

Chapter 1 - There's no way for the Tunnel's Opening to be simple

"No sooner than the sudden appearance of a cave after the mountain had collapsed, people came out from within, causing the residents to rush over to me in panic. That surprised me."



At the moment we left the entrance of the tunnel running through the Greater League Mountain Range after collecting all the sand and earth that had piled up around there, we were greeted by a view that was clearly contrasting the modern tunnel. Nicely put, you could call it full of nature, otherwise you might as well call it the sticks.

Before our very eyes unfolds the idyllic scene of farmers leisurely plowing their fields. Being surprised by our appearance, one of them apparently went to call someone of higher ranking.

The feudal lord-like person that showed up is around forty years old, I think.

With his attire that makes him barely identifiable as noble, he looked even thinner than my father in the past.

However, I'm surprised.

That there are noble territories which seem to be even poorer than the former Knight Baumeister territory.

A decent sort of young man, who seems to be in the first half of his twenties, is standing next to him; very likely his son and heir.

He has an appearance that's similar to his father.

In addition, the farmer, who went to inform the lord, and an old man, who seems to be around seventy years old, were behind those two.

The old man appears to be a butler or retainer.

If you ask why I know as much; it's because he has an aura about him that's similar to my home.

If it's butlers of rural nobles, there's only very few who are wearing a butler uniform like Sebastian from Elise's home.

"I'm sorry, as a matter of fact..." (Wendelin)

Once I explained the events leading to the current situation, they were quite surprised.

"No way, for such a tunnel to exist..."

"It's the accomplishment of the archaeologist acquaintance of mine over here." (Wendelin)

"I see."

The middle-aged feudal lord looks at Arnest with an expression that's full of admiration.

It was the same for his son next to him as well as the butler.

"So you are saying that the exit led to our territory?"

"Yes, therefore I'd like to ask one question; where are we here?" (Wendelin)

"Let's talk about that in my mansion? We only have low-grade tea, but I will gladly offer you

some."

We decided to entrust Thomas and his men with guarding the entrance to the tunnel, and accept the offer of the feudal lord without reservation.

Leaving the fields under his guidance, we descend through fields that are located on a slope, and once again leave those fields...

Given that almost all of the area is covered with farm fields, I will omit the rest. After a while a private house gradually comes in sight.

"(It's much more worn-out than the old mansion of the Knight Baumeister family, isn't it...?)"
(Erwin)

"(Shhh!)" (Wendelin)

I cover Erw's mouth who muttered something rude.

Although it's just as Erw says, it would turn into a big problem if they heard it.

"Our Eulenberg territory is a quiet agricultural community, as you can see..."

Along the way towards the mansion, we hold a polite conversation.

This middle-aged noble is called Sieg Frank von Eulenberg. He's a Knight reigning over a farming area with around 300 residents.

As expected, the young man is his successor. He introduced himself as Veith Frank von Eulenberg. The old man is the butler and is called Georg.

Even if they had said that they are farmers, I wouldn't have doubted it for a second before they introduced themselves...

"I'm Earl Wendelin von Benno Baumeister."

When I introduced myself next, all three of them immediately started to kneel down on the ground for some reason.

Due to the sudden turn, not only I, but even Elise can't hide her surprise.

"Umm...Lord Eulenberg, we are nobles from the same Kingdom." (Elise)

In panic she makes them quickly stand up.

No matter how paltry the Eulenberg territory might be, they are official nobles that had been granted their territory and peerage by the Kingdom.

It's not good for them to prostrate themselves in front of me who's a noble of the same Kingdom.

"Information about the world doesn't often reach this Eulenberg territory situated in the countryside, but even we know of you, Earl Baumeister-sama. How wonderful of you to have come to such a remote place..." (Sieg)

"Umm, listen..." (Wendelin)

Even though we should be nobles of the same Kingdom, Lord Eulenberg was awfully humble and menial.

As it's the same with his son and the butler, their excessive servility makes us feel uncomfortable

instead.

"Even though you, the great hero Earl Baumeister-sama, came all the way to this place, we can't even offer any decent hospitality..." (Sieg)

"As something like that hasn't been our objective to begin with, you don't have to worry about it..." (Wendelin)

"I feel terribly sorry about it." (Sieg)

"..."

The residence of the Knight Eulenberg household was smaller and more tattered than the one of the Knight Baumeister household.

