

## Steel 201

### *Chapter 201: Causing Trouble*

While Berengar was preparing to invade Lower Austria and march on Vienna, Linde was back in Kufstein looking after the family, including herself, Henrietta, and Hans. She was also keeping a close eye on Conrad, who had begun to act out; the longer the war went on, the more impatient the boy became.

At the moment, Conrad, Henrietta, and Linde were sitting at the dining table enjoying breakfast. As an act of disrespect to Berengar and to assert his authority while the man was away, Conrad sat in Berengar's spot next to Linde, which caused the woman to lash out at the youth instantly.

"Conrad, that seat is reserved for the head of this household and belongs to the Count of Tyrol! You should show some respect to people's positions and sit elsewhere!"

Despite Linde's protests, Conrad responded with a sharp tongue as he verbally attacked Linde in an attempt to shut her up.

"If this seat is reserved for the Count of Tyrol, then the seat you are seated in should be reserved for the Countess. Tell me, are you the Countess of Tyrol? Or are you merely the Count's mistress?"

At this point, Linde was outright furious at Conrad's behavior and stood up from her seat before slapping him across the face. The moment she did so, Conrad stared at her in disbelief before attempting to protest.

"What do you think you are-"

However, before he could finish his statement, Linde had slapped him once again. The moment she did so, Conrad raised from his seat with his fists curled and yelled at Linde,

"I am the Duke!"

The strawberry-blond-haired youthful beauty with the appearance of a goddess merely smirked smugly at Conrad before chastising him.

"Then act like one!"

This statement irritated Conrad's nerves, and he raised his hand in an attempt to strike Linde for her actions, yet there was no fear in her eyes. Instead, a steel-clad hand latched ahold of Conrad's arm, preventing him from swinging his fist.

The boy quickly looked over and noticed a tall and strong man glaring at him with his denim blue eyes. The man had a musket slung around his shoulder and wore a blackened steel three-quarters plate armor set, with a german style three ridge burgonet. He was one of Berengar's house guards and was tasked with protecting the young Count's family from any potential harm.

Thus the moment Conrad took an aggressive stance, the guard acted and approached the young Duke before he could pounce on the woman. The boy who would be Duke nearly wet his pants when he gazed into the fierce eyes of the house guard, who tightly clenched onto his wrist. The guard spoke in a stern tone as he began to lecture the boy.

"Your Grace, her excellency is correct. That seat belongs to Count Berengar, and you would do well to remember that..."

After being lectured so thoroughly by the intimidating guard, Conrad lowered his head and clicked his tongue before leaving the table and storming off to the quarter's he was provided. After he was out of earshot, the guard looked over to Linde and fulfilled his duty by inquiring about her condition.

"Are you okay, My Lady?"

Linde smiled gracefully and nodded before responding to the man who had come to her aid.

"Yes, thank you for your assistance."

the guard smiled and bowed respectfully to Linde

"I am merely fulfilling my duty."

With that said, he returned to his post and began to watch over Linde and Henrietta as they continued their meal. Conrad would have to go hungry for the time being. Conrad, had ran off to his room, and on the way there, he walked past a door that had two armed guards in front of it. Many rooms in this castle were off-limit to the boy Duke, as Berengar did not want him messing around with his stuff.

This room, in particular, was Hans's room, where the infant child was protected around the clock by Berengar's most elite guards. Thinking about Berengar and Linde's bastard child, Hans muttered under his breath.

"This asshole has Adela as his fiancée, and yet he so blatantly allows that woman to occupy her seat; what an ass! If I were engaged to Adela, I would treat her far better!"

Though he said it quietly, his words did not go unnoticed by the guards. They took note of Conrad's discontent. Such hostility towards their Lord and Lady needed to be taken seriously, and they would later report Conrad's outburst to the Commander of the house guard when they were relieved later in the day.

As for Conrad, he returned to his room for a while, though eventually, he left the confines of his quarters and entered the Great Hall, where he gazed from afar at Linde and a Byzantine Nobleman discussing business with one another.

It was not Arethas who had arrived this time, but a man under his employ who represented his interests in Berengar's current trade agreements. This man was named Andronikos, and he was responsible for making sure the shipments of silk arrived in Kufstein within the agreed period. Thus, he was accepting payment from Linde, whose servants carried a large chest out for him to inspect.

Andronikos made small talk with Linde as his servants inspected the supplied amount of silver coins to ensure that it reached the formal agreement.

"Tell your husband that my liege looks forward to doing business with all of Austria after he returns from this war. The Empire greatly values its trade agreements with the Count of Tyrol."

Linde smiled gratefully at Andronikos' compliments before responding on her own

"I will be sure to inform him!"

however, shortly after saying that, Conrad approached the scene and interrupted, resulting in Linde's menacing glare.

"Why wait for Berengar to return? I am the Duke of Austria; if you want to discuss trade agreements within my land, you can do it with me!"

Andronikos looked over at the boy and closely observed him before coming to a decision. He quickly snubbed Conrad and returned his attention to Linde.

"As I was saying, my Liege greatly appreciates the business between Tyrol and the Empire; your husband should visit Constantinople when he gets the chance."

Outraged that he had been overlooked, Conrad quickly revealed Linde's status in the household in a fit of fury. Surely this would embarrass the woman, he thought to himself before speaking his piece.

"Linde is not Berengar's wife; she is merely his mistress. She does not hold such a valuable position, and you should not be conducting trade with a woman of her status!"

Andronikos was shocked by this news, though neither Berengar nor Linde had outright said they were married; they also never denied the charge, thus questioning Linde on this reality.

"Is what the boy says true?"

Rather than be embarrassed about the truth or outraged by the accusation, as Conrad had expected, Linde put on a smile and acted with perfect grace. She

bowed respectfully to the Byzantine nobleman as she offered her apologies for misleading him.

"I apologize if there is a misunderstanding; while it is true that I am not Berengar's legal wife, and he is engaged to another woman, I do consider myself his wife in a deeply spiritual sense. Thus I never corrected you or your liege when referred to as his wife..."

Conrad was shocked by Linde's behavior, it went completely against the plan he had in mind to get revenge on her for slapping him twice this morning, and instead, Andronikos merely chuckled lightly at Linde's response before addressing her.

"Then Berengar is a lucky man to have a woman such as yourself so dedicated to him, despite not being his lawful wife; it is truly inspiring! Well, regardless of your actual position in the household, I will not look down on you; after all, you have been tasked by Berengar to oversee the matter of our trade while he is away and you have proven yourself relatively competent in that regard."

A gorgeous smile spread across Linde's immaculate lips as she thanked the man for the compliment.

"I appreciate it; I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your understanding!"

After the Byzantine servants had confirmed that the proper amount was in the chest, Andronikos bid farewell to Linde while completely ignoring Conrad.

"Well, your excellency, I must bid you farewell, it is a long journey back to the Empire, and I have to prepare the next shipment!"

Linde nodded and smiled as she led the man to the entrance of the Castle.

"I will pray for your safe travels! Tell your liege when you see him that we greatly appreciate the business and will continue to invest in the Empire!"

After hearing this, Andronikos smiled and left the Castle. As for Linde, the moment the doors were shut, she approached Conrad with a chilling smile before lecturing him.

"When I am speaking to guests with matters of importance, you would be wise to be a good little boy and stay far away from matters of the State. Do you understand?"

Conrad did not know why but he felt his spine tingle when he saw such a frightening yet, beautiful smile. He immediately became wary of Linde; the boy's impression of the young woman immediately changed from a brainless bimbo to a dangerous femme fatale. He thus became frightened of Berengar's lover and understood deeply that he should not provoke her in the future.

Thus all he could do was bow his head to the terrifying presence in front of him and return to his room in shame. Linde, on the other hand, had been significantly perturbed by the boy's actions and planned to poison him ahead of time; she refused to allow this brat to live a second longer than necessary. After all his antics had already become tiresome, she could not imagine living with such things for another three years.

### *Chapter 202: Troubles at the Byzantine Court*

While Berengar was fighting in Austria, events that would impact Berengar's future were occurring on the other side of the Christian World. In the east within the ancient city of Constantinople, Arethas Maniakes was kneeling within the Royal Palace before the Emperor of the Byzantine Empire. He was questioning the man about a particular area of interest.

Emperor Vetrans Palaiologos was the current Emperor of the Byzantine Empire; his ancestors had ruled over the Eastern Roman Empire for over a hundred years. He was in his early forties and already had a gray head of hair with a matching beard. The stress of overseeing the war with the Mamluke Sultanate, which reached a stalemate, had aged him drastically these past ten years.

However, for the first time in a long time, there was hope to turn the tides of war to his favor. Recently there had been developments in an obscure part of Europe, where the Count of Tyrol had developed an advanced industry and sold special equipment for a fair price to the Empire's forces.

Emperor Vetranis had no idea how Berengar von Kufstein had managed to create such a massive stockpile of high-quality steel, and yet he had personally witnessed the results. The enormous output that Berengar's factories were able to produce Mirror-Pattern armor was the likes that the Emperor had never seen before, and he had greatly desired to see Berengar's facilities for himself.

However, he could not very well travel to Kufstein, and thus he had to hear the details from his Strategos of Ionia, Arethas Maniakes, who had just entered the palace at the Emperor's request. Thus the two men were face to face within the Palace of Constantinople for the sole reason as to inquire about Berengar's production capabilities.

Strategos Arethas, it has been a while since I have last seen you. How have you been?"

Arethas was permitted to stand, and as such, he rose from his kneeling position as the Emperor approached him. It had been some time since he last saw the Emperor face-to-face, and thus he was incredibly thankful for the current opportunity.

The young Strategos grinned before returning the Emperor's greeting.

"I have been well since the last time we spoke; how are you faring, your majesty?"

The two men were quite friendly with one another as Emperor Vetranis immediately began complaining about his life.

