The high duke of Emlion surveyed the column that marched quietly below him. His house servant dared a quick look up at his master to see his mandibles twist slightly into just a hint of a sneer. Or was it disappointment? Very often the two traveled together with the duke. Was anything worthy of his notice?

“They're fools, the lot of them” The duke admitted quietly. His gestures were slow but precise. His servant stayed quiet. He knew better than to talk. He knew better than to move or even turn to his master. The duke was a particular man. It was rare for him to voice his opinions so openly.

“The Third company is a shell of what it once was.” The duke gestured, then turned his upper segments slowly towards the servant and observed his posture. The servant was careful not to let anything slip.

“Hmm. Once, the noblest of fighting men would clamor to join its ranks. The scouts. The first to find danger, and the first to throw themselves at it. I applied myself but did not make it on account of my lost third leg.” He patted the segment where his well pressed uniform should have had an opening.

The servant nodded.

“Spent and gone now I'd think. Nothing to scout I suppose… All gone silent hmm? What do you think?”

A direct command was different. No avoiding talk now.

“I had heard they were putting down the remnants of the Radicals, all holed away up in Northersend.” The servant ventured, his movements shamefully clumsy compared to the Duke's smooth and measured talking.

“True, but old news. The heavy lifting has been done for years. They've just been doing cleanup. Nothing but police work.”

“You think they're unprepared?”

“I know so.” The duke said, rubbing his first and second hands together.

“Then why send them?” The servant swung. Had he gone too far in asking the question?

The duke bristled. His segments rustling beneath his precisely arranged uniform.

“They're the Third. They're the scouts. If we don't send them, who are we to send?”

“So do you think we'll see any of them?” Adam communicated hastily as they marched. The tall white stone of the compartments which lined the street were just barely covered in the light of the morning. The shutters on the tall windows were mercifully closed. For some reason the pressed dress uniform of the Third elicited some kind of nervousness. There had been many scouts in the past to wear the same green and blue, but it just didn't feel right on him.

“See who? The Ularch? I imagine we will. Perhaps get to kill a few.” Hector responded, not even trying to steady his gruff movements.

In front of them was the mighty curtain wall, whose enormous height surpassed even the buildings around it. They still several blocks away, but Hector could see the sentinels still atop its multiple stories. The whole parapet would be bristling with weapons, coilguns, searchlights, and the heavier stuff as well. Yet there was a stillness to the silhouettes that didn't sit right with him. If the scouts were rusty, the defenders were rust itself.

“You really think so? Do you know what they're like?” Adam asked, struggling to speak as they were marching.

“I haven't seen them myself. Only stories.” Hector replied.

That wasn't the response Adam wanted, or expected. There was a slight pause in his movement, and his eyes opened a bit as he clearly struggled to comprehend something.

“Keep moving!” Ableton yelled. The major was known for his keen attention to detail and exacting nature, especially when the Third performed any function where the general public would see them. This was no exception.

The curtain wall loomed over them as they arrived closer.

“Wow. Do you feel that? Are those the generators? We're still blocks away!” Adam said in amazement. “And there's the gate out of Aenglia...”

“Ever been outside before?” Hector asked quickly. The hum got louder.

“No. Never even been near the curtain.”

Hector shrugged his heavy segments. “Huh? Not even for training?”

Adam's response was shy. “They said they needed the men right now, and as a function of my family's station...”

Hector made some sort of indistinguishable hiss of disgust and kept moving.

Adam's mandibles quivered with displeasure, but he didn't reply. He was almost, but not quite completely, used to such dismissals from the Third's veterans. Yet… Hector had said even he hadn't seen the Ularch. Were any of the great generation even in service?

They came to a stop beneath the wall. It was nearly ten stories tall, and much taller than any buildings outside of the core. The hum was almost unbearable. Here and there throughout the company, the privates fidgeted as the vibration shook them.

Ableton's vocalizations were completely lost amid the generators, but Adam could make out his words through his body alone.

The speech was largely forgettable, with it spending just the right amount of time on the glory and the history of the Third while transitioning to how their current mission, the first major expedition out of Aenglia in a decade, was a testament to the Third's ability and competency.

The words sounded nice, as Hector heard them, but it was all ruined by a slight motion. During the climax of the speech, assuring that the soldiers before him were destined for greatness, his eyes lifted a bit too high, revealing his true target. Hector's eyes followed the Major's. High above them, on his balcony was a figure, flanked by a smaller man. It only took a moment to make out the colors of the uniform. The duke.

The speech was not for them at all. They were not the ones who needed assuring. Who needed assuring was apparently their benefactor, the one who had been able to drag them out of Northersend. Hector didn't know to feel disgusted at the politics or grateful for leaving that horrible place.

But in some sense it didn't matter. Before them were the gates. The true home of the scouts was always outside the curtain, and above interior politics. Hector felt better than he had in many long years of violence. The doors opened, the generators stopped, and the rising sun came through the opened marchway. This was less an assignment and more of a correction in Hector's mind. They were coming home.