I end up thinking something rude along the lines that there's always someone below you in society.

"Excuse me for this run-down, shabby house." (Sieg)

"Ahaha..." (Wendelin)

No matter what I might say, these people are going to stay menial anyway.

Giving up, we enter the house that doesn't look like anything but a big farmer's home rather than a mansion.

The inside of the house matches with the former mansion of the Knight Baumeister family.

I guess the difference has now widened since it was repaired and improved after Helmut-niisan succeeded the peerage.

Once we sat down after being led into the living room, Lord Eulenberg and a woman that was around his age put out the tea.

She's a plump and healthy person.

"She's my wife Rose." (Sieg)

"As there's no maid in our home, I handle the housework myself. Everyone else is busy with farmwork." (Rose)

If pushed to say, even the former Knight Baumeister territory had maids that were close to being called proper maids.

Without such existing in the Eulenberg territory, the feudal lord's wife had to pour the tea by herself.

Elise also cooks and pours tea, but that's a matter limited to the battlefield and her own preferences. Nowadays, the mansion's maids will prepare the tea if there are visitors.

"It's especially delicious since I was thirsty." (Luise)

Luise, who drained the tea down in one go, asked Rose-san for another serving.

Different from the former Knight Baumeister territory, it's not something like a fake mate tea that's close to simple, boiled water.

The more diligently they make their guests feel welcome, the more sincere and virtuous they are compared to my hold home.

"The tea-cakes are steamed 『Maroimo』, I think?" (Ina)

It's a food I see for the first time, but Ina seems to know the real name of this vegetable. Going by its appearance, it's a combination of sweet potatoes and normal potatoes. The skin's color is a vivid yellow and it was steamed like a sweet potato. I don't know whether it's suitable for a noble to serve something like that as tea-cake, but once I take a bite, it's really sweet and tasty. I feel I incurred a loss for not having know about the existence of this potato until now.

"This potato is really delicious." (Erwin)

"Milady, I would like to have another serving." (Arnest)

Not only the female side of our group, but even Erw and Arnest were fond of it. Or rather, being able to calmly demand another helping in this situations makes me slightly envious of Arnest. Well, if I'm given another serving, I will also eat it, however.

"Elise, do you know this potato?" (Wendelin)

"I have heard the name of a potato called Maroimo, as Ina-san mentioned, but today is the first time for me to see the potato itself." (Elise)

"Even you haven't seen it before, Elise?" (Wendelin)

"I mean, it's a potato that only appears occasionally on the market, even in the Breithilde Margraviate." (Ina)

It might be treated as so-called 『Local Vegetable』. Since the numbers harvested are low, it probably hasn't spread much in society.

"Huh? That means this place is close to the Breithilde Margraviate?"

"I suppose calling it close is correct? This place is a small territory enclosed by the Breithilde Margraviate." (Sieg)

Lord Eulenberg, who finally toned down the servility, spread a map on the table.

"The Kingdom's southern region is split into the Baumeister Earldom that's south of the Greater League Mountain Range, the Breithilde Margraviate in the northwestern part, and an alliance of smaller feudal territories in the northeastern part. It's a fairly simple layout." (Sieg)

"That's true." (Wendelin)

I check the map as well.

"Because of the map, it has been recorded like this, but even in the part labeled as Breithilde Margraviate there are several small noble territories." (Sieg)

All of those territories seem to be fairly small-scale, like the Eulenberg territory. Several of such Knight territories exist, but as for their public recognition, it was just as one could guess.

"The population in those territories ranges from 200 to 500. They are really nothing but meager Knight territories. The location of our Eulenberg territory is here." (Sieg)

The location didn't differ much from the tunnel's exit point predicted by Arnest. I guess the sole difference is that this place isn't the Breithilde Margraviate, but the Knight Eulenberg territory.

"So that how it was? Then it makes things simple." (Wendelin)

"Makes things simple?" (Sieg)

Lord Eulenberg inclined his head in confusion, wondering what I'm talking about.