"I have been better; for starters, my daughter grows more beautiful by the day, her charm has managed to attract the attention of suitors across not only the Christian world but the Islamic world as well. I swear the number of princes she has declined over the past year must be in the dozens. She seems to have high ambitions for her future husband and won't listen to my suggestions! Raising a daughter is too much of a hassle for this old heart of mine to bear!"

Arethas immediately began to laugh at the Emperor's comment and tried to cheer him up.

"You are not that old, your majesty; you are only forty-three!"

However, the Emperor merely scoffed before chastising Arethas

"If I were a commoner, I would be close to death by now!"

Hearing such a response, Arethas began to laugh before patting the Emperor on the back.

"Well, then we are lucky you are not, in fact, a commoner!"

As the two men walked through the palace and continued their conversation, Emperor Vetrans eventually brought up the topic he wanted to discuss.

"Arethas I wanted to discuss with you about your visit to Kufstein. Tell me, how is that upstart Count capable of producing so much steel?"

Arethas sighed heavily as he shook his head, his brunette hair glimmered under the light of the sun, as he cast a downtrodden expression before speaking.

"I genuinely wish I could tell you, but I was not allowed to see how he produced the steel, merely the facilities he used to transform it into arms and armor. It was a level of production I had never seen before. Even our national armories can not compare to the efficiency that the Tyroleans are capable of. "

The Emperor sighed when he heard this news; he began to speak in a regretful tone.

"Well, that is a shame; I was hoping we could learn something from the Count of Tyrol. I hear he is currently involved in a war for control of Austria. Do you know how that is going?"

Arethas kept close contact with Berengar; after all, the trade they shared was very lucrative for both parties. With the war for Austria going on, the man was greatly concerned about Berengar's safety. Thus he nodded his head and informed the Emperor a bit of what he knew.

"Berengar's armies are far better equipped than any force I have seen. When I was visiting, his city guards were equipped with plate armor that covered their

heads, necks, torsos, and thighs. They also wielded strange hand cannon variants which were of an unknown design. If his boasts are true and all of his troops are equipped to such a degree, then the likelihood of him winning this war is huge. He also appeared to have mounted dozens of cannons on his city walls. So he seems to be capable of mass-producing such devastating weapons as well."

Emperor Vetrans was shocked when he heard such information, and thus he quickly asked Arethas about a new possibility that had formed in his mind.

"Tell me, Arethas, is it possible to purchase such equipment?"

Arethas shook his head and sighed once more; there was not much he could do about this matter; Berengar seemed keen to have a monopoly on such technology. Thus he answered truthfully to the Emperor.

"As far as I am aware, Count Berengar intends to hold onto such an advantage at any cost. I doubt he would be willing to sell such valuable technology in fear of it being reverse-engineered. One would either have to defeat his forces in battle and scavenge their weapons, or they would have to pay a great sum that was worth such risky trade. I do not foresee myself being able to convince him to sell us such weapons or the armor."

However, the Emperor was adamant about this issue and did not take Arethas' word at face value and instead insisted upon broaching the subject with Berengar.

"Could you at least try to purchase such weapons when you next see the Count of Tyrol? I hear his weapons have a devastating effect, rendering even plate armor useless! To have such an advantage over our enemies would aid in the ongoing efforts to restore our Empire."

Just as the Emperor was about to conclude his business with the Strategos of Ionia, a beautiful young girl appeared as she walked down the gilded staircase of the palace. She was dressed in a lavish purple silk dress with a bold golden pattern. She wore gold jewelry encrusted with amethyst across her neck, wrists, and waist.

The girl was no older than fifteen and had long chocolate hair tied up into an elegant ponytail. Her eyes were mint green in color, and her skin was as white as milk, despite her Greco-roman Heritage. Though she was not as busty as Linde or Adela's sisters, she was, in fact, perfectly proportioned, and her silk dress clung to her exquisite curves.

As she descended from the staircase, she had a scowl on her face. Something was upsetting this angelic beauty from the east. She instantly began to criticize the Emperor when she noticed his presence.

"Father! How can you engage me to the Prince of France? Aubry is so feminine that he is practically a woman! I won't stand for it!"

The Byzantine Emperor sighed heavily while looking at Arethas with a look that expressed his thoughts, those being, "See what I mean?"

By now, he had attempted to engage his daughter to over a dozen princes from various countries across the world, and she had a complaint about every one of them. Sooner or later, the Princess would say something along the lines of "I would rather kill myself than marry that man," thus forcing the Emperor to acquiesce to her demands.

This time he decided to put his foot down and enforce his will; after all, he was Emperor, and sooner or later, she would have to find a husband. Thus he put on a calm and gentle facade as he tried to coerce his girl into marrying the effeminate Frenchman.

"Honorina my only daughter, Aubry is the epitome of Western Chivalry; he is also the Heir to the French Throne. You will be a Queen if you marry him. It will also guarantee a powerful alliance for our Dynasty!"

However, the beautiful Princess, Honorina, refused to listen to her father's glib tongue and instead scoffed before making a rather rude retort.

"Queen of France!?! You have to be kidding me! Who would want to be Queen of a backwater Kingdom like that? How much are they paying you to sell me off as if I were mere cattle?"

Seeing the reaction on her father's face, she knew she had hit the nail on the head. He had for sure been paid a significant sum to sell her off to the prince of France. A man she was almost certain was a homosexual. If not, he was the girliest looking straight man she had ever seen. As such, she was more adamant about refusing this marriage proposal than any other before. However, she had already cried wolf enough times that her father would no longer allow her to refuse.

This time it was the Emperor who scowled in response to Honoria's strong words. Thus he began to chastise her as he made it abundantly clear she would be wed off to the future King of France.

"Enough is enough; you have turned down so many other candidates that this is my last option. You are my daughter and the Princess of the Empire. You will do what you are told!"

After hearing these words, tears began to fill in the girl's mint-colored eyes before she ran back upstairs in a fit of rage. However, before she left, she made sure to scream a set of hurtful words to her father.

"I hate you!"

After she was gone, the Emperor let out a heavy sigh and sat down at the nearest seat. He was getting too old to deal with his daughter's childish behavior. Thus he looked at Arethas and shifted the topic back to Tyrol.

"I am getting too old for this; promise me you will at least attempt to purchase Count Berengar's weapons the next time you see him!"

Having witnessed such a display just now, Arethas was in no mood to decline the Emperor and as such nodded his head. A wry smile appeared on the Emperor's face before dismissing Arethas

"Good... Good, well, I must scold my errant daughter. I will entrust this task to your capable hands. Until we meet again, Arethas."

Arethas quickly bowed with respect before departing; as he did so, he left behind a weary old Emperor and a delinquent Princess to further argue about their petty squables.

### *Chapter 203: East-West Relations*

While the war in Austria raged on, the Byzantines were not the only ones paying close attention to the conflict. The Catholic Church and the new Pope were watching the events with keen interest. The successor to Simeon and Avillius was a wise and intelligent man who now went by the name Lucius who completely disagreed with his predecessors' approach when dealing with the so-called Berengar Heresy.

However, the German Reformation had already declared its separation from the Catholic Church, and there was not much more he could do now other than an attempt to squash it through military force. Negotiations would have been a significant first step, but the time for talking was already too far gone.

With the Teutonic Order busy with its fight in the east against the Golden Horde, and the Knights Hospitaller fighting in North Africa against the Mamluke Sultanate, he was left with no option other than to create new Military Orders and recruit from the ranks of the European Knighthood to put down the rising influence of the German Reformation.

Though he had yet to outright call for a new crusade to deal with this issue, he was currently in the process of establishing new Military Orders to combat the threat of Berengar the Accursed and his heresy. At the moment, a large group of Welsh Knights was standing in front of the new Pope, their surcoat was green with a red maltese cross upon it, and they were being christened as the first members of the Order of the Red Dragon.

The King of England was an avid supporter of the Catholic Church and its ongoing efforts to crush the Berengar Heresy. Many knights from Wales were particularly attracted to the idea of taking up a new crusade against the German duchies and driving the Berengar Heresy into extinction. Thus at the moment, five hundred different Knights from across Wales were gathered in the Vatican kneeling before the Pope. Pope Julius spoke a chant in Latin before announcing to the Knights gathered before him.

"Rise Knights of the Red Dragon!"

After saying such a thing, the Knights rose from their kneeling position and stood firmly in front of the Pope, as his newest Military Order. They waited silently for the Pope to give his speech.

"As a Monastic Order of Knights, your goal will be to recruit as many followers as you can in the coming years from England; we will need your expertise in the war that is to come! The Berengar Heresy can not be allowed to thrive! Go forth, and raise your strength; when the time is necessary, I shall call upon you for crusade!"

The Knights saluted the Pope before shouting the Latin phrase

"Deus Vult!"

after doing so, they left the Vatican. They began their extended return home to Wales, where they would spend the next few years gathering their strength to March on Austria and the other regions of Germany which the Berengar Heresy has afflicted.

As the Crusaders left the building, Pope Lucius collapsed back into his papal throne and sighed heavily; he was completely and utterly exhausted. However, there was more on his menu to prepare for, and when his secretary approached him, he merely asked the question on his mind.

"How many is that now?"

The secretary held up a pair of primitive eyeglasses to his face before peering into the ledger; after doing so, he proudly declared.

"That would be the fifth Military Order you have approved of since assuming your position your holiness."

Pope Lucius began to rub his temples to ease his growing headache before voicing his unfiltered opinion aloud.

"That idiot Simeon has left me with an enormous mess to clean up. That moron must have terrible timing to pick a fight with a Count while all of the Military Orders are at war!"

The secretary immediately began to correct the Pope as he pushed the spectacles further upon his nose.

"To be fair, your holiness, Berengar was just a Baron's Regent when he killed the inquisitors that were sent to deal with him."

Lucius immediately began to roll his eyes at his assistant when he voiced his complaints.

"Oh yes, silly me, how could I possibly forget the fact that we sent assassins to eliminate Berengar von Kufstein, the rightful heir of Kufstein because we were afraid that he might resist the Church's influence in Kufstein! It is almost as if sending those damned inquisitors provoked him into taking such drastic measures. Am I the only sane person left in the Vatican?"

