

Kingdom Hearts: Final Confrontation_Cunla's Journey

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This story depicts the epic tale of "Kingdom Hearts: Final Confrontation," from the perspective of Cunla after his departure from Sora and Riku. See what he endures to become stronger, gaining new companions and eventually mastering the Rage.

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Chapter 1 - His Journey Begins

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1 - His Journey Begins

His Journey Begins

The sun was starting set now. The smell of the green pastures scented the land vastly stretching to the horizon. A lone figure stands, young and fair, yet strong in physique. He stands before a long road, a road heading to where the sun directed its descent. Such a calm youth this young man, not taking into mind what he had lost. Rather, he focused upon his future and how his efforts would affect the outcome of history.

From behind, four friends, whom he had only recently come to embrace as his best and faithful, approached with silent tongue to stand side by side with their fearless leader.

“Do you know what to do?” the first friend asked.

“I know my course.” The youth replied. “My fate lies with you and others who have gone out of their way to help me and make me who I am. For their sake I will fight. I shall return to aid them.”

The youth took a step forward, followed by another and another. His friends followed close behind. They now saw the task before them.

The young man’s name was Cunla...

The son of Cuchulain...

Cunla’s heart was still heavy as he piloted the gummi ship to some unknown destination. The sight of his father’s death at Long Valley was too much for him to bear. He recalled the face of his beloved parent and how he had done all in his power to keep his son safe. Cunla looked to the vastness of space and realized how lonely it was. Reflecting on the past, he felt somewhat ashamed having to leave his friends, the esteemed members of the KH team, to their fate in pursuit of his own reawakening. Cunla found it as his duty to become stronger.

“I’ve made it my vow.” Cunla thought to himself. “I will become stronger. Riku and Sora will be in need of me sometime in the near future. Unfortunately, I’m just not strong enough.” The boy clutched his fists. “I thought I was strong, I thought I had all the answers and experiences sufficient enough to get me to where I was going. But I realize now that I still have a long way to go.” There was a pause in his thoughts. His heart began to beat. “If only I had been stronger. If only I had more skill, I could have...” Just then a tear began to fall from his eye. Cunla was surprised by his own reaction and emotion. He tightened his fist even more. “No, I can’t cry. I’ve done my mourning. I must become stronger in order to help my friends. I will see to it that my father’s death was not in vain.”

The gummi ship flew on to some undetermined world with its young occupant still deep in his thoughts. However, it was not long before Cunla came across a stray world out in the stakes. The world was green and lush. Like an emerald jewel of the skies. Cunla observed the world with great curiosity.

“I wonder what world that is.” he thought to himself. It was then that his thoughts were interrupted by a growl from his stomach. Cunla sheepishly smiled as he touched his hardened belly. “Perhaps I could go with a little something to eat. Maybe there may be a place that I’d be able to get something to satisfy my gut.” Cunla eased the rockets and entered the world. As he neared the land, he found that the world was deeply forested. However, there were a few small towns scattered about the place.

"Looks like the German countryside." He thought to himself. Just then, as the ship descended down through a mountain pass, Cunla saw situated upon a flattened stone top, a castle, which overlooked one of the nearby settlements like a stern guardian over its many children. The castle was a magnificent structure of Gothicism. A fantastic structure of a German style castle with its cone roofed towers and its details of white masonry. Statues lined the tiers and cannons protruded through their gun ports upon the thick walls.

Cunla was awed by the sight. He hadn't seen such a beautiful castle since he had last seen the interior of the Disney Kingdom when he was still under the employment of Lord Sirius Viicous. But no sooner had he flown over the castle, several of the guns upon the walls began to fire. Several of the shells exploded near the wings of the gummi. Cunla steadied the gummi as he felt the shockwaves bounce off the hull.

"Damn it, why are they shooting at me?" Cunla thought to himself. He looked down to see hundreds of soldiers rallying to the battlements. The cannon fire accelerated. "What exactly did I do to them?" Cunla activated the stealth mode allowing the gummi to vanish from the view of their aggressors. Immediately, the cannons stopped thereafter when they found no target to aim for. "I should blow those bastards to bits for firing on me. But then what would be the point when I don't even know the reason behind their hostility." Cunla then spotted the village. "I'll take refuge in that town for the time being and find out for myself what all the fuss is about."

The invisible ship touched down, unseen, upon a grassy clearing just at the outskirts of town. The rockets fell silent and Cunla deactivated the optical stealth. Opening the hatch, he stepped out. Sword at his side and his father's spear clutched in his hand, the boy was prepared to enter into this strange and unfamiliar world. Pressing the deactivation button, he transformed the gummi into a capsule and placed it in his pocket.

"Thank God for Capsule Corp." Cunla said. He gripped the Gae Bulga tightly in his hand. "Now to find out what the heck's going on." His determination was cut short however as he felt the grumbling in his stomach again. "But first thing's first. I should have a little something to eat."

Cunla came upon a road. Not too far from the gates of the town that he saw before he landed. Just outside of the gates was a small cottage. There, an old woman came out. She was frail in appearance at best with a head of gray bundled under a blue bonnet. Her face was well aged, showing lines of the years she endured. Her eyes were squinted, like two peak pods close together. She wore a humble brown dress, possible made of wool. In her hands, she wielded a broom, indicating she was prepared to sweep the dust from her porch.

However, the moment she laid eyes on Cunla, she was shocked. Her eyes widened and her mouth hung slightly ajar. She gasped at the sight of the young boy. Cunla was rather curious at the old woman's reaction. He simply smiled.

"Hello there," he greeted, giving a slight bow.

But no sooner had that happened, the sound of the castle guns began to ring again. Both Cunla and the old woman looked up to see the smoke from the castle gun ports bellow puffs of smoke. Cunla wondered what the fortress was firing at now. Above the castle, there was a flying motorcar. It seemed like a classic automobile. Cunla awed at the sight.

"Look at that." He quoted to himself, "An old fashioned flying automobile."

"Boy," the old woman shouted. "Quickly, get in here!"

"What's wrong?" Cunla approached the old woman's cottage. The old woman took him by the hand and shoved him into the house. "What's going on?"

"I will explain later." The old woman replied with her heavy German accent. She locked the door behind her. "The soldiers will be coming."

"Soldiers...? Why...?"-

"First thing is first, boy. What are you doing here?"-

"What am I doing here? I just thought that I might be able to get a little something to eat. I've come such a long way."-

"But why would you come here to Vulgaria of all places?"-

"Vulgaria...? Is that where I am?"-

"Yes, this is the kingdom of Vulgaria. And coming here was a dangerous decision, especially for a boy."-

"Why...?"-

The old woman was curious of Cunla's response.

"You mean you don't know?" she asked.

"I have no idea." Cunla replied. "If you'd be so kind as to inform me of what you mean..."

"Baron Bomburst has made it his absolute decree..."-

"Baron Bomburst...?"-

"The one who lives in that castle overlooking the village, he is the ruler of Vulgaria."-

"And what decree is that which could be so threatening to me?"-

"The Baron has decreed that there are to be no children in Vulgaria."-

"No children? What sense does that make?"

