

Interlude

The Internal Affairs of the Empire

The Eastern Empire—one of the oldest nations in the world. It was more formally known as the Nasca Namrium Ulmeria United Eastern Empire.

The history of the Empire was said to be ancient, and that its foundations were laid out by a nation as far back as two thousand years ago. The long-standing minor Kingdom of Nasca gradually absorbed the large nations of the Magic Kingdom of Namrium and the Eastern Union of Ulmeria, thus giving birth to the Empire known today.

Its overwhelming military power was its backbone. During the past two thousand years, under the reign of the uniting emperor Rudra Nam Ul Nasca, the Empire grew immensely powerful, quashing any signs of rebellion from the nations they had absorbed. It acted as the hegemonic power, dominating these states.

This was the truth behind the Nasca Namrium Ulmeria United Eastern Empire, commonly referred to as the “Eastern Empire.”

The emperor could be described as an absolutist and was born from a pure bloodline of overlords who all passed down the name “Rudra.”

Regardless of the truth of this matter, the emperor advocated absolute meritocracy—and firmly stood by it. Thus, the core philosophy shaping the military was “Power is everything,” and a special system was established that allowed a person to climb the ranks, if they had the strength to.

There was a rumor going around among the citizens of the Empire, pertaining to the reason why they had yet to begin their invasion of the Great Jura Forest. The reason many believed: The Empire had not finished preparing.

Around three hundred and fifty years ago, an attempt to subdue the Storm Dragon Veldora failed, and a city was destroyed in the process. Those who had provoked the capricious dragon had no time to regret it, as they shared the same fate as that city.

It had been the largest city of the Empire at the time, boasting a population over a hundred thousand, and was a fortress city adjacent to the eastern side of the Great Jura Forest. It had been built over a hundred years to serve as a bridgehead to invade the forest. They had hoped to turn this city into a military stronghold in order to break through the forest and further expand the Empire’s territories. Driven by this ambition, the military at the time began to draft an assault plan.

They had to cross the Great Jura Forest. They had spent the past century longing for this opportunity. They were already a prosperous nation, and so there was only one reason why they hoped to expand their territories further: It was their emperor’s wish. There was no other reason, and none of the Empire’s citizens had any complaints.

The plan proceeded smoothly, and as the Empire’s army gradually accumulated power, they were ready to display their military prowess. Soon enough, they were given orders to invade the forest in the name of the emperor. However, all plans for the invasion were thwarted by the foolish idea of a certain troop captain.

Since we are here, we might as well subjugate the ruler of the Great Jura Forest too. It’s just a giant lizard, after all, it doesn’t stand a chance against us. This hubris led to their ultimate downfall.

As for what exactly they had done, it was not accurately recorded. After all, the people in charge of keeping records as well as the places holding said records were all turned to dust. The Empire’s wish and the emperor’s ambition were reduced to ashes.

Time passed, and in the present day, the Empire found itself in a state of limbo. They had finally recovered from Veldora’s blow, however, the emperor had yet to give his permission to invade.

Any act of invasion towards the Great Jura Forest was strictly prohibited. After three hundred and fifty years, they had rebuilt their power once more, waiting for the right opportunity to strike.

Then, let us have a look at the political structure of the Empire.

Within the Empire, the political department and the military department were the left and right hands of the emperor—he had both political dominance and military command, holding absolute authority.

Within the political department, the nobles within the Empire were organized into the House of Peers and enjoyed extraordinary authority. Yet it was merely superficial: in reality, these nobles had no actual decision-making power. They merely enjoyed the honor and privilege, while staying beholden to the emperor’s will. At most, they were just bureaucrats.

The power of the nobles was hereditary, and they could become senators without being elected. Even if they were extremely ambitious, they would never have enough power to achieve their dream. All of the territories of the Empire belonged to the emperor. The nobles were merely leased the land for temporary management.

The ones supporting the nobles were highly-educated officials. It was these officials who handled all the planning. They were directly supported by the emperor, since these officials had all sworn allegiance to him.

Up next is the military department. The supreme decision-making power of the military did not belong to the nation, but the emperor. All of the Empire’s military power was centered on the emperor. This also applied to the nations that had been annexed by the Empire. All of their territories were claimed, and their land now became the property of the emperor. So were the defense troops deployed there, where they were considered as a generous gift from the emperor.

This policy was effective in completely eliminating any form of rebellion in the provinces. The overwhelming difference in national power was the key to its success.