The secretary did not know how to respond; he was aware that Lucius blamed his predecessors for the problems at hand, but what he just said was borderline heresy. After all the words Lucius spoke made it seem like it was entirely the Church's fault that Berengar caused such a massive divide. As such, the secretary chose to ignore the Pope's comments and instead focus on the next issue at hand.

"Your holiness, the Patriarch of Constantinople, has just arrived and is waiting for you outside. Should I bring him in?"

Pope Lucius looked at the secretary as if he were an absolute dullard before asking him a rhetorical question.

"What do you think?"

Seeing the displeased look in the Pope's eyes, the secretary quickly hurried off to bring the Patriarch into the chambers. After a few moments, he returned with a lavishly dressed priest who was the leading authority of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The man did not bow before the Pope and instead spoke formally to Lucius.

"Congratulations on the promotion Lucius. It has been a while since we last met."

Lucius stood up and approached the patriarch with a friendly gesture before speaking to the man on friendly terms.

"It is good to see you, Petrus; I must say these are dire times we find ourselves in."

However, as Lucius approached the man named Petrus, the Patriarch backed away and snubbed Lucius' good gesture while adding insult to injury with his harsh words.

"These are dire times you find yourself in. Though I may disagree with the German Reformation, and frankly, I find them to be heretics. Count Berengar has provided great assistance to the Empire, and for that, we will not get involved in your affair."

Lucius had a worried expression on his face as he asked the Patriarch of Constantinople about his concerns.

"You mean to tell me you will not aid us? After all the west has done to support the reconquest of your Empire? Our knights still bleed for you in Egypt!"

However, Petrus merely chuckled at the Pope's response.

"Funny, the last time I checked, one of your precious military orders went about slaughtering their way through Moscow, which was filled with the people of our denomination. Yet, the Pope did nothing to stop them. I will be frank with you, Lucius, we do not have military orders as you do, so the Orthodox Church can not provide you military assistance, you would have to request it from the Emperor, and he is keen on establishing ties with Count Berengar, so your chances are slim."

Lucius immediately felt his headache grow three times larger as he heard this news; he thought to himself for a few minutes as he once more rubbed his temples before coming up with an idea.

"Well, can you at least release a statement referring to the German Reformation as heretics? Or possibly help us fund new Military Orders?"

Petrus was blunt with his rejection with further infuriated the new Pope.

"Can I? Yes. Will I? No. Such acts would only antagonize Berengar, who is at the head of the German Reformation, and I don't know about you but, frankly, I do not want such a man as my enemy, nor do I wish to incur the Emperor's wrath by souring relations between the two of them. You are on your own Lucius, at most, I can pray for your success."

Lucius could hardly believe his ears, he was hoping for some kind of support from the Church in the east, yet they had so blatantly rejected him; prayers? What good were prayers? He needed iron and flesh if he wanted to get rid of these heretics who had begun to infest Christendom. Since when had prayers won battles?

After hearing Petrus's response, Lucius's expression soured, and he began to shift the topic to other concerns.

"I see; well, I hope you enjoy your stay in the Vatican for the time being. Make sure to bring my regards to the Emperor the next time you see him."

Petrus nodded before responding.

"I will do so."

After these words were stated, the Patriarch of Constantinople left the building and proceeded onto some leisurely business. As for Pope Lucius, he had returned to his papal throne, where slumped into its comfort and placed his head into his hands before screaming intensely into them. Just why was it that nothing seemed to be going his way? Did God genuinely favor the German Reformation? These were the thoughts he considered as his mind slowly drifted into space.

The Orthodox Church's rejection to aid the Catholic Church in any way as they attempted to deal with Berengar and his German Reformation would be a great point of contention between the West and Eastern Churches. It would also unwittingly foster relations between Berengar and the Byzantine Empire.

#### *Chapter 204: The Fields of Vienna*

Berengar was mounted on his trusty steed as he gazed off into the distance. In his field of view were the borders of Lower Austria and his final destination in this conflict. While Eckhard laid siege to every corner of Upper Austria

currently occupied by the Bavarians, Berengar would march on Vienna with nearly 20,000 men.

Berengar vowed that after he finally won this war, he would do two things immediately, develop a new weapon, and start building a great navy. Though Conrad might protest his every action, ultimately, as Regent, he had the power to accomplish these things. Besides, Conrad would live another few years at best.

As such, he greatly desired to finish this war and focus on consolidating his territorial gains as quickly as possible. To Berengar, war was a means to settle disputes and acquire territory; the more critical aspect was the development of the land after the fighting had ceased. As a visionary, he had grand plans to construct an Empire that would last a thousand years.

For now, he needed to take Austria and establish his dominion over the region, and that was precisely what he planned to do. With the death of the enemy General at the hands of Berengar's assassin, a nobleman had taken his place and decided that the best course of action to stop Berengar's siege of Vienna was simple, they would sally forth and deal with his army once and for all. They would use the citizens of Vienna as human shields.

Thus as Berengar and his army entered Lower Austria, they saw a large force gathered, close to thirty thousand in total. The citizens of Vienna had been conscripted by the Bavarians and armed with anything that could remotely be used as a weapon. They were placed in the vanguard so that they could soak up the bullets of Berengar's forces, allowing their main troops to survive the initial onslaught and close the distance.

Seeing the enemy formation, Berengar began to frown, he would prefer not to slaughter over 10,000 of Austria's citizens, but this would be not easy to avoid. The Bavarian forces were behind the vanguard of Austria's common folk and nudged them forward with their spears, bills, and blades. This was not a good situation. As such, Berengar contemplated for a few moments before coming up with a course of action. Thus he rode towards his Artillery units and gave his commands.

"Ready your guns, and aim towards the rear of the enemy formation. I want the levies to remain as unharmed as possible. We will break their rearguard and allow the citizens of Vienna to flee!"

Hearing their Lord and Commander's orders, the Artillery officers quickly set to the task of ordering the Artillery regiment to unhitch their cannons and deploy them in position. They were raised to a specific elevation to act as howitzers where the shells would be fired into an arc and land at the rear of the Bavarian formation, sparing as many levies live as possible.

This was a tactic they had yet to employ on the battlefield. Thus the Bavarians were not expecting such a thing as such Berengar left the artillery to their own devices and rode to the front of the infantry formation where he began to shout his orders to the infantry.

"Try your best not to harm the levies, when the guns go off and batter the Bavarian ranks, allow the Levies to disperse before firing upon the remaining Bavarian troops, those are most likely the civilians of Vienna, and we should not harm our people if we can avoid it! God with us!"

The soldiers under Berengar's command all began to shout their infamous war cry in unison.

"God with us! God with us! God with us!"

Afterward, Berengar raised his sword and gave another command.

"Forward march!"

Under the thunder of cannon fire, the Tyrolean infantry began to march towards the enemy position. The Bavarians sneered as they figured Berengar had decided to eliminate the citizen levies at the front of the formation. However, when the shells fell from the sky and landed among their ranks, the Bavarian forces quickly began to panic.

They were not expecting the shells to land behind their vanguard and devastate their ranks, completely disregarding the plan they had made. Two hundred eighty shells were fired every minute into the Bavarian formations,

and their order quickly began to collapse. Blood, steel, and bone flew in every direction as the Tyrolean artillery battered the infantry lines.

Seeing that the Bavarians were in a state of panic, the citizens who were drafted into service of the Bavarians quickly began to flee the battlefield. Some were caught and stabbed by the men behind them, but most could escape the slaughter. Now that Berengar had bought the citizens of Vienna enough time to run, he began to lead the cavalry in a charge on the enemy position.

While he led the cavalry to attack the Bavarian flanks, his line infantry had begun to form ranks and fire upon the Bavarians who charged at their formations. Seeing their plans had come to ruin, the Bavarian commander ordered a full-scale charge; he intended to overwhelm the Tyrolean infantry before they could deal too much damage with their superior firepower.

As such, the Minie Ball projectiles fired out of the muzzles of their rifled muskets and into the ranks of the enemy. Piercing through their breastplates and dropping them where they stood, yet this did not stop the charge of the Bavarian men at arms, they knew their only chance was to engage in close-quarters combat with the enemy, and thus they ran as quickly as they could into the line of fire, hoping the bullets missed them and allowed them to attack the enemy.

The Tyrolean forces fired off only a few volleys before they could engage in melee combat with the Bavarians. As such, bayonets and spears began to clash among each other in a chaotic display of violence. While this was ongoing, Berengar was riding his mighty steed quickly, leading a charge of cuirassiers, lancers, and hussars who had all prepared to clash with the flanks of the enemy formation.

The Bavarian infantry quickly raised their spears and other polearms in response to the oncoming cavalry charge, which would typically be enough to deter the horses, however, just when they were within firing distance, Berengar and his cuirassiers raised their pistols where they proceeded to fire into the spear wall, battered the lines with musket balls, and claiming the lives of hundreds if not thousands of men.

The Hussars had fired their carbines from a distance into the ranks and dealt a great deal of damage to the enemy formation. There were hardly any spears raised at this point, and the cavalry unleashed their swords and lances onto the Bavarian flanks crushing through their lines in the process.

Berengar unleashed his heavy cavalry saber into the enemy infantry before him; while parrying an oncoming blow, he made a thrust directly into the opponent's eye, claiming his life in the process. His new steed was heavily armored and surrounded by hundreds of other horses who crashed into the enemy formation. Thus both he and his horse were relatively safe, as they trampled the enemy infantry and ruthlessly cut them into ribbons.

The Bavarian commander gazed upon the battlefield with fury in his heart as he realized that his flanks had been crushed, allowing the Tyrolean infantry to fill the gaps, and encircle the remaining troops. As such, he made a rash decision and fled the battlefield and back to Vienna. The majority of their army had been lost in this battle, and though it was still ongoing, he refused to be captured alive.

While the Bavarian commander was fleeing the battlefield, Berengar was leading the charge as he slashed down at an archer's neck, which was left uncovered, decapitating the man in the process. Berengar's heavy cavalry sword was fully capable of lopping off heads from horseback and yet had a fine enough point to pierce through most armor.