"The Baron and his wife the Baroness hate children. They want nothing to do with children and do all in their power to do away with them. Any child found would immediately be taken away and never be heard from again. That is why I fear for you boy. You should never have come to this country."-

"But if there are no children, how is it that civilization came to be here in the first place?"-

"The Baron has been in power for the past five years. His declaration has caused visitors to stay away, being dubbed the name "The Country without Children."-

"Is that so?" Cunla clutched the Gae Bulga tight in his hands. "Perhaps I can persuade the Baron otherwise."

"No you can't." The old woman pleaded. "You're just a boy. You can't persuade the Baron. Bomburst will have you arrested on sight."

"My age may be young and seem rather rash. But my mind has matured because of my experiences."-

"That doesn't make any difference. The Baron's mind only focuses on his own desires. From what I understand, he had recently captured an inventor who created a flying car."-

"A flying car...?" Cunla inwardly thought. "That must've been the one that was flying in the air."

"The Baron has been after it for some time. Even going so far as to sail all the way to England and kidnap the inventor behind its design. The inventor has been confined in the castle for some time now, forced to produce another flying car."-

"Was what we saw the final product?" Cunla wondered.

"I don't know." The old woman replied.

"Then there's only one way to find out."-

But no sooner had Cunla finished his statement, there came from the distance the sound of brass trumpets bellowing fanfare.

"Oh no..." The old woman gasped. "Soldiers..."

"Soldiers...?" Cunla asked.

"Soldiers from the castle, the Baron must've sent them for you."-

"Is that so? Well, let them try."-

"No you mustn't, young man. You cannot fight the entire Vulgarian army by yourself."-

"We'll just see about that then, won't we?"-

"No," the old woman took hold of Cunla and held him back from reaching the door. The sound of the trumpets continued on. Closer and closer they drew until the sound of speeding hooves clotted about

on the cobblestone road. The old woman peered outside to see a detachment of soldiers, on foot and one horseback, passing by.

Some were dressed in early nineteenth century dress, with their braided and well trimmed uniforms. Upon their heads were tall shakos, shined and outfitted to make even Napoleon envious. There were other soldiers dressed with fezzes and whose uniforms were not as elaborate. Most likely, they might have been members of light infantry. Then there were heavy cavalry, armed with bannered lances and dressed in heavy armor like mediaeval knights.

Despite being a possible threat, the soldiers did not halt. Their speed did not slacken. Instead, they continued on their way, past the house and into the village itself.

"What's going on?" Cunla asked. "They're just passing by."

"I don't know." The old woman replied. "I thought the soldiers would be after you."

"Unless they were after someone or something else..." Cunla turned to the old woman. "Do you have a back way, or a back door?"-

"Yes, through the pantry."-

"I'll be off then."-

"Wait," the old woman pleaded. "Don't go."

"I have to. I have to know what's going on."-

"But you'll be in danger."-

"If I stay here and the soldiers find me out, you'll get involved as well. And if I know the nature of soldiers, they don't take kindly to civilians who harbor enemies or wanted refugees."-

"But..."-

"Don't worry," Cunla gave a smile, "I'll be alright."

"Well," the old woman came into the pantry and pulled out a loaf of bread, which had been recently baked from her oven. "Take this."

"What's this for?" Cunla asked.

"You said you were hungry. I can't let you go on an empty stomach."-

"Thank you for your kindness, miss."-

"If you have no place to take refuge after this, you come back here. I'll keep you safe."-

"Thank you."-

Cunla smiled. With bread in hand, he opened the back door and ran off. The old woman watched as Cunla vanished from sight. As she looked upon his disappearing form, she felt somehow enlightened.

"There is something about that boy." The old woman quoted to herself. "I don't know what it is, but I feel as if he will change everything."

Cunla stealthily took flight onto the roofs of the homes and made his way over the town unseen, following the blowing of trumpets and the movements of Baron Bomburst's military detachments. Eventually, the soldiers halted, congregating at the town square. Cunla observed as the light infantry was deployed to search every house in the plaza. Doors were broken through and knocked down and people shoved out of the way by the military. Others toppled objects of trade and value that belonged to the townspeople.

"I want them found!" The captain of the outfit shouted. "Search every house! Seek them out!"

"I wonder who they're looking for." Cunla thought to himself as he peeked over the roof he was on to spy the activity below him.

Just then, a man appeared to join the soldiers. He was pale in the face much like a ghost and his nose was substantially long. Old and frail he seemed, yet he walked about as if still a youth. His entire garment ensemble was black, from the pants and tails he wore, to the shoes and gloves on his limbs, to the crumpled top hat upon his head. In one hand, he bore what looked like a giant hook used for heaving

up heavy cargo, or perhaps a tool used in the fishery. In his other hand was a large net. One could have mistaken him for a morbid dogcatcher. But instead of dogs, his profession was circled around catching another type of supposed nuisance in Vulgaria, children. This man was the child catcher. He drove a horse drawn caged wagon to which he confined any children he came upon.

He dismounted from his wagon and looked about.

"I know there are children here." He declared. "I can smell them." His head twisted and turned about, sniffing the air with his elongated snout. Suddenly, his eyes turned towards one of the doors that had not been broken down. "In there, Captain!"

The captain ordered his soldiers to storm the door to which the child catcher pointed.

"Open up in the name of Baron Bomburst!" the captain ordered. "Open up this door or we'll break it down!"

"Alright, alright," a voice shouted from within. The doors were opened willingly by a rather stout, middle aged man with a head and moustache of grey. He was the toy maker. The soldiers stormed in, pushing the man aside.

"A toymaker...?" Cunla thought to himself. "What would a toymaker be doing here in a land where there are no children allowed?" Cunla heard commotion going on for a few more minutes before there was another bellow from afar. This time, it came from one of the lanes on the far end of the square. It was the sound of soldiers cheering. Sure enough, to Cunla's surprise, a band of light infantry troops came marching in. And in their confiscation was a newly refurbished automobile with red walled tires, a shiny and well polished hood and wooden coach for the driver and passengers.

"We've got it!" one soldier shouted.

"We captured it!" another added. "We captured the flying car!"

"Flying car?" Cunla looked on. "That must be the one that was in the air earlier."

"Take this car to the castle!" the captain ordered. With cheerful fanfare, the soldiers withdrew from the square, moving the captured vehicle with them. Slowly all the military units withdrew.

"Strange..." Cunla thought. "I should follow them." Cunla quickly went in pursuit of the car. "I wonder what the significance of that car is. What other purpose does Bomburst have to want it so badly besides his own desires to obtain its uniqueness?"

However, no sooner had Cunla started his pursuit, he felt a strange presence about both near and far, it was a feeling both unfamiliar, yet recognizable. This feeling was pursued by a strange sound that whizzed through the air. It was faint to the ear, but Cunla could still sense it. He halted in his tracks. Sure enough, a knife had flung and lodged itself upon the roof tiles before him. Cunla looked around to see who could have thrown in. He quickly took hold of the knife.