"Indeed. Since a tunnel running through the Greater League Mountain Range was discovered, I'd like to put it in operation. The entrance on this side is within your territory, so I would like to cooperate with you, Lord Eulenberg." (Wendelin)

"Eh? With me?" (Sieg)

"Well, I mean, the tunnel's entrance is actually within the Eulenberg territory, so..." (Wendelin)

In addition, around half of the tunnel's ownership belongs to Lord Eulenberg. That's because the part of the Greater League Mountain Range located above the tunnel belongs to the Eulenberg territory according to the official documents. Since it's an area inhabited by wyverns and flying dragons, the issue of them actually being able to rule that area is a different matter, though.

"Therefore I'd like you to also deploy guards, Lord Eulenberg. In exchange you will be able to make a big profit by demanding a traffic toll." (Wendelin)

The magic airship flights increased in number, but if we don't discover new airships, it won't grow any further than it is now. It also has the flaw of charging high fare rates. If you go through the tunnel, it takes time, but it will be possible to shorten the time a lot more than it took back in the days when you had to travel along the mountain roads. It will give an easy access to the market for small-scaled companies and individual merchants. If the circulation of goods accelerates, it will likely bring about huge profits for the Baumeister Earldom.

"Of course it's the same for the Eulenberg territory. That's great, isn't it?" (Wendelin)

That it hadn't been the Breithilde Margraviate might be bad luck for Margrave Breithilde, but I don't care who it is as long as they manage the entrance on the other side.

"I'm going to manage it?" (Sieg)

"Yes, is there anything wrong with it?" (Wendelin)

"Impossible! That's completely out of my league!" (Sieg)

"For me too!" (Veith)

Even though it should have been a very nice deal for them, it was frantically denied not only by Lord Eulenberg, but even his heir. We couldn't do anything besides looking baffled.



""Margrave Breithilde-sama! Your esteemed Lordship——""

"Umm...we are nobles of the same Kingdom..." (Breithilde)

The task of managing and securing the tunnel has been refused by Lord Eulenberg. The perplexed me quickly used 『Teleportation』 to fetch Margrave Breithilde and Burkhart-san.

And, after seeing Margrave Breithilde, the parents and child began to prostrate on the ground once again. With Margrave Breithilde chiding that, it has developed into a scene that I've seen somewhere before.

"(This again...?)" (Wendelin)

"(Wend, I think no matter what you tell these people, it's pointless. They probably never met high-ranking nobles personally so far...)" (Ina)

Ina whispered into my ear.

Certainly, I really doubt that this place had been visited by high-ranking nobles until now.

"Why are you so menial? We are nobles of the same kingdom..." (Breithilde)

Of course this was his official stance, but I think that even Margrave Breithilde will be troubled if he's always treated like this.

If it's misunderstood by other nobles, it might serve as material to denunciate Margrave Breithilde.

"Having said that..."

The Eulenberg family had finally calmed down, but Margrave Breithilde dropped his shoulders while revealing a depressed expression.

Because of a whim of fate, the entrance to the big tunnel wasn't located in his territory.

"Earl-sama, check such things in advance." (Breithilde)

"But, this map is the official version released by the Kingdom's government. In the first place, even if he had checked it, he wouldn't have been able to avoid the problem anyway, right?" (Burkhart)

Even Burkhart-san believes that it's not my fault.

"That's correct, but...couldn't we have prepared some measures, if we knew in advance?"
(Breithilde)

"However, it wasn't written on the map. On this map, this place here belongs to the Breithilde Margraviate. Something like the map being right or wrong isn't my responsibility." (Wendelin)

"I suppose I really can't retort anything if I'm told that." (Breithilde)

Given that maps are military information, their production is related to the royal army. The households of high-ranking nobles aren't exactly eager to readily provide information about their territory, but even though the royal army should have secretly dispatched someone and produced a detailed map, the Eulenberg territory and several other small territories haven't been recorded on that map.

"Moreover, this map is this year's edition which has been released just recently."

"You're right. Why were these territories suddenly deleted from the map, despite having been regularly recorded until last year? Jeez! They are cutting too many corners!" (Breithilde)

There seem to be many cases with other maps where things are omitted because there's little to no necessity to record them, but not recording such details in an official edition published by the Kingdom's government can be regarded as crude.

The angry Margrave Breithilde takes out his MHCD and starts dialing the number of a certain person.