The exhilaration he felt as he once more engaged on the battlefield filled Berengar's heart with joy; what was the point of life he could not obtain such an adrenaline rush! Warfare was like a drug to him, and he could not get enough of it. The feeling of risking his life in pursuit of higher glory, the adrenaline and endorphins that flooded his system and made him feel like a living god, this was what it meant to be alive.

As such, he did not fear the possibility of death as he parried a spear's thrust with his sword and stabbed his blade into the gaps in the opponent's helmet, lodging the cold steel edge into the enemy's skull before ripping it out and slashing at another combatant.

As the cavalry converged on the Bavarian lines and trampled across their ranks, the Tyrolean infantry gained the upper hand in the grand melee and

quickly cut down the Bavarians. Bayonets thrust into the weak points in the enemy's armor, spilling blood and bile across the field.

As the massacre unfolded, the Bavarian forces began to route. Berengar took advantage of and led his cavalry to run them down, Lances thrust through the backs of the enemy, and swords pierced through their mail armor and into their hearts. Many of the Bavarian soldiers were not equipped with backplates, so it was a vulnerable area that had been exposed in their hasty retreat.

Thus the cavalry had an easy time slaying those who fled the scene. As the Tyrolean cavalry mopped up the routers, the main force of the Bavarian army struggled to maintain their defense. Yet, when the grenadiers lobbed their grenades behind the Bavarian formation, they could no longer hold the line and quickly collapsed as the explosion rocked them to their core.

The grenades exploded one after another, devastating the defensive position the Bavarians had set up, and in the end, those who survived the blast were run through with bayonets. The result of the battle was a complete and total slaughter. Though Berengar's army had suffered casualties, it paled in comparison to the losses the Bavarians sustained on this day.

With this victory, Berengar was one step away from claiming Vienna and ending the Bavarian occupation of Austria. Though the war would not be over, after all, the fight for Austria was just one of many ongoing conflicts in the greater war for Germany.

During this war that was bound to take years to finish, Berengar would use his power to expand his territory vastly and come out as the man on top. Conquering Vienna and become Duke of Austria was just the start of his grand ambition.

### *Chapter 205: The Bavarians Surrender*

After the battle in the fields outside of the city of Vienna, the Bavarian General who led the forces in Austria was no longer eager to fight Berengar and the overwhelming power of his armies, for to do so meant certain death. While Berengar marched every closer to Vienna's gates, the Bavarian General was discussing with his remaining commanders as to the best course of action.

A group of Bavarian noblemen was currently bickering about their options; one man, in particular, was tall and robust and voiced his thoughts in a boisterous manner.

"We must defend the Capital with everything we have! We have bled too much to accept defeat! If Vienna is to fall back into the control of the Austrians, then we shall make sure the enemy commander dies with us!"

However, after speaking his passionate speech, the Lord found that not a single person within the room agreed with his opinion; instead, he was instantly chastised by another nobleman who appeared to be the exact opposite of the tall, strong Lord in appearance. This feeble and meek Viscount quickly retorted

"Have you gone mad? Our army is defeated, we have even pulled out all of our forces from the southern Counties for this battle, and Berengar's ungodly weapons thoroughly smashed us! This is a war that can not be won! I suggest we surrender; Berengar is known to show mercy to those who willingly submit to his will; it is the best course to escape with our lives!"

However, the other nobleman was fearful of the consequences of such actions and, as such, pointed out his concerns at the first opportunity.

"Do you believe Duke Dietger will be merciful if we surrender Vienna and pull out all of our forces from Austrian lands? He will be outraged that we so thoroughly screwed up his conquest! Either way, we will face certain death; it is better to go out fighting!"

The two noblemen continued to bicker among themselves as the current General of all Bavarian forces within Austria listened to the opinions of his various commanders while entranced in deep thought. He did not know the best course of action, but the odds of survival were much higher by retreating. They had already lost far too many men to hold onto Austria, even if they successfully defended Vienna.

Eventually, the debate reached the point where the two noblemen were about to clash with one another, and thus the Bavarian General spoke up about the decision he had made.

"Raise the white flag; when Berengar arrives in Vienna, I will negotiate safe passage for all Bavarians within Austrian lands, back to Bavaria. The war is lost, and I will take full responsibility for our surrender!"

Hearing that the General would accept the blame for their monumental loss, the other noblemen instantly sighed in relief. As such they were much more amicable to the idea of retreating to Bavaria; with that said the meeting was concluded, and the commanders set the task for the few defenders left in the city to raise the white flag.

...

It took Berengar a few days to arrive at Vienna after his victory outside the city, mainly because he had to round up all of the equipment and bodies of his dead soldiers. Berengar would never leave such valuable technology to be scavenged and reverse engineered; as such, he spent the time to recover what was lost after every battle. More importantly, he regained his own soldier's bodies so that they could be afforded a proper burial back in Tyrol.

After arriving at the gates of Vienna, Berengar was quite shocked to see the white flag was raised. His overwhelming performance on the battlefield and his assassinations of the enemy commanders had frightened the Bavarians to the point of negotiating surrender. Of course, Berengar would never allow a white peace; he would force the Bavarian General to sign a heavily punitive peace agreement that would force severe stipulations upon the Bavarians for their crimes against the Austrian people.

If Duke Dietger did not accept such terms that his General would sign, it would give Berengar yet another valid *Cassus Belli* to invade Bavaria when he was ready to do so. Of course, it would be a few years before he could secure his reign in Austria and stabilize the situation; he was also expecting some Papal backlash in the coming years in response to his rapid rise to power. Thus he would not further expand his territory until all internal and external problems had been dealt with.

Berengar quickly gave an order to Arnulf as he gazed upon the white flag flying brilliantly into the clear blue sky above the mighty city walls of Vienna.

"Fetch me, my white flag, we will force these Bavarians to pay an exorbitant price for their crimes in Austria. It is time for some aggressive negotiations."

Arnulf quickly nodded and gave the order for the troops to fetch the white flag; after doing so, it was brought to Berengar, where he held it and rode out with his host, which consisted of himself, Arnulf, several of his commanders, and the necessary troops to secure his safety, all of which were battle-hardened grenadiers.

Seeing that Berengar and his host were riding out with a white flag, the gates of Vienna opened, and the Bavarian General rode out with his host, where they would meet the Tyrolean forces in the middle ground between Berengar's army and the city defenders.

After reaching a middle ground, the two parties stuck their white flags into the ground and began negotiating the Bavarians' terms of surrender. The Bavarian General was the first to speak his mind upon seeing Berengar in the flesh.

"I am Count Kuonrat von? Roth, I assume you are the fabled Count Berengar von Kufstein?"

Berengar smiled as he nodded his head before responding to the man's question.

"A pleasure to make your acquaintance."

Berengar's tone was overtly sarcastic, to the point where Kuonrat merely rolled his eyes upon hearing it and began to declare his intentions.

"As Marshal of the Bavarian forces in Austria, I hereby declare my intent to surrender to you Count Berengar von Kufstein under the conditions that all Bavarian soldiers left in Austrian lands be allowed safe passage back to our homeland!"

Berengar's lips began to curl wickedly as he heard this, and he thus began his intense negotiation.

"I will allow that under the condition that reparations are paid for the damages dealt to Austria by your armies and that the realm of Bavaria and its reigning authority swear by God not to invade our lands for at least another five years!"

The General's face scrunched as he heard these terms; he did not have the authority to establish these concessions on his own fully, they would have to be brought to Duke Dietger to do so, but being aware of Berengar's personality if he did not accept some concessions, then he and his men would not be allowed to return home alive. Thus the most he could do was agree to these terms and hoped the Duke Dietger honored them. As such, the man sighed heavily before addressing the point of reparations.

"How much do you desire to be paid?"

Hearing the man so easily accept Berengar's terms and begin to negotiate a price, Berengar knew the man was desperate to return to Bavaria and thus started with an absurd figure.

"A hundred tons of silver, I believe that is a price well worth the damage you have caused to Austria! You can pay it in installments over five years if necessary."

Berengar's whole intent was not to receive payment or secure a peace agreement but to give him an overwhelming justification for his future invasion of Bavaria. Though the damage destruction wrought upon Austria was in itself justification enough, he did not want to appear as a warmonger so early in his rise to power and thus needed to look like he was responding to a broken treaty rather than as an act of conquest.

When the Bavarian General heard such an unreasonable demand, his jaw nearly dropped; there was no way Bavaria could afford such reparations, a hundred tons was 200,000 pounds. That weight in silver was an astronomical figure. As such, he quickly began to debate with Berengar over the figure he cited.

"At most, we can afford 10 tons; 100 is simply being unreasonable!"

Berengar scoffed at the man's negotiation tactic and instead criticized him.

"You have butchered Austria's population and devastated her lands through scorched earth tactics; the amount of time and money it will take to repair the damage is close to the figure I have mentioned. You will either agree to my terms, or I will lay siege to this city and every fort your people still occupy, killing every Bavarian I come across!"

Berengar's voice had risen to a state filled with fury, and thus his tone had greatly frightened the Bavarian General; this was the outcome he feared the most. There were still thousands of Bavarians left in Austria, and they had already lost most of the 50,000 men sent into the region. Such a loss was monumental in this era, as it significantly depleted Bavaria's ability to raise income. Thus after careful consideration, the General nodded his head and sighed deeply.

"Alright, under these terms I Count Kuonrat von Roth surrender to you, Count Berengar von Kufstein."

Both men knew in their hearts that this agreement would not be honored and that war would eventually break out again, but what this managed to do was secure the Bavarians safety back to their homeland to focus on their enemies to the North and buy Berengar enough time to stabilize his rule across Austria. Thus they were both happy with the arrangement.

After hearing the man accept his terms, Berengar smiled before declaring the war to be officially over.