"I wonder..." Just then more knives went hurling at him from some unknown location. Cunla quickly took to the streets below. The rooftops were no longer safe. "There is no doubt, shinobis must be here. But does this world have such assassins?" Cunla looked at the knife he had in his hand. The straight kunai bore a symbol all too familiar to him. It was the symbol of the Midnight Faction. "Impossible, the Imperial Axis is here too? What would they be doing here of all places?" He sensed the energy in the air. He picked up a few energy and life signals from the tree canopies outside the city walls. "There are at least four of them. I better stay on guard and keep my focus on their movements. No doubt they'll be informing their superiors of my presence. And knowing my reputation now amongst my old peers, I'm a traitor and they may hope to execute me without question." Cunla placed the knife in his sleeve. "This may come in handy later. It's best to be cautious this time around. Now that I know the faction has deployed shinobis, my task in this world has become a lot harder."

He jumped from atop the roof to the street below. But no sooner had he done that, there came the shout from the far end of the isolated street.

"A child!" the voice shouted. "There's a child here!"

Cunla turned around to see two soldiers who happened to appear from behind the homes. They were a pair sent out possibly for a daily patrol. They were both swordsmen, armed with sabers at their sides.

"Halt there, boy!" one soldier shouted.

"I better take care of them before they sound an alarm and summon more reinforcements." Cunla raised the Gae Bulga above his head. The two soldiers charged on instinct, hoping to stop the boy. But Cunla's thrust was deadly as he threw his father's legendary spear through the air. The Gae Bulga wailed out and struck one of the soldiers dead. The second soldier was shocked to see his partner killed so swiftly and so easily, and at the hands of a boy. But no sooner had that happened, Cunla rushed forth, his hand clutched to the hilt of his still sheathed sword. Before the soldier could react, he was cut in half by the boy, who deployed his side arm blade like lightning and just as silent. Blood splattered from the ghastly wound and the soldier fell dead instantly. Cunla shook the blood from his blade and sheathed it back.

"Damn it," he said to himself as he pulled the Gae Bulga out of the slain soldier's body. "Now, I have to hide these bodies so no one will be suspicious." But his efforts were dashed as the sound of a gun was heard from the opposite side of the narrow street. A stray bullet struck the road no more than a couple feet away. Cunla turned to see four soldiers this time. Three light infantry and one man on horseback, possibly an officer because of the elaborate uniform he wore.

"Stop there, boy!" the officer shouted as he drew his saber and rushed Cunla.

"What a time for them to show up." Cunla thought. "I can't afford to kill anymore of these soldiers. It'll be too suspicious. And I can't be too reckless now that I know the Imperial Axis is present in this world." Cunla thus made a hasty retreat with the soldiers still firing at him.

"Stop, boy!" The officer on horseback galloped after the youth. But Cunla's sudden spur up the wall forced him to stop. Cunla flew back onto the roof tops and vanished. "Who was that?"

"These two are dead, sir." One of the light infantrymen explained. "By the looks of it, they were killed instantly."

"A boy did this?" the second asked.

"Who or whatever he was," the officer explained, "He was certainly no ordinary boy. We must inform the baron at once."

"A boy you say?" Another voice unexpectedly intervened. The four soldiers turned to see none other than the long nosed child catcher approaching with hook and net in hands. "Interesting..."

"It would be ill advised to go after him, sir."-

"Nonsense, we are dealing with a mere boy."-

"A boy that killed two of my men without pause..."-

"Did you see him kill them?"-

"Well no, but we did see him retrieve the weapons that killed them. I assume that he must be the one that slew these men."-

"If that be the case, I could use a good challenge."-

"You're insane, sir."-

"Insanity is merely in the eyes of the beholder." The child catcher chuckled. "This boy is just a juvenile delinquent who must've come from a poor background. Oh well, we can easily dispense with him. It just gives us all the more reason to do away with this upstart."

"It's rather strange though." The officer explained.

"What is?"-

"The boy was wearing an identical uniform similar to our guests."-

"That is rather interesting..." The child catcher pondered. "Oh well, I guess time will only tell. But for now..." The child catcher threw over his shoulders a colorful coat of yellows, reds, greens, and blues. "I have two other rats to weed out."

All the while, the flying car had been brought to the castle and into the courtyard. Soldiers, servants, and diplomats alike came forth to awe at this spectacle that the Baron had been after for some time expanding.

As the car made its way in before the grand doors of the castle interior, the Baron himself emerged, surrounded by his closest advisors. He was a pompous twit, with a pudgy red face. He was dressed in a hunting garb and could have been mistaken for any member of the aristocracy if it wasn't for the gold and red velvet crown that he wore upon his head.

"Ah, the flying car!" he said with a boastful cry and a heavy German accent, "At last it's mine! At last I have the flying motor car in my possession!" He and his advisors ran over to inspect the car. Overjoyed by his prize, the baron seated himself in the driver's side. He turned to one of the military officers.

"Send for the inventor!"

"Send for the inventor!" the aristocracy added.

"Sir," the officer replied and withdrew.

All the while, the Baron fiddled around with the gadgets in the coach, honking the horn, turning the dials doing all he could to activate the vehicle.

"Now then fly," he said in his burly voice. But even the bellowing tone of his throat did not move the car.

"Come on, fly!"

"Fly, fly, fly," another aristocrat added, honking away at the horn. The Baron slapped his hand away.

"I shall be the one to fly it." Bomburst tightened his fist, his cheeks puffing red. "I command you to fly!"

But the car remained dormant. By this time, the officer had returned with two soldiers who held an old man by the arms as if a prisoner. He was simply known as Grandpa Potts, an old man who had been mistaken as the supposed inventor of the car.

He was bald upon the top of his head and was grey everywhere else upon his face that had hair. He was dressed in a late nineteenth century, khaki brown uniform worn by the British military. But one could tell that his military discipline had long since vanished. They brought him before the car. The old man thus looked at the car with a sense of familiarity.

"What's this doing here?" he commented, but no one seemed to take notice. The Baron looked at him.

"You are the inventor," he declared, "Now make this car fly!"

"Make it fly!" the close advisors added, pushing the old man up into the driver's seat. Since he had no experience whatsoever with cars, Old Potts just took a chance and honked the horn, hoping that doing so would activate the engine.

"Stand back everyone, we are going to fly!" Bomburst commanded. The aristocracy and the soldiers backed off.

Suddenly, another voice, high pitched in nature, shouted out to the Baron. It was his wife, the Baroness. She was dressed in a yellow and black velvet and silk dress.

"Yoo-hoo Bombie," she hooted, "Wait for me!" The Baron turned his head and grumbled in disapproval. It was a known fact that the Baron did not take pleasure with the Baroness. He had even tried several attempts to see that she met with an unfortunate accident. His plans never worked however and his annoying mistress continued to haunt him like a plague with her stuck up giddiness. Of course, the Baroness was always oblivious with her husband's attempts to get rid of her. He snapped his fingers.