"A magic tool for communication!" (Sieg)

"Father, that's nothing we can afford. As expected of Margrave Breithilde-sama." (Veith)

"Master, I had to reach this age to see the actual thing for the first time in my life." (Georg)

"Even I only saw it once in the city where I had been staying during my childhood." (Sieg)

"Father, high-ranking nobles are amazing, aren't they?" (Veith)

Together with the butler, the petty bourgeois-like parent and child stared at the MHCD of Margrave Breithilde with looks full of envy.

Their behavior is similar to a primeval tribe that witnessed the conveniences of civilization for the very first time.

"...Somehow the mood is kind of amiss...Minister Edgar?" (Breithilde)

At the other end of Margrave Breithilde's phone call was Minister Edgar, the highest authority responsible for cartography.

Since the creation of maps falls in the jurisdiction of the royal army, it's only natural for it to be his duty.

"It's about this year's Kingdom map, but..." (Breithilde)

『What did you say——!?!』 (Edgar)

Once Margrave Breithilde explained the situation in detail, his angry voice reverberated so loudly that it was even audible to us.

With the owner of the voice obviously being Minister Edgar, it appears that he hasn't been aware of this issue either.

『Is Earl Baumeister there!?!』 (Edgar)

"Yes, next to me." (Breithilde)

『Come and pick me up!』 (Edgar)

And thus I transferred to the royal castle with 『Teleportation』 to bring Minister Edgar along at once.

As fellow traveler, taking along an appointed noble, who trembles like a small animal, is...

I saw it.

How Minister Edgar stormed into the government office called Royal Land Survey Department while yelling.

And also how he grabbed the nape of the appointed noble's neck who's in charge of cartography. That scene had a dreadfulness which was equal to Doushi's combat scenes.

"Viscount Meiser! Let's have you explain what this is about!" (Edgar)

The elderly noble called Viscount Meiser, who was brought along to Margrave Breithilde by me and Minister Edgar, ended up prostrating on the floor of the Eulenberg mansion.

For some reason the Eulenberg father and son as well as their butler prostrated themselves next to him...

"Say, Earl Baumeister. Did I do something bad to these three?" (Edgar)

"Well, you know..." (Wendelin)

"Father-in-law-san, those three are simply nervous after seeing a high-ranking noble with a minister post whom they considered to exist above the clouds." (Wilma)

In my stead, Wilma provided an explanation of the circumstances.

"Is that so...? But, they are also nobles of the Kingdom, so doing something like this is kind of troublesome..." (Edgar)

Due to the excessive servility of Eulenberg father and son, even Minister Edgar apparently lost some of his anger.

In a certain meaning Viscount Meiser might have been saved thanks to them.

"Well, it's not like your responsibility diminished because of that, though, Viscount Meiser." (Breithilde)

Without a moment's delay Margrave Breithilde warned Viscount Meiser who sighed in relief due to Minister Edgar's rage having vanished.

"Yes...I'm well aware of that..." (Meiser)

"Then it's fine." (Breithilde)

Thanks to Viscount Meiser having cut corners in the production of the map, we ended up connecting the tunnel's exit under the wrong impression that it's the Breithilde Margraviate on the other side.

It was a case where I don't know whether it fulfilled the conditions of a crime, but it's a fact that the situation has become chaotic thanks to this.

Anyway, something like the management of a huge tunnel in a territory that has a population of 300 people is a heavy burden.

"I guess I will ask first. How did it come to this?" (Edgar)

He has drastically toned down from his previous, huge rage fit, but the eyes of Minister Edgar, who's questioning Viscount Meiser, were full of killing intent.

The frightened Viscount Meiser begins to explain the circumstances without any particular reluctance.

"In order to reduce the costs, we changed the workshop that produces the maps..." (Meiser)

Different from books, maps are difficult to print. Every year small details such as slight changes in the terrain, fluctuation of noble territories, changes in the noble families ruling those territories, and survey achievements in regions that hadn't been mapped yet took place.

Since just creating the map takes a considerable amount of time and money, Viscount Meiser apparently put great effort in thinking up ideas how to make at least the expenses decrease in some way.

"Deciding on a reduction of expenses falls into your jurisdiction, Viscount Meiser, as the one holding responsibility, so I won't say anything, but omitting details is a problem, isn't it?"

"However...it was a truly small mistake..." (Meiser)

Certainly, normally it's a mistake that wouldn't matter.

After all, even Minister Edgar and Margrave Breithilde hadn't noticed the error until it was pointed out to them.