"Very well, you have at most three months to fully retreat from Austrian lands; if you remain any longer, we will consider the treaty to be violated, and the fighting will resume. I promise you, if such an occasion were to happen, not a single Bavarian within Austria would survive my wrath!"

Kuonrat nodded his head in agreement and pledged Berengar

"I promise you; there will be no Bavarians remaining within Austria's borders by the withdrawal date you have given."

After hearing this, Berengar smiled before saying one last thing.

"Good, I will leave you to your lonesome; for the time being, you must have many things to manage if you are to withdraw from Austria. Farewell"

Throughout this entire exchange, a scribe had written down the treaty, and received signatures from both men, when it was fully signed into an agreement, Berengar departed from the field, with his copy of the agreement in his hands.

As for the Bavarian General, he put on a facade and smiled at Berengar as he left the field and returned to his army. It was only after Berengar had exited earshot that Kuonrat voiced his concerns to his nearby commanders.

"Prepare for a full withdraw from Austria; I want every Bavarian soldier who still holds breath to retreat from these lands as quickly as possible!"

One of the commanders had a worried expression on his face before asking the obvious question on his mind.

"What do we tell his Grace?"

Kuonrat sighed heavily before giving the order.

"For now... tell him nothing; we will inform him of our surrender only after we have fully withdrawn."

With those words said, the Bavarians began to prepare for a full retreat, one that would signify the ending of the war within Austria. Berengar and his allies had been victorious, and the young Count of Tyrol had fulfilled his promise to end the war before the leaves fell from the trees.

### *Chapter 206: Dinner With the Strategos of Ionia*

Since the signing of the treaty a few weeks had passed and Berengar had returned to Tyrol, Eckhard and the others were notified of the treaty and halted their advance into Upper Austria; In contrast, Berengar returned home, Eckhard would remain within the region with a small army of 5,000 men to ensure the peaceful withdrawal of the Bavarians. As for the rest of the soldiers, they too returned with Berengar back to their homes.

Though Vienna had been secured, Berengar had no plans to move into the city and oversee Conrad. Thus he had made a decree temporarily shifting the capital of Austria from Vienna to Kufstein; his justification for doing so was that Vienna had been extensively damaged during the war and would need time to repair itself before it could function as the capital of Austria.

For the time being, Conrad stayed in Kufstein, under the constant control of Berengar; with each passing day, the boy Duke became more of a puppet. He had no backers, while Berengar was considered the man who liberated Austria from Bavarian occupation and thus had gained many supporters among the nobility of the Duchy.

Everyone knew that Berengar was the proper authority in the region, yet few dared to oppose him despite that. They had grown to fear his military might and the extent to which his spy network had infiltrated every corner of the Duchy. Nobody was safe from Berengar's reach within the confines of Austria.

Berengar had begun his transition of power from Count to Duke. However, it would still take several years to accomplish this fully; thus, at the moment, he was preoccupied with other concerns, such as entertaining his guests from the Byzantine Empire.

Strategos Arethas Maniakes had opted to visit Kufstein once more now that Austria was safe to travel to and thus was sitting at Berengar's dinner table, where Berengar, Linde, Conrad, and Henrietta were eating alongside the nobleman from the East.

Arethas had important business to discuss with Berengar, especially considering the Emperor had tasked him to inquire about the procurement of firearms. As such, he attempted to broach the subject over a fine meal after Berengar had consumed a few chalices worth of beer.

Berengar was interested in small talk at the start of the conversation and thus casually asked about the Emperor and his current condition.

"So Arethas, my friend, how is the Emperor doing?"

Arethas thoroughly enjoyed the food on his plate, as he thought about the answer, eventually after washing down the pichelsteiner that he had as a side

to his pork schnitzel, and spaetzle with a strong lager, the man opened up about some details revolving around the Emperor.

"The Emperor is a little bit stressed currently, but aside from that, he is good."

Hearing that the Emperor was stressed piqued Berengar's natural curiosity, and thus he continued on this line of dialogue.

"Why is the Emperor stressed? Is it anything serious?"

Hearing the concern in Berengar's voice, Arethas quickly dashed any thoughts of turmoil that Berengar might be having about the Emperor's life and promptly revealed the well-known secret.

"Oh, it is nothing substantial; his daughter Princess Honoria is just being a hassle again. Her father had engaged her to the Crown Prince of France, and she has no interest in marrying the man. In her own words, she refers to him as an effeminate homosexual who is completely lacking in ambition. Thus, she feels like Aubry de Valois is among the worst available out of all the matches that could be made. However, she truly has herself to blame, her father has tried setting her up with over a dozen matches before this, and she has refused them all."

Hearing this, Berengar began to chuckle to himself; he made a snarky comment about the French Prince as he did so.

"Why am I not surprised?"

hearing this, Arethas was confused and thus questioned Berengar's comment.

"Why are you not surprised about what?"

Feeling that he had caused a misunderstanding, Berengar decided to clarify himself after drinking from his skull chalice.

"I just find it fitting that the Crown Prince of France is an effeminate homosexual, is all..."

Hearing Berengar's words, Linde immediately broke out into laughter. Even in this era, or should one say especially in this era, the intense grudge bore

between Germans and Frenchmen was no laughing matter. Thus Berengar took the opportunity to make fun of Crown Prince when the opportunity was presented to him.

Conrad, on the other hand, was scowling. Not once had the important nobleman from the East bothered to talk to him or even acknowledge him despite being the Duke. The young boy struggled to contain his inner fury as Berengar and Arethas chatted as if they were men of equal standing.

Henrietta was confused, as she was too innocent to know what an effeminate homosexual was, and thus did not understand Berengar's snide remarks. Therefore she merely focused on eating her meal, like the adorable little loli she was.

When Arethas heard Berengar's remarks, he also found it quite funny, as he was well aware of the stereotype that the Germans thought of when it came to the French. Thus he made a joke of his own.

"I doubt you would be saying such a bold thing if you were standing face to face with the youth; I hear he is quite the capable swordsman."

Berengar, on the other hand, laughed at this comment and pointed to his eye as proof of his feats in battle.

"The last Capable swordsman I dueled with took my right eye. However, I managed to take his life. I do not fear a petty French Prince. I would gladly tell him to his face what I think of him. If he has a problem with it, he can taste the might of my flintlock pistol!"

Hearing Berengar mentions his firearms brought a sense of delight to Arethas' face; the conversation had naturally steered in this direction, thus allowing him to inquire about purchasing such weapons. As such, he took advantage of this opportunity and asked the question on his mind.

"Speaking of which, the Emperor had personally requested that I inquire about the possibility of buying such weapons from you. I know it is a longshot, but is there any way you can sell me a few of these so-called flintlocks?"

Berengar immediately shook his head in denial, which instantly brought down Arethas' spirits; however, the words that came next shocked the man, as he was not expecting them.

"I cannot sell you flintlocks; that is simply unacceptable. However, I do have a prototype design that I can build for you. I call it the Arkebuse; it may not be as exceptional as my weapons, but I promise you that it is better than anything else you will find in the world!"

For some time now, Berengar had considered selling the primitive matchlock arquebus to his friends in the East in an attempt to curry their favor further. The reasons for this were twofold; first and foremost, such a weapon did not pose a significant threat to his forces. It was heavy, albeit portable, and had minimal range; it was also significantly less potent than a musket and could not pierce through his soldier's armor with a single shot.

The other reason was more important than this. With his rapid expansion of power, one could certainly say his advanced weaponry was primarily responsible for this. Thus it would not be long before an interest in firearms became the norm, and other countries attempted to replicate his success. One could say Berengar had sped up the interest and development of firearms from its natural course.

Other countries might have been already experimenting with improvements over the hand cannon because of the might that Berengar's armies displayed. Thus he wanted to take advantage of this to introduce the Arquebus as the standard arm for his potential allies, allowing him to accumulate great wealth with its trade and expanding Byzantine power so that he would not have to worry about some form of Islamic incursion into Europe as the Ottomans had done following the fall of Constantinople in his old life's timeline.

Hearing that Berengar was willing to sell the Empire some form of advanced firearm, even if it was not as advanced as his own army's weapons, immediately piqued Arethas's interest, and thus he was more than happy to negotiate its purchase as he had been given the authority to do so by the Emperor. However, when he was about to inquire about procuring such weapons, Conrad quickly interrupted by throwing a tantrum.

"Absolutely not! I will never allow you to sell such dangerous weapons to other regions! What if the Byzantines turned on us with our weapons."

Hearing the young boy finally speak, Berengar and Linde alike glared at him with murderous intent, which immediately shut the kid up, this greatly enraged Conrad. However, Berengar's following words further added insult to injury.

"Don't worry about the kid; he has no authority on the matter, I would gladly sell you the Arkebuse, and we can further negotiate the price at a later time. I would prefer to manufacture a few of the weapons and demonstrate to you their capabilities before we agree."

Arethas smiled and nodded; this was a reasonable request, mainly because he could negotiate a fairer price when he was more informed about their capabilities. Berengar was genuinely generous to allow such a display before negotiations commenced.

As for Conrad, he began to throw a tantrum and immediately questioned Berengar's claims.

"No authority? I am the Duke of Austria! How dare you claim I have no authority!"

Berengar, however, clicked his tongue before chastising Conrad about the issue.

"Your Grace, with all due respect, I said that you have no authority on this matter, which you do not. These weapons are property of the County of Tyrol, not the Duchy of Austria. As the inventor of the weapons and the Count of Tyrol, I have the final say as to whether or not I intend to sell such weapons."

Hearing this, Conrad was stupefied; he honestly did not have a response to such words. Once more, he was outwitted by Berengar, to a point where he could no longer refute the man's logic. Thus he merely began to pout like a spoiled brat, no longer causing any trouble.

After Conrad's little tantrum, Berengar returned to the topic at hand.

"I apologize for the interruption; as I was saying, you are more than welcome to stay in Kufstein for the time being until I can manufacture a few test samples so that I can demonstrate to you what a unit armed with such weapons are capable of. From there, we can negotiate a good price for the weapons and how many you wish to purchase."

