

Holy Roman Empire #Chapter 11: Court Guard - Read Holy Roman Empire Chapter 11: Court Guard

Chapter 11: Court Guard

Franz, standing in the spotlight, was busier than ever, and a succession of social engagements had exhausted him. That was the life of an aristocrat in Vienna.

Franz's younger brother, Maximilian, was also in the same situation, but he looked comfortable with it. He was enjoying it rather than being exhausted by it, something Franz envied.

Franz never enjoyed social engagements, especially with a bunch of devoted nobles dancing about, keeping him on his toes constantly.

"Archduke, it's time for you to go to Archduke Louis's party, we should start off now," his maid Jenny reminded him.

"I understand. Tell Maximilian to come with us!" Franz commanded.

"Yes, Archduke!" Jenny replied.

Franz would have liked to bring his other two younger brothers with him, if not for his mother's strong objection. At the very least, they could spare him most of the stress of dealing with aristocratic girls.

Unfortunately, his two younger brothers were much too young. Not only did Princess Sophie keep them away from such parties, but Franz also did not want to lower the age limit for the parties, either.

The truth was that they were much more attractive to the aristocratic ladies than Franz was. Being Crown Prince gave Franz a higher status and also doomed him to a marriage that could only be a political union.

In contrast, his younger brothers would have much more freedom in marriage, choosing from all the big noble families around the country--they would not encounter any objection.

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Seeing that Maximilian was flirting with a group of aristocratic girls very cheerfully, Franz pulled him out the crowd and teased him. "How is it going? Have you found the love of your life, little brother?"

"Dear brother, if I have, then what do you think Princess Sophie will..." his younger brother replied, seemingly unbothered by his brother's joking.

Franz smiled. "Is that true? Dear brother, for the sake of your lifelong happiness, I don't mind being scolded. But what about you? Can you just sit there and take the pressure from our dearest mother? Today, all the noble ladies here are much older than you; do you have a mother complex? Oh my God, Maximilian, how astonishing that you..."

"Stop it, my dear brother, if you go on talking like that, my lifelong honor and integrity will be destroyed!" Maximilian interrupted.

It was not the first time they had shared little jokes like that between them.

"Keep these annoying girls away from me for a while; they're like flies, and I need to go have a talk with Archduke Louis!" Franz said gravely.

"Well, how wonderful, to know you need me for something so unbecoming!"

Maximilian made an expression that displayed no signs of affection, while Franz rolled his eyes at him disdainfully.

How could it be a simple banquet when Franz attended? He would be too lazy to be here if he had not wanted to use this banquet to deceptively influence public opinion.

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"Dear Archduke Louis, I need your support to take control of the Court Guard!" Franz came straight to the point.

"God! My little Franz, how did you get that idea? You know, you're only 16 years old, not yet 17!" Louis said in amazement.

As a Crown Prince, it wasn't t tricky to laze around in the army, but it was a different story to really take charge of an army, especially when Franz was not yet 17 years old.

Therefore, he could only take control of the Court Guard as a second-best bet. Although the scale of this unit was small, and the fighting capacity of it was unknown, it was all Franz could manage.

"Uncle Louis, you know I have liked the military since I was a child, and my dream is to be a real general! However, it is not likely that I'll be in service to the army for a long time because of my status, and now I can only satisfy my dream by leading the Court Guard," Franz explained.

Archduke Louis shook his head and said: "It's not possible. You must know that the Court Guard is of great importance, and you've yet to prove yourself. If you really want to, you can attempt to do so in the City Defense Force!"

Franz was very clear on what stuff the Austrian City Defense Force was made of. The concentration camp of generals, as it was called, was the only unit in Austria where there were more officers than soldiers.

According to the tradition in the German region, nobles must be enlisted in the army as they grew into adults, or they would be condemned by the public.

As most nobles in Austria were also from the German region, this tradition went on in the Austrian Empire. However, as the Austrian Empire had decayed, the public turned a blind eye to these noble lords.

Since most nobles were enlisted simply for show, save for those who really wanted to develop in the army, there was absolutely no willingness on Louis's part to let Franz take charge of this army.

Franz frowned: "Uncle Louis, are you sure this is not a swindle? You know, like me, what the City Defense Force really is. Even the Archduke himself had said nothing can be done about them. What do you think I can do about them?"

Even after his intention was laid bare, Archduke Louis, a crafty politician, stayed calm and collected.

"Franz, calm down and think of it as a test of your skills. If you can handle the City Defense Force, then what couldn't you handle?"

These words could perhaps swindle foolish youngsters, but not Franz, who was no longer one of them. He would not feel uppity just because of some flattery.

"Uncle Louis, I would be able to go if you ordered all the gilded nobles to retire from the army," Franz said with affected anger.

"Franz, it is impossible to get them out, even for the Emperor!" Grand Duke Louis said helplessly.

"Which is why the City Defense Force is not suitable for me, while the Court Guard is. Or is it because you don't want to give up the power?" Franz said, acting mad.

"Not at all! Well, Franz, you can join the Court Guard, but not as the commander in chief. Since you're too young, you'll need a few more years' experience!"

Archduke Lewis settled for second best.

"This damned age again! Well, then I'll wait a few more years!" Franz pretended to be helpless.

Until then, his purpose had already been served. The Court Guard was different from any other army because they were only faithful to the royal family.

For Franz, it was not necessary to be the commander of the unit to control it. Typically, this post was filled by the emperor himself or a royal family member assigned to the task.

At the moment, this unit was under the charge of the Regency Council, with Archduke Louis acting as a commander in chief. After Franz joined as Crown Prince, surely someone would defect to him.

Franz had already made it clear that he, with single-minded determination, had to join the Palace Guard, and he couldn't be stopped by Archduke Louis, even if he was discontented.