Seeing as the Kingdom's government is a gathering of humans, one should be able to find as many such mistakes as they like, if they search for them.

"But you know, you were really unlucky, Viscount Meiser." (Edgar)

"No way..." (Meiser)

Yes, Viscount Meiser was unlucky.

Normally one won't be punished for a mistake at this level where it's unclear whether it might be noticed or not.

After all there are almost no people who would be troubled by not knowing the the few small territories that are surrounded by the Breithilde Margraviate.

"Thanks to Viscount Meiser, a delay in the tunnel's opening has become inevitable. This will of course reach His Majesty ears as well."

"His Majesty's ears?"

"Naturally. The development of the southern Baumeister Earldom is sponsored by His Majesty. Even though a tunnel, which will possibly promote that development, had been left behind in a perfect condition, its opening will be delayed for such a reason. Do you believe that we will be able to hide that fact?"

"No...I don't..."

"Since I also bear responsibility for not having checked it sufficiently, it would be nice if there won't be any official punishment." (Edgar)

"I also hold responsibility as I didn't check properly." (Breithilde)

Margrave Breithilde also followed by saying that he's responsible as he didn't point out the mistake at the time when the map was released.

But, that still doesn't mean that Viscount Meiser's mistake will be pardoned. It will likely result in the pitiable Viscount Meiser having to withdraw from his current official position and his seat as family head.

I guess the official reason will be something along the lines of recuperating from a serious illness. Like this nobles are forced to take responsibility and will disappear without the common people knowing about it. Let's be careful in various way since there are also occasions where it will strike oneself on the next day.

"So, what are we going to do?"

"That's nothing we can decide by ourselves."

"That's true. Earl Baumeister, let me ask for your assistance once more." (Edgar)

"Okay." (Wendelin)

Taking Minister Edgar and Viscount Meiser, who has completely lost all vigor, along, I transfer to the capital once again.

And then, after picking up the people named by Minister Edgar on the way, we returned to the Eulenberg mansion.

"A large-scaled tunnel running through the Greater League Mountain Range, huh? You sure found something nice there, Earl Baumeister."

"Above all I'm happy that you seem to be healthy, Elise, Son-in-law-dono." (Hohenheim)

"Earl Baumeister, please allow me to inspect the tunnel afterwards."

"The work of Count Ishrabak, eh? It looks like it will be of use as reference."

We returned to the living room of the Eulenberg mansion while taking along people in high positions, who were curious or were related to the tunnel, such as Finance Minister Rückner, Cardinal Hohenheim, Trade Minister Röhrich, and the research director of the Sorcery Guild, Beckenbauer-san.

"It's great that you look well too, Erw. Tell me about the civil war later on."

Even Warren-san has shown up and calls out to his disciple, Erw. It's not like he is a lust murderer, but in the end he seemed jealous of his disciple for having obtained achievements after experiencing real battle.

"...Master Warren? That means..." (Erwin)

Since he's a company commander of the Royal Knight Order, he's not such an important figure that he would be called here.

But he was needed as guard of a certain person who had decided to show up here in a hurry.

"When I told him that the whole story had become complicated, His Majesty said that things would be resolved faster with himself coming forth."

"This is also a trick for reducing the work. After all a king is indeed busy. I brought Warren along as well. Many of the elites who triumphed in the Empire's civil war are here too. Thus my safety is in good hands, right?" (Helmut)

"Even His Majesty...?" (Breithilde)

As expected, even Margrave Breithilde apparently can't hide his surprise about His Majesty himself having entered the stage.

"It's better to deal with matters like this quickly." (Helmut)

"That would be appreciated." (Breithilde)

If it's a high-ranking noble at Margrave Breithilde's level, they are used to talk with His Majesty. Nowadays I had lost much of my nervousness as well. Growing accustomed to circumstances is necessary for humans.

However, not only His Majesty, but also high-ranking nobles with Minister posts, an important director of a guild that has influence in the capital, a Cardinal of the church; with only such big-wigs showing up in their house one after the other, there were some people who had reached the limit of their mental capabilities.

"Dear, Lord Eulenberg and his family..." (Elise)

"Wend, since a while ago they have completely stopped moving after groveling on the ground." (Ina)

Once I turned my eyes in the direction indicated by Elise and Ina, I found the figures of the Eulenberg father and son as well as their butler stuck prostrating there without even a single twitch.