Arethas quickly agreed to these terms and nodded his head before responding

"It is no problem; I would be glad to stay in Kufstein for the time being; I am sure when I return to the Empire with your weapons, the Emperor will be pleased by the results."

With negotiations for the trade of the Arkebus halted, the group of noblemen and women returned to their meal and enjoyed the rest of the evening. Tomorrow Berengar would place for an order of thirty Arkebus. He would then have a few of his soldiers test them on the mirror pattern armor commonly issued to the Byzantines and their enemies.

### *Chapter 207: An Unexpected Invention*

After the dinner, Berengar took a bath with his lover before the two of them returned to their bed chambers. As per usual, after returning from the battlefield, they spent a fair amount of time making love every night for weeks on end. Eventually, the couple fell asleep in each other's arms.

By the time the sun rose in the Morning, Bernegar once more engaged in his standard morning routine. Lately, Linde had been joining him for a portion of the exercise, ever since she had given birth to Hans, she had begun to put effort into losing the baby weight, and once more, she was in pristine condition, though that did not mean for one moment that she would stop her daily routine.

After finishing their exercise, the couple took a bath together before eating breakfast; when they were finished, they went their separate ways for the day. Berengar had to visit Ludwig and place an order for the Arkebuse to sell to the Byzantines soon enough.

As for Linde, she had to manage the Spy network and collect intelligence on specific issues at hand. Now more than ever, she was filled with work, as her

efforts were critical to stabilizing Berengar's rise to power. However, that was a tale for another time.

Berengar quickly descended from the Castle and entered the burgeoning city below, flanked by his House guards. When he neared Ludwig's office, he motioned for them to stay behind before entering the facility and knocking on the old man's quarters.

After knocking a couple of times, Ludwig opened the door; he looked more haggard than usual as if he had spent an entire three days straight working on some unknown project. When the man saw Berengar smiling while standing at his entrance, he rubbed his eyes a few times to see if he was witnessing reality. After realizing what he saw was indeed the truth, he exclaimed with shock.

"You excellency!?! I was just about to send word that I have something to show you, quickly come in, come in!"

Seeing the excited look on Ludwig's weary face, Berengar could not help but be amused, and as such, he walked inside the office only to realize it was cluttered with scraps of paper that looked like blueprint designs. Thus his curiosity was instantly piqued.

"Tell me, Ludwig, what is so important that you must forsake sleep?"

Ludwig was too excited to answer Berengar's question immediately, and thus he rummaged through a variety of blueprints on his desk before finding the right one. After grabbing ahold of it, he threw the other papers off the desk and spread the file across the surface so that Berengar could witness his newest creation.

When Berengar gazed upon the blueprints, he was completely and utterly shocked. He knew exactly what this weapon was and was astounded that someone could design such a thing in this era. Ludwig had taken Berengar's concepts, and with further education, and experimentation had designed a puckle gun by himself.

The puckle gun was a weapon from Berengar's previous life; only two were ever manufactured. However, for the time it was designed, it was practically a

machine gun. It was a flintlock artillery piece that used a revolving cylinder that could carry six to eleven loaded shots and fired at a rate of nine rounds per minute. One might not think that is a lot, but in an era where it took 30 seconds or more to reload a standard cannon and 20 seconds or more to reload a single musket, that was an enormous advantage.

Most importantly it could be loaded with a solid ball, or a form of canister shot that contained a total of 16 musket balls per round. Allowing Berengar's armies to launch musket balls into infantry formations at a decent distance, with a much higher rate of fire than the traditional canister shot used in his cannons.

Berengar was stunned that Ludwig could design such a marvel of weapons engineering and gazed upon the man with newfound respect. Seeing how Berengar was staring at him, Ludwig decided to explain his creation and how he came to invent it.

"Your excellency, while you were at war, I got dreadfully drunk and had a sudden bout of inspiration. After sobering up the next day, I thought about my idea and realized it was entirely feasible. My thought process is, what if I could design a cannon that functioned similarly to your revolving flintlocks! I call it the Schmidt Gun after my family name! What do you think?"

Berengar was at a loss for words; this weapon was something that should not exist in this timeline, only someone like himself who had reincarnated into the world with future knowledge should be able to devise such an advanced piece of weaponry, and yet, Ludwig had invented it from scratch loosely based upon the principles of existing equipment that Berengar had developed. It was truly astounding.

Berengar could not be more proud of the man he placed in charge of his industrial district and smiled fervently at Ludwig before clapping him on the shoulder.

"Ludwig, my friend, you just earned a Knighthood!"

Hearing Berengar's words, Ludwig was shocked; he knew with Berengar's political and military reforms that Knights were quickly becoming a ceremonial position of lower nobility, but never in a million years did he think such a

prestigious reward would fall into his hands. By now, Ludwig was extraordinarily wealthy as the head of Kufstein's industrial district, but he could not buy a noble title.

In particular, Berengar intended to introduce the Baronet rank for members of the common people who exceptionally served his state. Thus they were ranked higher than Knights but below standard Lords. Until now, Berengar had not found a commoner worthy of such a title, but with this game-changing invention by Ludwig, he would finally be able to introduce it to his noble hierarchy.

Hearing such praise from his liege, tears began to swell in the old man's eyes as he thanked Berengar for the reward.

"Your excellency, thank you!"

Berengar merely shook his head and responded to Berengar's appreciation.

"Do not thank me; you have earned it yourself! Your merit is second to none among the common population!"

After taking a few moments to collect himself, Ludwig finally realized that Berengar came here for a different reason, and thus he began to inquire about the details.

"Your excellency, why are you here?"

It was only now that Berengar remembered his original intentions for arriving, and as such, he carefully placed Ludwig's blueprints into the man's hands before putting his own upon the desk.

"The design is much simpler than the flintlock and not as effective. However, I hope that this Arkebuse can be produced so that I can sell them to the Byzantine Army!"

Seeing such a simplistic design on the table, Ludwig eagerly grinned before asking the thought on his mind.

"How many do you need and when?"

Berengar did not hesitate to declare his demand.

"Preferably thirty, and as soon as possible. I need to demonstrate their effectiveness to the Byzantine representative."

Ludwig scratched his beard for a moment while thinking about how long it would take. Eventually, he answered Berengar's question with a toothy smile.

"Give me a week; I need to set up a new production line for these Arkebuse as you call it; by then, we should be able to produce them regularly."

Berengar smiled and nodded before returning to the blueprints Ludwig had made.

"Set up a production line for the Schmidt Guns as well; I want as many as you can field. These weapons will be a force to be reckoned with on the battlefield!"

Seeing how eager Berengar was to implement these new weapons he developed brought a smile to the old man's face, and he quickly gave Berengar a thumbs up before proudly proclaiming.

"Leave it to me! I will be happy to produce as many as I can; I hope that they may bring glory to our realm!"

Thus Berengar gave one last piece of advice.

"Get some rest, Ludwig; you deserve it; everything else is secondary to your health."

Hearing that Berengar cared about his condition Ludwig almost broke out into tears; however, he managed to choke them back before responding with a wide grin.

"Don't worry, your excellency; I will get some sleep after I have given the orders to set up the production lines."

Berengar nodded before proceeding out the door. He still had several things to go over throughout the rest of the day. Namely, he had to visit Ludolf and check to see the progress of his reformation. He had been at war too long and had not focused enough attention on the spread of his new religion.

As he walked towards the local Chapel, Berengar began to wonder if any of his other exceptional subordinates would surprise him with significant innovations; only time would tell. One sure thing was that Ludwig was an outstanding engineer for the times he found himself in, and Berengar fully intended to help the man on his path.

Unfortunately, Ludwig was already an old man and would most likely not serve him for too many additional years. Thus the need for public education and the fostering of exceptional individuals were more important than ever in Berengar's mind.

#### *Chapter 208: Meeting With Ludolf*

After meeting up with Ludwig and discussing the new designs, Berengar proceeded to the local chapel with his guards following behind. While the Grand Cathedral of Kufstein was under construction, the local chapel had been seized from the Catholic Church and was being used by Ludolf to preach the gospel and the words of Berengar's reformation.

When Berengar arrived in the chapel, he noticed service was currently underway, and thus he watched from the back of the church while listening to Ludolf's sermon. The sermon was about the separation of Church and State, and therefore he was quoting Matthew 22:15-22 as he preached to the crowd who had gathered.

"Then went the Pharisees and took counsel on how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us, therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?

Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him,

Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left him, and went their way."

Ludolf then continued to interpret the words in a way that spread Berengar's message.

"Thus, in Christ's own words, we are to obey the laws of the Kingdoms of Men while owing our souls to the Father in heaven!"

The sermon went on for some time before the people of Kufstein were finally dismissed. Eventually, after some time, all that remained in the Chapel were Ludolf and Berengar, and seeing the man who had led him to enlightenment standing with a grin on his face in his church, Ludolf could not help but smile.

Berengar quickly walked over to the man and patted him on the back.

"That was an excellent sermon, my friend; you are truly fit to lead our reformation!"

However, Ludolf decided to tease Berengar as he was cleaning up some of the leftover mess from the gathering.

"I have not seen your face around these parts lately; I was beginning to think that you had lost your faith."

Berengar, however, chuckled at these words and shook his head.

"Not in the slightest, I have merely been too busy overseeing the realm and waging wars against those who would harm us. I try to make it when I can, but the work of a Count is never truly finished."

Ludolf sneered at Berengar's comment and posed a question to him

"The work of a Count or a Duke?"

Berengar once more laughed at Ludolf's jest before making a joke of his own.

"Careful, those words are treasonous; if you let the little brat hear you say that, he is liable to have your head cut off!"

When Ludolf heard this, he could not contain his laughter and snickered at the remark.

"Yeah? Tell me, Berengar, without your approval who would obey the Habsburg Boy? Everyone knows it is you who truly holds power in Austria. Conrad is just your puppet."

Berengar did not deny the charges against him and merely smiled innocently before switching the subject.

"So, how is the reformation progressing?"