"Oh no," he grumbled, "Every time I want to have a little fun, she turns up." But he quickly put on a smile to greet her. "My darling, we are going to fly!"

"Oh how exciting," the Baroness uttered so innocently. She was assisted into the backseat and was all a flutter in her excitement. "How exciting...! Fly...How thrilling!"-

"Well, come on, hurry up!" the Baron instructed Potts.

"Yes, I'm doing my best, sir." Old Potts replied. He maintained his composure as best he could,

pretending that he knew what he was doing. "Just a minute," he looked upon a lever near the steering wheel. "Here's one that we haven't tried yet."

"Here, we go my beloved!" Bomburst said to his wife.

"Hold on!"-

Not knowing the lever's function, he pulled it back. Suddenly, there came a shrilled scream as an ejection seat on the rear jettisoned the Baroness high into the air.

"Isn't it exciting my dear?" The Baron commented only to turn to see his wife hovering into the air with her dress open like an umbrella and the frills of her bloomers in full view. Seeing his wife in peril, the Baron could only chuckle and slapped the old man on the back. "You are a genius!" The Baron saw his opportunity. "My guns...! Bring my guns!" A soldier came with a double barreled shot gun. The Baron took it and aimed at his mid air mistress. "Don't worry little pigeon. I'll get you down!" He quietly mumbled. "I've been waiting for this for twenty years." He took careful aim, hoping to hit her on target with the gun blasts. He fired the first shot. The pellets missed, however, to the misfortune of the Baron. He aimed again. "Are you still there, my love?! Don't move!"

He took careful aim again and this time hit the dress of the baroness. Like an umbrella in the wind, her skirt flipped over her head and the Baroness with tumbling down like a rock, falling into the lake on the far end of the castle.

The Baron quickly ran to see the results of his hit. He peeked over the ramparts along with his other advisors. Once again, to his dismay, the Baroness was still alive. Though a little wet, she was in tact.

"There she is, Your Excellency." One of the officers shouted.

"Are you alright, my dear?" the Baron asked.

"I'm alright, my dumpling!" the Baroness replied.

"Good...!" The Baron turned away with a grumble. "Never mind, I'll get her the next time."

"There won't be a next time, Bomburst!" a voice shouted from the courtyard. "Or have you forgotten that we have other matters to attend to!"

The Baron looked down to see who spoke. Down in the courtyard, five individuals stood. They were Imperial officers ranking from as low as a sergeant major to the highest being a colonel. Their distinct style of dress indicated that they were all members of the Midnight Faction.

The leader, the colonel, was a tall and dashing man. Yet his stern look would turn away even the eyes of the most hardened of S class elites. His name was Valjean Von Kreist. His hair was raven black, spiked though subtle with his bangs draping to touch the tops of his eye lids, even so to the point where his flashy green eyes were protruded by the curtain of dark strands. He was dressed in a bright red, double breasted frock, lined with black and white and completed with an entourage of brass buttons and gold officer braids latched from the left shoulder to the left row of buttons. A star like medal of silver and gold was fixed to intermingle with the braids, as much as a new born infant snuggled in its mother's arms. Wrapped around his upper right arm was the arm band bearing the famous symbol of the former Imperial Regime, a relic in the new age of factional powers. The frock leveled just below the knee, covering black trousers with red officer lines on the sides, which were also tucked into high white boots with gold tips. The entire ensemble was completed with one large chest strap slung from the left shoulder to the right hip, connected to the white belt around the colonel's waist. Both the chest strap and the belt bore gold plates, each centered perfectly on the uniform. Then, over the chest strap was another shoulder strap, thinner in appearance, which kept the belt fastened and stationary. This was to help support the weight of the large saber that dangled at his side. The scabbard of his sword was a pearl white as well.

Alongside him were four of his subordinates, all wearing almost identical outfits, say for a few changes in some of the details in parts of their ensembles. Despite that, they were all dressed almost the same with black shell jackets that were cut off at the waist and were lined red at the cuffs and within. All were gold

lined and double breasted, opened at the chest to reveal black, brass buttoned vests tucked under their white belts with brass buckles. Their pants were all black with red officer stripes down the outer side and tucked into equally high white boots, but without the brass tips.

The four subordinates stood stolid and at attention, with arms behind them and feet apart. Left to right, they went by the following titles. There was Sergeant Major Carson Defoe, Lieutenant Crispus Custis, Captain Dalius Sorbet, and Captain Reinhardt Allgota. Besides their commander Von Kreist being senior both in age as well as rank, being in his late twenties, or early thirties, all of the subordinates were still teenage youths, ranking from thirteen to seventeen years old. Yet still, they were given a great rank and responsibilities along with them.

The Baron turned around to greet his guests.

"Now, now, Von Kreist," Bomburst said with a ticklish chuckle, hoping to recover the positivism of the atmosphere, "It was just a bit of fun that's all."

"That's Colonel Von Kreist to you. And I can understand that you want to kill your own wife, but do it at your own leisure. Smother her in her sleep for all I care. But you will not be wasting anymore of my minutes." The colonel stepped up to the baron. "So long as I am here, your childish antics will cease."

"Now, colonel, be reasonable."-

"Reasonable is something that I don't do very well. I have come to this world to establish a new port of access to other realms. We need this world and you need our help to keep the rebellious populous under control. So long as you are behind your high walls and your weapons and man power, you are secure in your regime. But sooner or later, the rats in town will find a way to prick upon the flaws in your protective armor. Because you have forbidden the presence of children in this world, you have lost favor with the people. And now in order to keep them under your thumb, you have to maintain an iron fist policy, which in turn agitates your subjects even more. Hence, your power over them begins to weaken and you will have to rely on outside powers to protect you." The colonel turned his back. "Now if you would like, we could just withdraw from this world and choose someplace else, leaving you with the enraged mob, who are plotting and scheming to get at you, and take away all that power you enjoy."

"I understand..."-

"Then I suggest that you stay focus on the efforts of solidifying our alliance, and stop fiddling around with flying motor cars or attempts to kill your own spouse."-

"Of course..." The Baron bowed and withdrew back to the castle. Von Kreist withdrew back to his subordinates.

"I don't understand why you're playing buddy-buddy with that fathead." Sergeant Major Defoe grumbled.

"I'd have to agree, colonel." Captain Allgota added. "He's just a petty-lofty scumbag. We can easily do away with him."

"We could gain power here very easily indeed." Von Kreist replied. "But we need a scapegoat to act as the lone figurehead if things go awry."

"You do have a point there, sir."-

No sooner had that last statement left the captain's lips, the shinobi scouts appeared before Colonel Von Kreist.

"Ah," the colonel said with a snooty scoff. "So my faithful watchers have returned. I trust that you found something worth reporting?"

"We do colonel." The leading shinobi replied. "There was an incident in town today while the baron's soldiers went in search for that aerial vehicle."

"And what incident was that?"-

"There was a young man who infiltrated past our positions and was spying upon the troopers engaged."-

"Is that so?"-

"He seemed to be a young boy, no older than the youngest of your subordinates, sir."-

"Really...?"-

"He managed to slay two of the baron's soldiers and was able to evade the others in pursuing him."-

"Is that so?" The colonel pondered. "How interesting..."