"I feel with them...because they saw a parade of important people, who form the core of the country, in this short time..."

"The majority of the Kingdom's nobles will never be able to experience this in their entire life, or should I say...it's an honor, or rather...my condolences..."

Luise and Wilma watched them with looks full of sympathy.

"By the way, Earl Baumeister."

"Yes?" (Wendelin)

"Why are these people so menial?"

"Well..." (Wendelin)

"Seeing as we are in their territory, it was out of their expectation to be able to meet His Majesty at any other time than the succession ceremony, I believe?" (Katharina)

Katharina provided an explanation in my stead.

"I see...Lord Eulenberg and son, you might raise your heads and act normally now." (Helmut)

"I'm deeply sorry! Sorry for possessing a territory in this location!" (Sieg)

"As heir I shall beg your pardon as well!" (Veith)

For some reason father and son desperately apologized to His Majesty. Even His Majesty looks confused as he can't make heads or tail.

"This is a lost case..." (Wendelin)

It's impossible for this people to guard and manage the tunnel.
I resolved myself that dealing with the matter in question would take unexpectedly much time.



"This is called maroimo? It's a good tea-cake." (Helmut)

"I don't think it's something that should be served to you, Your Majesty, thus I'm truly sorry for the circumstances..."

"There's no social status with food. If it's delicious, one will be happy if they are offered it." (Helmut)

"It's the special product of our territory." (Rose)

"I see. This refined sweetness after just having steamed it. I definitely favor this over average sweets." (Helmut)

Since the concerned parties have gathered, we decide to continue the discussion.

With the Eulenberg mansion's living room as conference venue, Warren-san, Erw, Ina, Luise, Wilma, Burkhart-san and Katharina are stationed at the wall. Even if assassins were to charge into this place, they should be sent off to the other world in no time.

Elise served maroimo and tea together with Lord Eulenberg's wife.

Compared to father and son who have become menial after seeing nothing but high-ranking nobility, the wife is attending to His Majesty amiably.

Women having nerves of steel when push comes to shove is the same in any world.

"However, I haven't seen it appear on the market often."

"Ina, you knew it, didn't you?"

"Yes. It doesn't appear on the market usually, but just once I saw it and remembered nothing more than its name." (Ina)

"I see."

"I didn't buy it, though. A child's pocket money is limited after all." (Ina)

There are only few places that grow maroimo. Around here it's just the Eulenberg territory, so you will very occasionally find it on Baulburg's market.

It looks like the market appearance frequency drops even further if it comes to the area around the capital.

"Despite it being so delicious."

"The cultivation requirements are somewhat peculiar. Right, Lord Eulenberg?"

"Indeed. If it's not a field on a slope with a big decrease in temperature in the evening and morning, you won't be able to cultivate it successfully. In addition it won't become sweet-tasting if you make a mistake with the soil quality or the cultivation method." (Sieg)

The Eulenberg territory is adjacent to the Greater League Mountain Range.

Maroimo is cultivated on fields which were prepared on slopes, but if it were the slopes of the real mountains, farm work would be impossible due to wyverns and flying dragons flying by.

However, because the slopes located in the Eulenberg territory could be remains of the Ancient Magic Civilization's collapse, neither wyverns nor flying dragons come visiting.

"That's why it's possible to grow it there," Lord Eulenberg explained.

He apparently got finally accustomed to the situation and stopped being that menial when talking with Ina.

Or rather, speaking of social position, Lord Eulenberg, who is a family head, is higher in the hierarchy, but...

"I guess it's limited to the region then. It's most certainly a precious ingredient. Its refined sweetness sure is tasty though."

Even Minister Rückner and the others seemed to be pleased with the maroimo's sweetness.

"Now then, let's return to the talk about the tunnel. Margrave Breithilde, what's the core of this problem?"

"Simply said, it wouldn't have caused such an uproar if the other tunnel entrance were to be in my territory." (Breithilde)

"I'm sorry!" (Sieg)

"I told you before already. It's not really your responsibility, Lord Eulenberg, you know...?"

Given that everyone around him is a big-wig, he probably ends up cowering all the more as there's also the difference in experience on top of it.

However, in the eyes of Margrave Breithilde and the others it's instead troublesome if this much servility is demonstrated towards them.

That's only natural as they are nobles of the same kingdom.