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Chapter 12: For the Glory of the Nobility

Since the agreement between Franz and Louis had been reached, the two of them continued their casual conversation as if nothing had happened. In fact, Franz had already acknowledged Archduke Louis' favor implicitly.

It was difficult to pay back a debt of gratitude, but sometimes it was not a bad thing to be burdened with such debt.

For example, from this moment on, Franz had built relationships with this conservative leader and was considered a friend.

Otherwise, why would Franz specifically asked for a favor from Archduke Louis? Was there no other way for Franz, the heir to the throne, to join the Palace Guard?

Obviously, the answer would be "no." Franz could join with a title or without, because traditionally, the Palace Guard only served the royal family, pledging allegiance to the emperor first, then the Crown Prince.

"Uncle Louis, it seems not so peaceful internally in recent days!" Franz said, with affected curiosity.

"Well, it is all because of our Prime Minister, who cries for reform every day. Now, a group of capitalists has turned into reformists in the name of patriotism, though they actually seek benefits.

Our Prime Minister turns a blind eye to that, while he keeps an eagle eye on us, as if we, the nobility, are a cancer in Austria's society!" Louis said unhappily.

Prime Minister Metternich didn't monitor the capitalist class? So what did he set up the secret police for? Certainly, it was not for the nobles.

Prime Minister Metternich, a representative of the nobility, was, most of the time, a defender of noble interests, except in the case of the abolition of serfdom!

Franz kept these thoughts to himself. The person he was talking to was the conservative Austrian leader. To speak his thoughts aloud would attract negative attention.

"Uncle Louis, since the capitalists can do what they want in the name of patriotism, we can do the same in the name of reform!" Franz smiled.

Without knowing why, Franz found it interesting to persuade people, after his reincarnation.

"Oh, Franz, are you joking?" Archduke Louis asked, surprised.

It was indeed nonsense for a noble to hold high the flag of reform. For the nobility to reform was like cutting their own flesh with a knife. How was that possibly going to happen?

Franz said, "No, Uncle Louis, I'm not joking! If the capitalists can propose a reform plan, why couldn't we, the nobility, do the same?"

There was a consensus that the Austrian Empire had to make a reform, but such reform would harm noble interests, which was why the conservatives were opposed to it. Archduke Louis thought deeply.

Franz's proposal, in his view, was to take the initiative, to hold the right of reform in their own hands.

He did not doubt that Franz had possible ill intentions, because the capitalist class was also an enemy of the royal family, and the reform they led would first deprive the emperor of his rights.

That was just the moderates among the capitalists, while the radicals wanted Republicanism. Looking back at the history of Charles I and Louis XVI, no emperor could have a good feeling about the capitalist class.

Franz, the Crown Prince, naturally would not be an exception; one's position determined his opinion. When Franz talked with him, he used "we" time and again, which was just because of his standing. The royal family and the nobles naturally took the same side.

"Franz, it seems you have something in mind, so what is your plan, then? Can you go into detail?" Archduke Louis asked with concern.

Now he dared not to look down upon Franz, who he knew was good at politicking based on their talks.

"Uncle Louis, have you noticed that the capitalist class is demanding the liberation of serfs in the name of freedom and equality?" Franz asked.

"Of course, all of them shout political slogans daily, not to mention they made a whole bunch of unjustifiable demands for constitutional reform, national autonomy, and so on.

Really, it's just for their own benefit. They want to abolish serfdom just because of the lack of labor force in their factories. They're a bunch of vampires, to be perfectly honest.

You know, the vast majority of workers are living a more miserable life than serfs. We at least provide serfs with food, clothing, and shelter, and support them when they are old.

But the evil capitalists are not as kind as we are. The people who work for them can rarely survive for more than ten years. Once they are old, they will be driven out and left to rot.

They worked hard for the capitalists all their lives, but end up on the street. May God punish these vampires!" Louis raged.

Franz had to admit that Archduke Louis was partly telling the truth. The capitalism of the age was truly dark, and that workers lived no better than serfs was an accurate assessment indeed.

The truth also could be surmised from lifespans, as urban lifespans were three to five years lower than that in rural areas. Thus you can imagine the cruelty of capitalism during that time.

Ordinary workers who were recruited into the factories would see themselves destroyed within ten years, which meant that most of them would only live until the age of forty.

However, most of the nobles were just as dirty as the capitalists, so both parties were vampires, and neither one was kinder than the other.

"Uncle Louis, I know the facts about all this. Now that capitalists can call for the abolition of serfdom under the guise of fighting for the rights of serfs, why can't we limit the development and growth of capitalism in the name of protecting the welfare of the working class?" Franz said with a cunning cold smile.

Franz played a double game when he spoke to different people.

Now, he put up a face of the feudal aristocracy, full of righteousness and a hatred for capitalists.

"For the benefit of the working class? I'm afraid that won't do. It will also harm the interests of many of the nobles should the treatment of workers improve, since they have workshops," Archduke Louis said, in an overly cautious and indecisive tone taking hold

Looking at the Archduke's face, Franz knew that what he read from in history books was not wrong — the man was indeed indecisive, but that just made him easier to sway.

"A little profit is nothing compared to the glory of the nobility. If there are no restrictions placed on the capitalists, I'm afraid it will not take too long for them to overpower us!

Uncle Louis, have you not noticed that the power of the capitalist class has been growing this entire time? In the long run, we won't be able to keep a hold of them!" Franz prodded.

Franz's talk made sense at the moment, because the nobility hadn't started transforming into the capitalist class. Even if some of them invested in industry and commerce, however, none were personally in management.

At the moment, it would be a shame for those noble lords to be on an equal footing with the capitalists. This was true for ordinary nobles, not to mention the grand nobles like Archduke Louis.