"Could it have been an alliance scout?" Allgota asked. "Sneer might have sent one of his best agents here to see if they could stop us from establishing absolute authority over this world."

"I don't think so." The shinobi replied. "He was wearing an Imperial uniform." The five were shocked.

"Did you say an Imperial uniform?" Custis asked.

"Aye, sir..."-

"Possibly an agent hoping to sever our ties with the baron..." Defoe said. "The alliance was clever, dressing one of their own in our uniforms and then sending them off to wreak havoc upon our ranks."

"Have your men silence this intruder." Von Kreist ordered. "Track down this rat and have him killed on sight. Do whatever it takes to silence him before he starts causing more mayhem for us."

"What about the officer and soldiers who were involved and saw this miscreant in action?" the shinobi asked, "No doubt that they may try to tell the baron. And knowing Bomburst, he'll have us shackled in no time believing that it may have been one of our men who assaulted and killed his soldiers."

"Even if he did find out, I highly doubt that he'll try anything reckless. There may only be a hand full of us, but we can take on anything that the good baron can throw. But nevertheless, it's best that we maintain the facts of this incident to ourselves. Eliminate all who were involved. And if you can find that intruder and kill him, then do so without haste."-

"Understood..."-

"Then be on your way."-

"Sir,"-

The shinobis withdrew as mysteriously as they had arrived.

"In the meantime, it's best that we prepare with our own strategies, gentlemen." Von Kreist ordered.

"Withdraw to the castle and let us convey a meeting with our superiors."

"Sir..." The subordinates replied. Three of them quickly turned and withdrew along with the colonel. But Von Kreist realized that the one of his subordinates, young Captain Dalius Sorbet, was still in a semi daze.

"You three continue on." The colonel said. "I'll be with you at the moment."

"Yes sir," Custis, Defoe, and Allgota replied and headed towards the grand gates of the castle. In the meantime, the colonel went to Sorbet's side.

"Is there something wrong, captain?"-

"I don't know." Sorbet replied.

"Something pining in your mind...?"-

"I don't know how to explain it, but for some reason I feel nostalgic."-

"And what are you nostalgic over?"-

"That's a mystery to me."-

"Well, enough nostalgia. We still have work to do."-

"Yes sir." Sorbet replied.

"Shall we adjourn for the time being then?"-

"Aye..."-

All the while, Cunla had made his way to an isolated part of the town to which there were no enemy soldiers on patrol. However, he knew that such a predicament could arise, especially after his little scuffle with the baron's guards. Alone and apprehensive, Cunla had to think of some kind of alternative

plan that might be able to get him out of his present situation. He couldn't afford to be careless. Now that he had shinobis and the Midnight Faction to worry about, precautions were inevitable.

"There's no doubt in my mind that the Imperial regime is staking out this world to help establish another stronghold." He thought to himself as he nipped on some of the bread that the old woman gave him.

"That has to be prevented one way or the other."

Just then, there came the sound of a clomping horse and the wheels of a wagon echoing down another street. Cunla took no mind to it though, believing that it was merely a peddler on the streets selling their trade. The sound of jingle bells could be heard along with the clomping of the horse, which silently rang in Cunla's ears.

"I wish that person would sell their trade someplace else." Cunla grumbled. "I'm having enough trouble trying to concentrate on my next plan as it is." The jingling continued. Cunla ignored the racket as best he could and stared into the distance of the other homes and the surrounding tree canopies, seeking and sensing for the shinobis who might still be observing him from afar. He sought out their power levels. Sure enough, he sensed their individual life sources. "They're near alright. They might be planning to ambush me. Well, so long as I can sense their life force, they can't hide from me no matter how thorough they conceal their movements."

Just then, there came a call for Cunla from the far end of the street.

"Hey you, boy," the voice shouted. Cunla quickly drew up his Gae Bulga, fearing that it might be more of the soldiers coming to capture him. But instead, he saw two men dressed in civilian wear. One man was short and middle aged with a thick moustache in which its grey matched the hair that topped his head. He was the local toymaker. Next to him was a tall man, younger than the toymaker, yet older than Cuchulain. He was a man perhaps in his late thirties. He had dark brown hair, well groomed, showing that he was still a proper gentlemen. He wore a brown English style of attire.

"It's another child." The toymaker said. "Is he one of yours?"

"No he isn't..." the tall man replied.

"But what is he doing here? Perhaps he is one of the baron's."

"We don't know that for sure." The tall man called out of Cunla. Cunla raised his weapon.

"Stay back," he declared.

"Calm down, son, we're not going to hurt you."

"Are you with the baron?"

"No..."

"The question is are you?" the toymaker asked.

"Of course not..." Cunla replied.

"Then we have no need to quarrel with you." The tall man said. "Lower your weapon."

Cunla cautiously lowered the Gae Bulga, but kept his guard up in case something was to happen. The tall man approached.

"I don't believe we were properly introduced." The tall man explained. "My name is Caractacus Potts."

"And I am the toymaker." The toymaker added.

"I'm Cunla." Cunla replied.

"And what brings you to Vulgaria?"

"Well, I came here simply to get something to eat. But from what the old woman outside of town tells me, this country does not allow children. She told me that this country has forbidden the presence of children for the past five years because the Baron and the Baroness hate kids."

"That is right. The Baroness especially hates them. She finds children to be more of a nuisance, putting them in level with rodents or vermin."

"I see..."

"But lately, the baron has been after a flying motor car."

“So I understand. The old woman and I saw the vehicle fly overhead not too long ago.” Cunla looked at Caractacus. “I take it that you were the one who was driving that vehicle.”

“Yes,” Potts replied. “I invented it.”

“Ingenious as it may be, it was foolish for you to come here.”-

“I had no choice. The Baron kidnapped Grandpa...my father.”-

“I see...”-

“We came here to get him and we’re not leaving Vulgaria without him.”-

“We...?” Cunla asked.

“Yes, I came here with my two children Jeremy and Jemima, and Miss Truly Scrumptious.”-

“Scrumptious eh...?” Cunla inwardly thought. “I swear they pick names out of the blue like this is some sort of two bit musical. Either that or this guy’s trying to be funny.”

“I keep telling to go while he can,” the toymaker said, “But he insists on staying.”

“My father is still in that castle.” Caractacus implied. “And I told you that until he’s free, we’re not leaving!”

“But the child catcher...”-

“Child catcher...?” Cunla asked.

“He’s a ghastly and frightening man, the one responsible for hunting out children. He rides upon a prison wagon pulled by a black horse carrying a net and hook. His skin is pale and his nose...his nose can sniff out the scent of children from anywhere.”-

“That man eh...?” Cunla pondered. “So he’s the child catcher.”

“I am telling you now,” The toymaker said to Caractacus, “The longer you stay here, the greater the chances are for the child catcher to find your children. He is not as easy to elude as the soldiers.”