The Empire would accept the surrender of other nations, but it was the equivalent of forfeiting all of their rights. If one of them rejected those terms and launched a rebellion, they would be met with a bloody purge. The Empire did this to deter even the thought of insurrection, cutting off the very roots of rebellion.

In that manner, the Empire managed to maintain order. On the one hand, the fear of their tyranny, and on the other, ensuring the livelihoods of its loyal subjects—the quintessential carrot and stick policy. Through this, the Empire managed to maintain peace and prosperity with its complete authoritarian control.

It was normally impossible for an empire of this scale to be ruled by a single person. Yet even so, throughout its two millennia of history, the dominance of the emperor had never been shaken. Generation after generation, the emperor’s authority never faded. By all accounts, it was an extraordinary feat. If all of this truly was the emperor’s own doing, he was a being that transcended the mortal realm.

Moving on, let us have a look at the military strength of the Empire. The structure of their military could be roughly divided into three major corps.

The Armored Corps—an army modified by armored technicians consisting of mainly mechanized troops. They were the modernized Armed Corps and their arsenal included heavy weaponry, such as tanks. They symbolized the Empire’s technology.

The Magic Beast Corps—an army consisting of all sorts of magic beasts captured by the Empire from various regions across the world, within their domain and otherwise. The corps manipulated the magic beasts and wielded their power. They symbolized the Empire’s strength.

The Mixed Corps—a cesspool where nonstandard mechanized troops and uncontrollable, ferocious magic beasts were dumped, loosely resembling an army. This corps was considered to be too reliant on individual strength and unsuited for organized group action. However, their total strength was unknown, and if united, could potentially pose a tremendous threat. They symbolized the Empire’s heart. Though, this “heart” was not mature enough yet.

Unlike the Western Nations, which focused its military power on swords and magic, the Empire was pioneering a new era with magic and science. The existence of otherworlders played a major role in the growth of the Empire’s military power.

Someone had seen potential in the knowledge brought from the other worlds, an archmage, one who had lived for a long time within the palace, named Gadra. Despite his elderly appearance, the man was extremely energetic. He craved knowledge of all kinds, even outside the field of magic. He was also very fond of hearing the stories told by people from other worlds. That was how he learned that there were many other nations in other worlds as well. Unlike this world, the residents of these other worlds spoke different languages and had different ideologies. Yet, even then, they were able to overcome their differences and coexist. He also learnt that other worlds had no magic, yet their civilizations were highly developed and completely different to this world’s.

Gadra had lived for a long time. Every time his life was about to come to an end, he would undergo the secret ritual he invented—the mystic art of ‘Reincarnation’—in order to rewind his lifespan. It was this ability that allowed him to study otherworlders over many lifetimes. He amassed a wealth of knowledge, including several otherworld languages. In addition, whenever otherworlders arrived in this world, he would send his subjects to ensure that they were under his personal protection. Magical beasts weren’t the only thing the Empire was collecting.

Gadra also appealed to the emperor on the practical use of otherworlders and was given the permission to do as he wished with them. Some of these otherworlders possessed unusual abilities, and some possessed vast knowledge. The otherworlders arriving at the borders of the Empire received special treatment, and far more had gathered there than any other nation. As a result, their cultures and traditions were seen across the Empire.

Naturally, the Empire realized that many of them possessed Unique Skills and thus carried out further research. Because of them, the Imperial Army’s technology continued to develop to the point that it likely surpassed all the other nations in the world.

The Empire had abandoned the use of knights. Fighting on horseback had long since become obsolete, and in its place, battles were fought with modernized weaponry. Soldiers who replaced their flesh and bones with steel and machinery were called “mechaknights,” 8 and they soon played pivotal roles in the Empire’s war force. The Armored Corps, the main force of the Empire, strongly exemplified this feature.

In addition, the Magic Beast Corps also cleverly used the knowledge of the other worlds. DNA, also known as deoxyribonucleic acid, was a biological macromolecule that held the genetic information of biological beings. Having gained this knowledge from the otherworlders, the Empire was able to analyze the strength of the magic beasts. They even went a step further in their research…

As for the Mixed Corps, it consisted of many powerful otherworlders. Every one of them had awakened their Unique Skills. They were a force to be reckoned with.

And so, by cleverly combining the technology from the other worlds and special abilities, the Empire created an incredibly powerful army. You wouldn’t be wrong to attribute much of the Empire’s steady growth to Gadra’s passion.