If such a story is leaked to the outside, rumors about them being arrogant will spread in society, resulting in a decline in their reputation.

And someone at the level of high-ranking noble cares about their reputation in society.

"The tunnel seems to be a huge structure." (Helmut)

"Yes."

There are five traffic lanes on each side, and there are even emergency lanes for broken vehicles. Lighting and ventilation is present as well. And a huge magic crystal has been set up in the power room to enable their operation.

The newest materials and construction methods back then had been used for the roads and tunnel walls. The tunnel should be usable for a few more thousand years if it's maintained properly.

"There's also a limit to transportation through magic airships." (Helmut)

"The roads need maintenance, but having a transportation network via land routes would be great. After all the magic airships will be requisitioned by the air force, if there's a war."

In the Empire's civil war the magic airships' requisition plan by the air force was called off due to the jamming device.

But, if there were to be yet another war in the future, there's no guarantee that it will be possible to ward off their requisitioning as they are overly convenient.

After all the jamming device doesn't exist anymore.

In case that were to happen, it would affect the transportation towards the Baumeister Earldom and thus it would be a relief if there was a land route, Minister Edgar explains.

"It will take some time, but in regards to time and transported volume it will be overwhelmingly

better than transportation by walking along mountain roads. The expenses being lower than with magic airships is a nice bonus, too." (Rückner)

Minister Rückner advocates for an early opening of the tunnel, too.

"In regards to the sorcery guild, it's surely possible to run an investigation after the opening. I think we should open it as fast as possible for the sake of the Kingdom's economy."

Beckenbauer-san also approves, or rather, there shouldn't be anyone present who opposes this.

"Upon the tunnel's opening there will be several issues. First, guards are indispensable with the tunnel being what it is."

There's the danger that terror acts such as blocking the entrances by destroying them will be carried out.

No matter how many ceasefires and peace treaties have been closed, the Empire is still a hypothetical enemy.

Moreover, you couldn't definitely exclude the possibility of nobles, who are hostile towards the Earl Baumeister household, taking interfering actions.

"Odd criminals and refugees coming and going as they please would be a problem, too."

"Therefore it's necessary for both sides to employ a fixed number of soldiers and keep guarding the tunnel at all times. Regular inspections and repairs will be also required."

"The money issue... No, that can be covered with traffic tolls. On the contrary, it will definitely yield a huge profit."

Minister Rückner grasps that the biggest problem isn't money.

"Since it will cause confusion if the inbound lines and the outbound lines have different traffic tolls, it should be fine if you decide after consulting with Earl Baumeister. I think around 100 cent per one-way trip will be plenty."

"That's true. If the traffic tolls are at this level, it will be possible for many users to pay it. I guess there will also be many people who will enter the market as new companies."

Those who hesitated because of the expensive airship fares and the dangerous mountain roads will enter the market and boost the variety of businesses.

That should turn into a benefit for the whole Kingdom.

"What will become a problem here is the tininess of the Eulenberg territory."

"I'm sorry! Sorry for having a small territory!" (Sieg)

Once again Lord Eulenberg apologizes while repeatedly bowing.

Since it's very unlikely for him to fix that even if we caution him, all of us decided to simply ignore it.

"Taking a traffic toll while managing and guarding the tunnel in a territory with 300 people...?"

You might as well call that physically impossible.

I think there are people who will say that it will be fine as long as he employs new people, but hiring such a big number of people and directing them skillfully all of a sudden is definitely unreasonable.

That's because Lord Eulenberg is...

...a noble who is far away from the image of a worldly noble as he lived modestly and peacefully while plowing the fields together with his fief's residents.

It's pitiful that he is about to be forced into a job that doesn't suit his own capabilities.

It's the same with his heir, too. He isn't suited for it either, or rather he's probably unable to do it.

"Minister Edgar, as that's the current state of affairs, can't you dispatch guards from the royal army or something similar?" (Wendelin)

"Earl Baumeister, it would be nice if that would be alright. The rights for the tunnel belong to the Baumeister household and the Eulenberg household. We can't cover any more than a third of the guard duty." (Edgar)

It seems it won't be desirable for the government, if people believed that the Kingdom meddles in the concessions of nobles by dispatching more soldiers than that.

"A third would be around a thousand soldiers, right?"

"Correct."