“He won’t get the children, I swear on that.” Caractacus declared.

But no sooner had he said that, commotion began to rise not too far away. There was the sound of screaming and yelling intermingling with the fast galloping pace of a horse. Cunla, Potts, and the toymaker quickly scurried to where they heard the noise. As they reached one of the street crossings, they witnessed as black carriage passed with great haste. The driver was all dressed in black and he constantly lashed at the horse’s rear, urging the animal to go faster. And in the carriage itself, two little children, a boy and a girl, were seen screaming out from behind the iron bars.

“The children...!” the toymaker gasped.

“Jeremy, Jemima!” Caractacus shouted.

“Daddy, daddy,” the two siblings cried.

“What happened...?”-

“Caractacus...!” a voice shouted. The trio turned to see a young woman, fair and light in complexion with flowing blonde hair came running towards them. It was Truly Scrumptious, the young woman whom Caractacus spoke of.

“Truly, what happened...?”-

“The children, he took the children!” she cried.

“No...”-

“Bastard...” Cunla growled. “I’ll get him.”

But no sooner had he said that, three shuriken appeared out of no where and landed at his feet. Soon after, four shinobis appeared.

“You will not be going anywhere.” The first shinobi declared.

“You are Cunla the traitor.” The second said.

“Who are these men?” the toymaker asked.

“Imperial scum...” Cunla replied. Cunla drew forth his weapon. “I take it that you’re here to scout the area and establish another outpost?”

"That was our objective." the lead ninja replied. "But now we have new orders. And that is ordering the execution of any conspirators that might be about. And to think that the person we have to eliminate would be you, Cunla, son of Cuchulain."

"By order of the Imperial Regime and His Excellency Lord Sirius Viicous, we hereby initiate your assassination." A second shinobi declared.

"Sorry to disappoint you, but I will not die so easily." Cunla replied.

"You are a fool." The leader declared. "A warrior like you cannot match the skill and stealth of a shinobi."

The four surrounded Cunla. Instantly, they began to execute a series of hand signals, unleashing a powerful jutsu. Cunla was caught by it, the genjutsu of the four.

"You will die a slow and painful death by means of the delusions that you will undergo." the second in command said.

"Our jutsu has never been broken by our prey." a third shinobi said. "No matter how cunning they may think they are, they have never beaten us."

But suddenly, Cunla's eyes began to pulsate. Suddenly, the genjutsu was broken as easily as it was established. The four ninjas were shocked.

"Fools," Cunla said. Using a downward slash, he cut the ground to which the shinobis were standing. The four were quickly air bourn. But no sooner had they leaped to their safely, Cunla vanished only to appear again. He cut down two of the shinobi without pause and without difficulty.

"Impossible..." the second in command uttered. "He struck down both of our subordinates in an instant." But no sooner had he said that. Cunla threw the shuriken he had earlier confiscated, striking the second-in-command upon the throat. The knife went all the way threw, killing him instantly. Before the leader could react, Cunla had deployed his sword and sliced at the shinobi's right arm, crippling it for good. He twirled and struck at the right leg, maiming the ninja so he couldn't get away. The ninja was struck to the ground and his left arm elbow was impaled on the ground by Cunla's blade.

"You underestimated me." Cunla said. "Just because you're ninjas doesn't necessarily mean that you're invincible."

"But how did you break our jutsu...?" the shinobi gasped.

"You're talking to one who has also excelled in the ninja arts. I know that your jutsu only works on those who are either below or level to you. I also know that countering the jutsu ahead of time will prevent any form of manipulation to occur. That is what I have learned. But unlike you, I did not take the path of a true shinobi. To me, fighting face to face is one of the ways that I maintain my sense of honor." Cunla drew out his sword from the ninja's arm. "Besides, your abilities are trivial compared to General Saber. He too strayed away from being a true shinobi. The reason being is because he became too formidable to stay in the shadows." Cunla held the point of the sword to the ninja's throat. "Do you know why shinobis are stealthy and use deception to fight their battles?" Cunla's blue eyes seemed soulless as he peered into the ninja's pupils. "It's because they are too weak to fight their foes directly."

Cunla thrust his sword downward. The shinobi opened one eye and realized that Cunla had purposely aimed his blade harmlessly upon the ground and inch away from his throat.

"I'm not dead...?" the shinobi uttered.

"I have killed enough." Cunla said. "I will let you live." Cunla drew back his sword into its sheath. He then pulled out from his pocket a bag of senzu beans. Taking out one, he broke it in half. "Eat that." The shinobi did as he was told and ate it. In seconds, he was refurbished, his wounds healed.

"I'm well..."-

"Now go." Cunla said. "I set you free."

"But why...? You know I'll end up fighting you again. You restored my strength and now I can use it to kill you."-

“Do what you will. But think before you act.”-

The shinobi drew out his kunai and prepared for another attack against his foe. But he knew all too well the reality of the situation and the reputation of the opponent that confronted him. Before him stood Cunla, a mere boy of thirteen years who did not waver. He stood like a rock, his gaze unbroken. The shinobi knew in his heart that he stood no chance. The element of surprise was out of his favor, he was in the open, and three of his teammates lay dead on the ground. And if three out of four shinobis could be so easily vanquished, what chance would on shinobi have? Attempts to strike at Cunla would be in vain.

“I will remember this...” the shinobi said. He suddenly turned and withdrew from the scene, leaving his fallen comrades in the streets.

“Why did you let him go?” Caractacus asked.

“I’ve spilled enough blood.” Cunla replied. “Killing him would have been a wasted effort.” Cunla gripped onto the Gae Bulga. “Besides, the child catcher got away. No doubt that those two children are now at his mercy. We’ll have to conjure a plan.”

“You do realize he will tell on you.”-

“That’s exactly what I want. If the Imperial Axis is involved in this world, I want them to know that their task has just gotten harder.”-

“Do you intend to do something about it?”-

“I do...”-

“But what do you think you can accomplish?” the toymaker protested. “You think you can just barge in and take on the entire Vulgarian army single-handed?”

“The toymaker is right.” Truly added. “It would be suicide to go in alone.”

“I suppose you have a point.” Cunla replied. “Charging in would be reckless.” Cunla turned to the toymaker, Caractacus Potts, Miss Scrumptious, and several other villagers. “However, if you want the Baron to pay for what he’s done, you’ll have to take on some form of resistance. So why not start now?”-

What Cunla said was true. It was possible for resistance to rise now that the spark has been lit.

“That’s an idea.” Caractacus said. “I think you may have something there, young Cunla.”

“Wait a minute,” the toymaker interjected. “How do you expect us to overthrow the Baron? Do you expect simple townsfolk to go against well disciplined troops who are fortified behind their high walls? We have no weapons besides our tools and pitchforks.”

“You want your children back don’t you?” Cunla asked. His words silenced the toymaker’s objection.