However, separate to the three main corps Gadra developed, there was another group in charge of protecting the emperor. This group was, at most, the size of a company, which was a hundred men. It was called the “Imperial Guardians.” The members were called “Imperial Knights,” 9 despite the term “knight” being a relic of a bygone era. A clueless outsider might think that they were merely a formality, or like their name, a remnant from the past. But that was far from the truth. The Imperial Knights of the Imperial Guardians were the elite of the elite, handpicked from each of the corps.

Among them were otherworlders, which only further proved their commitment to the credo that “Power is everything,” by disregarding any prejudice over a person’s home country. These people had not gained their titles through their family’s name or influence in this old empire, but purely on their own merit. There were rumors saying that the Imperial Guardians were all gifted legendary-grade weapons as proof that they were the strongest among men. These powerful elites paired with the best gear could take on thousands of foes on their own. Their combined strength was superior to that of every corps combined.

They were also guaranteed the best treatment. Each one of them had the rank of a senior officer. When they carried out special missions, they were granted the authority of a colonel, at minimum. They were the Imperial Guardians, admired by the Empire’s soldiers as the greatest force of the Empire.

In conclusion, there were four military corps within the Empire. To be the commanding general of these corps, one had to demonstrate adequate military prowess to force those below into obedience. They had to make sure that everyone recognized why they were the strongest within the Empire.

So, how would they prove this?

This was done through competition for ranks—a rank battle—within the Empire’s military. So long as the battle was supervised by a neutral third party, this system allowed a lower-ranking individual to challenge his superior. In other words, it allowed insubordination. As a result, ranks within the corps often fluctuated.

Naturally, several conditions had to be met for these rank battles to be approved. They could not be held during a military operation. It would be rendered invalid without the presence of a witness. Moreover, if the challenging party were defeated, they would need to wait another year before regaining the right to challenge. The same rule applied if the challenger killed their opponent.

Since superior officers were allowed to kill their challengers, these challenges had to be treated with caution. The challenger had to utilize an overwhelming amount of strength in order to make their opponent admit defeat. This system was very much in line with the Empire’s philosophy, “Power is everything.”

Nevertheless, there was no shortage of people who hoped to climb the ranks to become Imperial Guardians. The Empire’s ideology was engraved on the people’s hearts.

This was how the rankings within the Empire were decided. However, Gadra was exempted from this rule. Due to his special position, he was like a foreigner to the Empire.

Excluding Gadra, the Empire would select soldiers from the rest of the military to join the ranks of the Imperial Guardians, as well as elect the corps commanders. When a replacement was needed, candidates would be chosen from among the top 100 ranks.

Those who wished to climb the ranks of office were given equal opportunity. That was why those who truly possessed strength would not go unnoticed. Everyone continuously honed their skills, eager to demonstrate their talents.

Through this method, the Empire would elect one marshal, the most highly-ranked officer, and three generals. In addition, the highest-ranking individual would automatically be elected as the marshal. In contrast, only after the emperor, the marshal, and Gadra had discussed the matter would they appoint the appropriate candidates as the generals. The reasoning was very simple: strength didn’t always translate to strategic command.

All in all, the members who remained in each corps were weaker than the Imperial Guardians, so there was no doubt that the generals who became the corps commanders would all be the most capable elites in their respective corps. This was how the commanders of the corps were decided. These four individuals were the highly esteemed people representing the Empire to the public.

The marshal and the three generals would receive gear appropriate for their position. Since the members of the Imperial Guardians received legendary-grade gear, the gifts to these four individuals must therefore be superior, secret treasures of the Empire. These were the strongest treasured items, those whose power was wielded during the many conquests in the ancient times—mythical-grade gear.

The fact that the Empire possessed multiple mythical-grade items, the existence of which itself was often questioned, underpinned their prestige. The ultimate gear that no mortal human could ever dream of touching. Only those worthy could wield it. Once the gear itself approved of them could they unleash their true power. Only the strongest deserved this ultimate power. These individuals seemed almost invincible, and so the Empire managed to stand, unshaken.

Yet as time passed…

An anomaly appeared in the Empire. For the first time in several decades, a new face took the place of an old corps commander. With a feat that had seemed unfeasible, one man brought the disjointed Mixed Corps together under a single, strong will. He had been a part of the corps for less than a year, but the rate of his progress was unprecedented, beyond all reason. Following triumph after triumph, defeating countless experienced warriors, this young man had managed to climb to one of the Empire’s top positions.

His name was Yuuki Kagurazaka.

With the rise of Yuuki, things were about to escalate rapidly.