If you combine the management, maintenance, collection of traffic tolls, and in addition cracking down on smuggling and suspicious people, around that much becomes necessary.

After all they will have to work in shifts, 24 hours every day in the year.

"No way...newly hiring a thousand people is impossible..." (Sieg)

Suddenly commanding such number of people will also be difficult for a feudal lord of a territory with 300 people.

And it's not just the assets to hire the people. It will also be indispensable to provide places whether they and their families can live.

Stating that something like that is impossible for him, Lord Eulenburg was half in tears.

"Now that it has turned out like this, how about having Margrave Breithilde act as agent for the duties?"

"That's not really a good idea."

Albeit being small, the Eulenberg household is fully-fledged nobility.

If they not only meddle in the rule of that territory, but actually enter the territory and do its work, the Margrave Breithilde household will very likely be regarded by other noble households as having selfishly preyed on the Eulenberg household to obtain profits by putting restrictions on their rule.

"It's wrong to do that no matter how small the territory of the other noble might be. Troublesome

systems such as disputes have been put in place for that sake."

Destroying the other side is taboo, even if you hate them.
That's why they are carrying out those troublesome disputes to regulate the interests.

"Is switching territories not possible? As in, exchanging the Eulenberg territory with a far more abundant territory."

"As that's in the sphere of the Kingdom's authority, I can't interfere with that. Even if I could, it would only cause my reputation to hit rock bottom." (Breithilde)

"Margrave Breithilde forced something unreasonable on the low-ranking Eulenberg household because he lusts for the tunnel rights." He says that it would be unbearable if such an ill repute about him spread through society.

"We have made a considerable gain with you, Earl Baumeister, as vassal. Even now the jealousy is going strong." (Breithilde)

"Let's have the Eulenberg territory relocated and turn this place in an area under the direct rule of the Kingdom then." (Wendelin)

"That's no good either." (Helmut)

This plan was declined by His Majesty.

"It's a charming idea, but the location is bad." (Helmut)

"The location, you say?" (Wendelin)

"Indeed. It's surrounded by the Breithilde Margraviate. If we do something so blunt, fellows, who will scoff at the relationship between the Kingdom and the Breithilde household, will appear." (Helmut)

"Yes. It will produce an imaginary, strained situation of the Kingdom aiming for my profits." (Breithilde)

Just because luck was with them for this place to have been peaceful for 200 years doesn't mean that things won't change in such way. I understood that statesmen are full of considerations that are almost neurotic.

"What are we going to do in that case?" (Wendelin)

"For a while the sorcery guild will apparently check the tunnel, but the magic tool guild will likely come to investigate it as well. That will buy us some time. That means all of us have some homework to tackle, doesn't it?"

You might call it postponing the problem, but there's no other option at the moment.
It was decided that the meeting would come to an end with this for today.

"Well then, before having Earl Baumeister bring us back, I guess I will buy some maroimo. Warren." (Helmut)

"Yes, Your Majesty!" (Warren)

Upon the king's order, Warren took out his wallet and paid Rose-san.

The butler immediately places a great amount of maroimo into a jute bag and brings it over.

All of the others bought some as well.

Of course I intend to go home after buying some as well, but I end up thinking, 『Maroimo are too popular, aren't they!?!』

Won't I be unable to buy any if they become too popular?

"I will turn them into stone-baked sweet potatoes at once and then eat them." (Wendelin)

"Son-in-law-dono, as usual you are quite enthusiastic in your research of new dishes, aren't you?" (Hohenheim)

"It's my hobby after all. By the way, how about having dinner together with us today?" (Wendelin)

"That might be a good idea, too. My turn will come after the tunnel opening went ahead. What I can do right now is at most establishing pilgrim places at both entrances, I suppose." (Hohenheim)

Since it's a tunnel, such establishments and resident priests become necessary to include prayers for safety.

One might think that it's just a tunnel, but even in Japan it might be the same with the bittersweet dissensions by bureaucrats and politicians, including various interests.

"Then, I will buy some maroimo and...Lord Eulenberg?"

"HmMMM. It looks like His Majesty's sudden visit and the tunnel talks were too heavy for him, doesn't it...?"

Having experienced various even in just one day, Lord Eulenberg and his heir fainted while prostrating on the spot.

We harbored that feeling that we had done something slightly unfair to them.