Upon hearing Berengar dodging his statement, Ludolf took the hint and began to talk about business.

"It is going well; large swaths of Bavaria are being converted, despite the war they held against you. Especially in the Swabian region, it has also spread into Baden, Wurttemberg, and the Swiss Confederation. The reformation is making progress in the East, all the way into Dresden. As far as the Southern portion of the German-speaking regions goes, we have established a foothold."

Berengar was delighted upon hearing this news and congratulated his friend.

"That is good! Well done, this is all thanks to you and your efforts!"

However, Ludolf did not seem too happy, and Berengar immediately noticed that; thus, he inquired about the details.

"What's wrong?"

To this question, Ludolf sighed heavily before voicing his concerns.

"In the North, our people are being persecuted, the Catholics still hold a large control of public opinion, and our followers are burned at stake. It is truly maddening the lengths they will go to silence us."

Though Berengar put on a solemn expression as if he were reflecting about such matters with a heavy heart. In reality, he was incredibly excited by this news; such actions gave him a *Cassus Belli* to march into the North after he

had unified Southern Germany in the coming years. The longer this persecution in the Northern German-speaking regions persisted, the better his chances of having a just cause for declaring war on the North.

Inadvertently by persecuting the Reformists in Northern Germany, the Catholics had given Berengar a reason to invade when he was finally ready to do so. However, he could not very well admit this, and thus he pretended as if he was overwhelmed with grief.

"Truly it is madness as you have proclaimed, the fact that the Catholics would murder those who interpret the word of God differently shows how corrupt they are. They do not care about salvation but maintaining control over the people."

Berengar's words reached an accord with Ludolf, and he wholeheartedly agreed. Thus he nodded his head and spoke the words Berengar wanted to hear.

"Promise me that when you become powerful enough, you will march on the North and liberate our brothers and sisters in Christ from the sinful corruption of the Catholic Church!"

Berengar put on a facade as if he was shocked about such a statement and pretended to be hesitant.

"I don't know about this..."

However, Ludwig was adamant and thus shook Berengar slightly

"Berengar! Promise me! You must save our people!"

Finally, after a few moments, Berengar seemingly relented and sighed heavily as if he were deeply conflicted about the issue.

"Okay, I promise you that when I have enough power, I will invade the Northern German States and rid them of the horrific influence of the Catholic Church..."

Seeing Berengar agree to Ludolf's plight, the Priest smiled before patting Berengar on the back.

"Do not fret, my friend; we are merely acting in the interest to protect our people from the wickedness of the Vatican! How could God scorn such a war?"

Berengar finally smiled and nodded his head in approval of Ludolf's words. The man never ceased to disappoint him. Thus he decided to switch the topic to something else.

"Do you require any additional funding? Just let me know how much you need, and I will gladly donate it to the church!"

Ludolf began to chuckle as he heard these words, and he began to chastise Berengar.

"You are already building a Great Cathedral to rival that of the Notre Dame! How could I possibly ask for more money from your coffers?"

However, Berengar shook his head after hearing this response and informed Ludolf of his opinion.

"For the work of the Reformation, you just need to ask, and I will gladly fund anything you require so long as I am able!"

Ludolf was more adamant than Berengar realized and rejected his offer.

"I thank you for all you have done, Berengar, but we receive enough funding from all of the Noblemen who support our reformation; you do not have to spend so much..."

This news brought a smile to his face; the more Lords who contributed to the reformation, the better, and the Reformist Church was now making enough money to stand on its own without his support. At least for the most part. Thus Berengar finally relented on his offer.

"Okay, just let me know if you ever need anything, and if it is in my power, I will be more than happy to assist you."

With that said, Ludolf smiled and nodded.

"Certainly, remember to keep your promise. When the time comes, you must liberate our brothers and sisters to the North!"

Berengar chuckled when he heard that before posing a rhetorical question.

"Have I ever reneged on my promises, my dear friend?"

With that said, Berengar bid Ludolf farewell and began to return to the Castle. He took a pleasant stroll observing the progress of his City of Kufstein when he did so. Though he had built many structures out of concrete and steel, he knew one day he would have to rebuild many of them to ensure their structural stability for a thousand years. After all, he could not build the foundation of his Empire off of structural materials that at most lasted 100 years.

Concrete and steel were cheap to produce and quick to turn into structures. Still, the cost of that was longevity, and as such, Berengar made a vow when he looked at his grand designs being rapidly built that he would reconstruct them with stone and cement within his lifetime. For if his culturally significant buildings could not last the test of time, how could his Empire?

### *Chapter 209: Testing the Arkebuse*

A week had passed since Berengar's meetings with Ludwig and Ludolf. During this time, Ludwig had fully set up a small-scale production line for the arkebuse firearms intended to be sold to the Byzantines.

His troops who were assigned to demonstrate the effectiveness of the weapons had spent some time getting accustomed to the different actions, but for the most part, the loading procedure was the same.

As such, Arethas and Berengar were now standing in the audience of one of his testing fields. In the center of the field, there were straw targets set up where they were equipped with mirror pattern armor to represent the soldiers of the Mamluke Sultanate, the current enemies of the Empire.

Seeing Berengar's troops rapidly load the arkebuse firearms in a span of a little over 20 seconds brought a question to Arethas's mind, and thus he voiced his concerns.

"If it takes so long to reload, how would I protect my troops from the enemy closing the distance and entering into melee combat?"

Arethas was unaware of the existence of bayonets, and Berengar did not plan on selling this technology. Thus he smiled as he responded to the Strategos of Ionia's questions.

"Ideally, you would have a unit of pikemen alongside them to keep the enemy soldiers at bay while your arkebusiers reload their weapons. Once they are loaded and prepared to fire, you would pull your pikeman back to prevent friendly fire. After the volley has been unleashed, you would repeat the process."

Hearing this strategy, Arethas could envision it in his mind and nodded his head in approval; he could not wait to see the effects of these arkebuses. Thus after loading the weapons, the soldiers who were test firing the equipment aimed the firearms at their targets roughly 20 yards away.

The arkebuse that Berengar designed was shorter and lighter weight than the longer barreled variants; there were two reasons for this. The first one being that he hated the idea of using forks to act as a support to fire the weapon appropriately.

The second one being a shorter barrel created less velocity and thus posed a significantly lower threat to his forces. After all, the higher the speed of the projectile, the more likely the weapons were to pierce through his own troops' armor. The troops began to unleash their volley with a command by the officer who led the small platoon of soldiers numbering thirty in total.

"Fire!"

Upon uttering the order, thunder echoed in the air, and the thirty arquebus balls were sent downrange, most of which found their targets and pierced through the mirror style armor that the Empire's enemies were equipped with.

After the weapons were fired, they were checked for function before being put back on the weapons rack where they would later be cleaned, and after negotiations, hopefully, be sold to the Byzantine Empire as the first batch of such weapons.

Seeing the display from afar was a marvelous sight, and Arethas had a broad smile on his face like a kid on Christmas. After the area was deemed safe for inspection, Berengar posed a question to Arethas.

"Would you like to inspect the damage up close?"

Arethas was instantly intrigued by this offer and silently nodded his head before standing up and following Berengar down to the field below, where the straw dummies were resting, most of which were knocked over by the impact of the arkebuse balls and had to be reset to standing position.

Upon closer inspection, the arkebuse balls had thoroughly penetrated past the mirror pattern armor, into the straw dummy, and out the other side of the armor. It was indeed an effective weapon against the popular armor patterns of the period.

Arethas was surprised by the efficiency of the weapons and no longer needed convincing in regards to purchasing the equipment. Thus he began the negotiations for the acquirement of such weapons.

"I am thoroughly convinced such weapons are superior to anything else I have seen, aside from maybe the weapons your forces use. Tell me, Berengar, what price would you desire for these magnificent firearms?"

Berengar had come up with a plan in the past week to get the most advantages out of the Byzantine Empire's vast trade network with the East while simultaneously appearing generous. Thus he decided to put on a facade about intensely thinking over the matter before expressing his idea.

"Normally, I would charge five hyperpyrons per arquebus, but under certain conditions, I could make a deal and give you a twenty percent discount."

Arethas immediately took the bait upon hearing such an offer existed.

"What conditions might those be?"

Berengar put on a graceful smile as he answered Arethas' question.

"Since we have become such good friends, I will place a 20% discount on each Arkebuse sold to the Empire, under the condition that you sell me saltpeter at an equally discounted price."

Berengar's nitreries were having difficulty keeping up with the demand of saltpeter that he needed to fuel his armies. Knowing that the Byzantines had access to an ample and cheap supply of saltpeter from their trades with India, Berengar wanted to take advantage of this to get ahold of vast quantities of the material for a low price.

Even with the 20% discount, he would still be making a fortune off of the Arkebuse trade, and in doing so, would be able to invest a fraction of it into cheap saltpeter. This would allow him to continue the rapid growth of his armies and supply them with the gunpowder they needed to dominate the European battlefields.

After careful deliberation, Arethas spoke his thoughts on the matter

"I can agree to such terms, but in return for the discount, I would like the Empire to take priority in the sale of such firearms."

Arethas began to wonder if he was too greedy with his demands, but to his surprise, Berengar smiled and nodded his head before replying.

"That is not a problem. So long as we can produce these weapons, I can agree to have the Empire take priority in their purchase."

With this, an agreement had been made, and the two men shook hands before drafting up a formal trade agreement, one that they both signed with their signatures and seals of their houses. Afterward, Berengar posed an invitation to Arethas.

"It is getting late. Would you like to dine with my family and me tonight?"

Arethas saw no reason to refuse, especially since the cuisine cooked by Berengar's chefs was always delicious. Thus, he nodded his head in agreement before responding.

"It would be an honor."

With that said, the two men returned to Berengar's castle, where they sat down at the dining table. Linde, as per usual, took her place next to Berengar, and Henrietta sat across from her. As for Arethas, he sat across from Berengar and Conrad next to him.