“Well yes...”-

“You want them to live freely and not worry about having to be taken away from your arms again correct?”-

“Yes...”-

“You want to make sure that they are happy, right?”-

“Of course... I would be out of my mind if I didn’t agree with you.”-

“Then we have to take action.”-

“But you can’t expect these villagers to just rise up and storm the fortress do you?” Miss Scrumptious advised. “That would be preposterous.”

“I’ve already taken that into account.” Cunla assured the young lady. “And I intend not to approach so directly.”

“Then how did you plan on getting in?”

“I wonder...” Cunla pondered. He turned to the toymaker. “Is there anyone who has solid knowledge of the castle’s interior?”

“You know...” The toymaker said, “I think I may have a solution. Just follow me.”

Cunla, Caractacus, and Miss Scrumptious followed silently, escorted to wherever it was that the toymaker wanted to lead them.

All the while, the child catcher entered the grand hall before Baron Bomburst and the Baroness, presenting Pott's children, Jeremy and Jemima, like animals in their cage, which was carried by four of the elite guards.

"Children, your majesty!" the child catcher said with a bow. The Baron and the Baroness, surrounded by their attendants and advisors, cautiously approached the cage, looking on in awe and disgust at the boy and girl.

"Are you sure that they cannot get out?" the Baroness asked.

"Absolutely, my lady, they are secure behind my iron bars."-

One of the advisors drew forth his hand, as if wanting to touch and pet the children. But Jeremy, like a piranha, threw his head forward with teeth revealed trying to bite the man.

"Oh horrid little things!" he said.

"Wait until our daddy comes to get you!" Jeremy boldly declared.

"He's going to make sure that you pay once and for all." Jemima added, sticking by her elder brother.

"Silence, you little insects!" the Baroness shouted. "No one is coming to save you now! You are within the secured walls of our castle!"

"And we will make sure that you never see outside these walls again!" the Baron added.

"Our daddy will come!" Jeremy shouted. "And he will teach you a lesson, you mean Baron!" The squealing voice of the young lad was enough to turn the Baron's face even redder than before.

"How dare you, impertinent whelp!"-

"Here, here," the advisors shouted. There was quarreling and bickering towards the children. That was until the thunderous shot of a pistol and a bellowing voice erupted.

"What is going on?!" the voice shouted. Everyone present turned to see Colonel Valjean Von Kreist and his four subordinates standing at the stairwell.

"We have caught two children, colonel." The Baron said. "And one of them tried to bite my advisor"

"Children..." The colonel worked his way in to see the children. Unlike the attitude towards Baron Bomburst, Jeremy and Jemima found Colonel Von Kreist an intimidating and frightening sight. He was not at all pudgy and laughable as the Baron, which is why their tongues were still. "You put up a bunch of fuss for the sake of a couple snot nosed brats?" He glared at the Baron. "What kind of delusional aristocracy are you running here?"

"But they are children..."-

"And...?"-

"Well...we hate children..."-

"They are disgusting little creatures..." the Baroness added.

"I don't care if you plan to use them for guarder grip stockings, you brainless ditz!" The Colonel bellowed, shocking the lot. "All I know is that your emphasis on this menagerie is wasting my time. You forget that we are here to establish commerce in this world, Baron. In return, you need us to expand trade and enrich your miserable little regime and keep it well secured from the peasantry. Now if you'd prefer, I can simply excuse myself of my services."-

"No, no..." the Baron pleaded, "There is no need for that."

"Then I suggest that you cooperate and do as I say."-

"Yes, colonel..."-

"Now get these little rugrats out of my sight!"-

"Yes sir..." the Baron turned to the guards. "Take them to the tower!"

“To the tower,” the advisors concurred like squawking parrots.

“Captain Allgota...!” the colonel hollered.

“Did you summon me, sir?” the Captain replied as he came to the side of his superior.

“I want you and the other subordinates to secure yourselves on each of the four perimeters. Keep watch for any suspicious activity.”-

“Are you expecting something, sir?”-

“I expect a battle to commence today.”-

“With who...?”-

“Who else, those meddling villagers...”-

“The villagers...? But they pose no threat to us here, sir.”-

“Just do it... That’s an order...”-

“But what is your hunch, sir?”-

“The shinobis I sent out have not yet returned, which indicates to me that something has happened. You should recall earlier that they beheld a stranger who slew a few of the Baron’s men. I can only imagine that this stranger is actually an Alliance agent who is highly skilled.” He turned to the captain. “Now do as I say.”

“Understood...”-

The captain withdrew, leaving the colonel in his thoughts. Not long, the shinobi appeared before his superior.

“I have returned, sir.” The shinobi declared.

“I can see that.” The colonel replied. He looked about, seeing no sign of the other three. “And where are your other three companions?”

“They have been slain, sir.”-

“Is that so? Well, did you manage to carry out the mission?”-

“We tracked down the officer and the men who witnessed the death of those two soldiers. We believe...”-

“I don’t care about them.” Von Kreist growled. “They’re just minuscule matters. I only want to know if the new arrival has been executed successfully.” The shinobi was silent. Von Kreist turned his back on the shinobi and folded his arms in front of him. “I’m waiting for your answer.”

“Well, the thing is...”-

“Is he dead or not...?”-

“No, sir...” the shinobi bowed his head respectfully. “I regret to inform you that the target was not eliminated.”

“Is that so...?”-

“He was the one who killed my other comrades, sir.”-

“Really...? You say they died, but yet you return without a single scratch.”-

“There were reasons, sir.”-

“Well, from what your presence indicates to me is that...” Kreist suddenly turned in lightning speed. His hand was gripped upon the handle of his saber, which flew from the confinements of its scabbard. The glittering steel made a quick clean cut, severing the head of the poor shinobi from his shoulders. “You have failed, my incompetent friend.” The body of the shinobi fell to the ground only seconds after his head had rolled to the floor and settled no more than a few feet away.

“Sir...” a voice gasped. Von Kreist looked to see young Sorbet standing no more than a few feet away from the ghastly execution. “You killed him...”

“I did.” The colonel replied as he wiped the blood from his sword upon the body of the slain shinobi.

“But why...?”-

“He has only proven to me that he was ineffective.” He sheathed his sword. “That shinobi was strong,

but not strong enough. Therefore, there was no need to keep him around any longer.” He looked into the eyes of his subordinate. “You know me. I never accept failure...ever. And to fail means that you are inept. Hence, you are required to forfeit your own life. That is the policy I stand by and it is one that I expect my subordinates to stand by. Is that clear?”

“Of course...”-

“Besides, he was a mere shinobi, not worth anything to grumble over. Had he stayed to fight to the last, I would have accepted that much more.”-

“But should we fail you, are we to forfeit our lives?”-

“Well...” Von Kreist sighed. “I believe I can make exceptions for officers above sergeant. Anyway, if I ordered the execution of each of my subordinates, I’d have no more to send into the field. And I don’t believe that His Excellency Lord Sirius Viicous would be happy about that.”

“Still...” Sorbet approached the decapitated body of the shinobi. “I believe that your actions may have been too hasty, sir.”

“How so...?”-

“This man may have had a few more facts to share with us, such as the identity of the culprit who slew some of the baron’s soldiers as well as three of our four assigned scouts.”-

“I know that all too well.” Valjean said.