The boy had grown quite irritable over the last week, as Arethas, an essential dignitary from the East, paid no attention to him, despite Conrad officially being the Duke of Austria. Thus he was visibly scowling while sitting at the table. An action that did not go unnoticed by the others sitting at the table.

Berengar ignored the boy; Conrad was already being slowly poisoned and would finally croak within a few years without anyone being the wiser. Thus he just had to manage the kid's outbursts for the time being before he could seize the title of Duke for himself.

Arethas also ignored the boy as he was well aware of who the real power in Austria was. Thus he decided to ask Berengar about his plans for the future. Despite the actual Duke of Austria sitting right next to him.

"So, Berengar, now that you have driven the Bavarians from your lands and established a relative peace. What do you intend to do in this time?"

Berengar drank the beer from his skull chalice before responding to the nobleman from the East.

"Despite being victorious, large swaths of Austria were negatively impacted by the invasion, entire villages massacred, fields destroyed, and livestock butchered. It will take a substantial effort to recover from such a pyrrhic victory. I will spend the next few years stabilizing the region to the best of my ability and bringing vast fortune to my people."

Seeing that Berengar had no immediate plans for future conquest, Arethas sighed in relief; at the rate, Berengar's power was growing, one day he could

potentially be a threat to the Empire, and it was better to foster a friendly relationship with the man than to make an enemy out of him. Such an approach would undoubtedly take time.

As such, Arethas drank from his chalice before asking another question on his mind.

"I hear you are trying to implement many economic, military, and agricultural reforms. Do you not fear an uprising by the nobility of Austria? Or greater yet a grand coalition of your neighbors?"

However, Berengar's answer greatly surpassed his imaginations; Berengar had a calm, maybe even cruel smile on his face as he drank from his skull chalice. After wiping his mouth with his napkin, he responded as if it was the most obvious answer in the world.

"Of course! Those stuck in their traditions will never fully embrace my reforms; they will inevitably scheme against me; in fact, many of the noblemen throughout not only Austria but also Tyrol are currently planning such a thing as we speak. Yet, I do not fear rebellion. Instead, I welcome it, for a great purge is needed to usher in the new era, and when my enemies finally bear their fangs I will be well prepared for it."

Arethas and Conrad alike were shocked by this answer, Berengar was fully expecting a rebellion, or possibly two, and he was already preparing for such an eventuality. The man clearly had foresight, but what was even more frightening was that he had stated he welcomed the rebellion so that he would be able to purge the malcontents in his society.

After hearing such a bold statement, Arethas felt like he should not question the mind of a Tyrant and quickly got back to eating his food; Conrad, on the other hand, looked as pale as a ghost, as if he finally realized he had appointed a monster as his regent, one that he had no power to stop.

As for Linde and Henrietta, they were merely enjoying their meal, as if Berengar's words were the most natural thing in the world; they were well accustomed to his proclamations of his grand ambitions and the cruelty he would go through to achieve them. Thus the dinner went on in awkward silence for some time before finally coming to an end.

Arethas would soon return to the Empire with the first batch of arkebuse firearms, and Berengar would greatly profit from it. As for the future, it was in the hands of God; if one believed in such a thing, that is.

#### *Chapter 210: Introducing New Military Innovations*

Another few weeks had passed, and Arethas had long since left to return to his home in Ionia; of course, he would first report to the Emperor about his visit and his success in acquiring firearms. Yet that was a story for another time.

At the moment, Berengar was in the testing facility once more, where he was observing the introduction of two new key pieces of equipment. Ones that would drastically change the results of the battlefield once again.

Since Ludwig had designed the Schmidt gun, which greatly resembled the Puckle Gun from his previous life, he had spent a great deal of time and effort bringing it to reality. At the moment, three of such weapons were lined up in the testing field, with multiple cylinders loaded with either solid ball or shot.

The Schmidt guns were mounted on carriages that could be dragged by horses, much like a standard artillery piece. Thus allowing for excellent mobility of the weapons on the battlefield. This immediately caught the eyes of the artillery officers present, who by now had all engaged in battle at some point.

Soon these weapons would be demonstrating their capabilities to Berengar and many of his artillery officers who had gathered. Berengar was about to hold a speech, and Ludwig was standing next to him; this speech would do two things.

It would introduce Ludwig as the inventor of the Schmidt gun and establish him as a new rank of landless nobility. Thus the charismatic young count spoke with a great deal of passion for the man in front of him, who was also a great friend.

"I have gathered you all here today to witness the birth of a mighty weapon, one that would not exist without the brilliant mind of this man standing before you. Most of you should be aware of his identity; he is Ludwig Schmidt;

without his efforts, none of you would be equipped with the weapons you use in the field!

He is the director of Kufstein's industrial sector, and now he has invented a weapon that will change the course of the battlefield; what you see before you is known as the Schmidt Gun, named in honor of its creator!

It is a revolving artillery piece with the ability to fire nine rounds per minute! Either solid ball or a shot comprised of 16 musket balls! Its effective range is 75 yards, with its maximum range being 200! Now let us witness how effective this weapon truly is!"

Upon hearing this impassioned speech, a series of applause erupted from the audience of Officers who had gathered to witness the destructive power of the new weapon. An enemy formation of 100 straw targets was set up at 75 yards, each equipped with brigandine breastplates that simulated an enemy formation. The moment Berengar gave the order, the three guns began to fire their volley.

The first volley fired by the Schmidt Guns was filled with solid balls, and a total of 27 rounds were fired in a single minute; the large balls devastated the enemy formation, as they tore through not only one opponent but sometimes the target behind them as well.

However, the demonstration was not finished with that. Instead, the cylinders were rapidly replaced with ones filled with canisters, and before long, another volley was fired off; each canister contained 16 musket balls that flew downrange into the targets and shredding them apart, a total of 9 canisters were fired per the three guns in the span of one minute resulting in a whopping 432 musket balls being fired into the enemy formation during that small time frame.

The resulting devastation of the simulated enemy formation was shocking even to the veteran artillery officers who had waged many battles. They could only imagine the effects such a weapon would have on the battlefield when used alongside standard cannons. It was indeed an astonishing degree of destruction that these so-called Schmidt guns wrought upon the armored straw targets.

After the demonstration was finished and the straw targets were thoroughly scrapped. Berengar noticed his officers were staring in silence for some time. Eventually, a single officer began to clap, and before long, it transformed into thunderous applause.

So much so that Berengar had to calm the men down before saying his other piece of important news.

"Due to the great extent that Ludwig Schmidt has served our great County, I hereby anoint him as Baronet for his exceptional service to the County of Tyrol! For those of you wondering, Baronet is a new hereditary rank of landless nobility who shall be henceforth be appointed from the common people who have accomplished exemplary service to the County. For those of you present who are nobles do not fret, for it is the lowest tier of nobility!"

The news that Berengar declared just now was shocking to the people present, especially considering the officer class was almost entirely filled with Knights and Nobleman at the moment. Thus they were conflicted over the matter. However, Berengar did state that they were landless nobility, and at the bottom of the hierarchy therefore such a thing was somewhat acceptable to the old nobility.

Despite their concerns over the issue, they still applauded Ludwig on his promotion, and the old man shared his usual toothy grin in response. He was now a member of the nobility, even if he was at the bottom of the hierarchy.

However, Berengar did not stop the presentation here; he had another critical invention to add to his military, one that Ludwig had helped produce; it was a relatively simple design and thus could be employed in mass numbers.

However, this presentation was meant for the infantry officers, and thus he dismissed the Artillery officers before approaching the other test field where his infantry officers had already gathered. On the field was a platoon of Grenadiers, who appeared to be holding the standard 1417/18 Rifled Musket that was issued to the majority of Berengar's infantry.

However, what shocked them was that their cartridge boxes were open, and in them were no longer the standard-issue paper cartridge but a wooden cartridge; this invention was based upon the Japanese Hayago from

Berengar's previous life and essentially sped up the reloading process. Thus Berengar boldly declared its effects to the infantry Officers who were gathered and observing the strange new devices.

"This is the quick loading tube; it will replace the use of paper cartridges in our service. It is made of wood and contains a Minie ball projectile and the gunpowder inside of it! This device allows the gunpowder and projectile to be loaded in a single motion, thus allowing a far quicker reload speed! Instead of firing two rounds in a minute, your soldiers will be firing five!"

The Grenadiers present had spent the last few weeks getting accustomed to the device and by now were exceptionally proficient in its use. As such, they rapidly reloaded their first shot. In doing so, they placed the wooded tube to the bore of the rifled musket and then jammed its ramrod inside of it; with this act, the gunpowder and bullet were filled into the musket in a single motion.

After doing so, they quickly cocked their rifles, aimed at the targets downrange, and fired. Within seconds the platoon of grenadiers reloaded their muskets and fired again. This rate of fire peaked at five rounds in a single minute, thus thoroughly shredding the enemy formation in front of them at a hundred yards.

The infantry officers who were gathered for this demonstration were just as shocked at its display as the artillery officers were for the Schmidt gun. This small wooden tubular device would change the way they waged war. It would make Berengar's armies far more lethal than the enemy forces, even if the enemy got their hands on some primitive firearms.

Thus a roar of applause echoed throughout the testing field as the infantry officers clapped to their heart's content. They would now be able to fire many more projectiles downrange at the enemy forces before having to engage in melee combat; such a device was genuinely revolutionary.

Berengar himself was impressed with the speed and efficiency that his grenadiers utilized such devices with; if his entire army could be trained to be so efficient in their use, nobody in this world would be able to challenge him on land. Thus he too applauded the soldiers who had been used in the demonstration.

Berengar could see the rise of his future Grand Army with the new military inventions, all he needed now was a matching Grand Navy, something he planned to begin construction on shortly. For now, in the following months, his troops would be adequately trained in the use of the quick loading tubes, which would become referred to as tubes in the future for simplicity.

Berengar's grand ambitions were slowly but surely starting to become a reality, and thus he looked upon the new military innovations with pride. He truly believed the weapons his army currently wielded would establish his dynasty's dominance for years to come—something he greatly anticipated.