“You do...?” the captain was bewildered. “Then why on earth would you have slain him so quickly without extracting that last bit of information.”

“Because I like a challenge...” Von Kreist rubbed his palms together. “Never before have my four shinobis been defeated so easily, let alone having three being slain. That means that this menace must be quite a skilled combatant and tactician. And to disguise him self in an Imperial uniform to elude detection, I can only perceive that this person is a veteran in their trade.” The colonel looked to the midday sky. “Besides, this couldn’t have been a more opportune time. If all goes well, and this individual does intend to oppose us, he will most likely have to go against Baron Bomburst. And with any luck, both of them will wipe each other out. Imagine the chaos that will ensue. And we will have first glance at the havoc.”

“From what I’ve heard so far, this individual is more than a match for the Baron’s soldiers.” Sorbet said.

“Two soldiers are one thing. A full regiment stationed at the castle, that’s a completely different matter. And once this upstart has done away with our pompous pawn, if he emerges the victor in the end, and has drained him self of his power then we will step in and finish him. Let’s see how this turns out. Perhaps our assignment won’t be as dull as I had perceived.”-

All the while, the toymaker had accompanied Lady Truly Scrumptious, Caractacus Potts, and Cunla through an underground passage that leads to the very catacombs of the castle, an area unknown to even the Baron. The passage was only accessible by boat. Ergo the four silently rowed through a stone carved tunnel, in which the entry way was covered with vegetation, concealing their movements. The boat traveled for a quarter of a mile though a winding corridor. So dark was the tunnel, the toymaker had to light a torch to illuminate the way.

The sound of dripping water could be heard as moisture trickled down the stone cavern through cracks in the granite. Eventually, the shadowy journey was over as they came to a series of lights at the end of the tunnel. As the boat shifted down the waterway into the dull brightness, Cunla, Potts, and Scrumptious looked on in awe at a vast stone cavern. Torches were lit upon the walls. There were also small fires to which individuals could keep warm.

“Look at this place.” Caractacus uttered.

As they observed further, the four came to realize that surrounding them on the banks of the waterway were hundreds of children, boys and girls, who stood vigilant at the newcomers. They were of a great many ages, from infants and toddlers, to children of kindergarten age, to those who were in their adolescent years, some equal or older than Cunla.

“What is this?” Scrumptious asked.

“This is the haven.” The toymaker explained. “This is where we hide our children.”

The four reached a small docking area which led up to the stone banks. The children and some adults observed their disembarking.

“My Goodness...” Caractacus uttered. “There are so many.”

“They have been hiding here going on five years.” The toymaker said as he patted one of the little boys on the head as he passed. The four went amongst the children.

“The poor dears...” Scrumptious said.

Just then, there came a commotion at the other end of the chamber.

“There’s food,” a ragged teenage boy shouted. “There’s food coming!”

“Food, food,” some of the children said as they rushed to where the youth stood. They came upon a platform, the highest in the cavern. Before them, built into the side of the wall was a shoot. And from that chute, scraps of left over vegetables, bread, and cooked meats came down.

“What is that?” Caractacus asked.

“That is the only real main source of food that the children have to rely on.” The toymaker explained.

“That is a garbage chute from the castle. All the leftover food is tossed down from the kitchen to here. That is what the children eat mostly. They cannot afford luxuries. Though we sneak in as much fresh bread and vegetables as best we can, we cannot bring in enough to nurture them all. And if we did, then this forgotten part of the castle would be rediscovered by the baron’s soldiers. And who knows what may happen. As far as I am concerned, we cannot put our children into any danger.”

“To think that kids would have live like this...” Cunla said to himself. “They have to dwell underground like rats and scrounge like animals, eating leftover scraps.”

“Children should never have to be brought up into this world like this, having no place to run around, not able to feel the sun on their faces.”-

“Son,” Caractacus shouted to the teenage boy at the chute.

“Yes...?” the boy replied.

“I’m looking for my children. Do you know if they’re in the castle somewhere?”-

“A boy and a girl...?”-

“Yes...!”-

“They are in the tower.”-

“And their grandfather...?”-

“Down in the dungeon.”-

“That proves it then.” Caractacus said to Cunla and Truly. “My family is being held captive by the baron.”

“Sir...” another boy said. He was no older than seven at least. “Are you here to help us?” Caractacus looked down in the brown eyes of the child. He then gazed up at the other children whose faces seemed to light up with hope.

“Yes, that is what we’re going to do.” He put his hand upon the boy’s head. “We’re going to see to it that from this day forward, you all will not have to worry about living like this ever again.”

“But how will you do that?” a young girl asked.

“Yes,” another boy said, “The baron will not allow it.”

“That’s why we’re here.” Cunla replied. “We are here to put an end to Bomburst’s regime once and for all.”

"You mean overthrow him?" a teenage girl asked.

"That's right."

"That's impossible." A teenage boy objected, stepping forth. He was about fifteen years old. "The castle is armed to the teeth with the baron's soldiers. We have no weapons to fight them with."

"No weapons at all?"

"There are a few medieval weapons stored about the place, but nothing more than that. Those, however, won't prove much of a match against firearms."

"That's the reason why we plan on attacking the baron indirectly, when he least expects it."

"But how...?"

"How well do you know the interior of the castle?"

"We know it both in and out." Another fifteen year old youth declared. He was a strapping young lad, with brown hair and hazel green eyes.

"You do...?"

"I know each corridor like the back of my own hand. That's because I was the one responsible for stealing goods throughout the castle. I know nooks and crannies that the baron has no knowledge of."

"And what's your name?" Cunla asked.

"My name is Hans."

"Well Hans is there any vital information that you can share with us?"

"I have been up to the castle recently and realize that there is a grand banquet and ball that'll be thrown later today in honor of the baron's birthday."

"Oh yes, I forgot to mention that." The toymaker replied. "Today is the baron's birthday. That is the reason why I was creating some new toys."

"For the baron...?" Cunla thought to himself. "Just how old is Bomburst mentally?"

"That gives me an idea." Caractacus explained. "Perhaps we can use this banquet to our advantage."

"How so?" the toymaker asked.

"You're making new toys for the baron's birthday, right?"

"Yes..."

"What sort of toys?"

"I was creating two large scale dolls for him to play with. One is a large music box with a young Alps woman that moves and sings. The second is a stuffed doll that winds up and moves about on its own."

"Is that so? Then I think I just found the basis of our plan. We'll use your toys and the baron's birthday party as means to our ends." Caractacus turned to the children. "Did you all hear that? As of this day, you will all be free from Bomburst's grasps. If the baron has a party today, then we will give him a celebration that he will never forget!"

The children became jubilant at the declaration and cheered.

"Alright," Cunla said. "We have to crowd motivated, what happens now?"

"This is what we'll do." Caractacus began. "But we'll have to act fast before the baron's party begins."

A plan was set in motion. Hopefully, by the end of the day, a five year of oppression against children will finally come crashing down.