

# Steel 431

## Chapter 431 - A Day In The Life Of The Austrian Army

Captain Jonas sighed heavily as he stood within the village chapel, which now acted as the command post for his unit. Three days and nights had passed since his company of Jaegers first occupied this position. By now, the entire village was fortified with makeshift defenses such as trenches and watchtowers.

A report had been rushed towards the main Austrian Army regarding the general case of lawlessness that had consumed Portugal as it awaited the invasion of the Triple Alliance. When requesting further clarification on his orders, High Command had responded with a simple objective, fortify their position, and conduct basic reconnaissance operations throughout the countryside.

Despite being in the middle of summer, a freakish storm had consumed the Kingdom of Portugal, and its torrent was unleashed upon the Portuguese-Granadan border. From the perspective of the Portuguese people, it was indeed the end of days.

Jonas heard a knock on the door as he observed the map that had been sprawled out across a table set within the chapel. Assuming one of his men brought him the newest reconnaissance report, he quickly answered in his native tongue.

"Come in!"

The young officer was surprised to see the appearance of the village girl he had saved from a group of brigands a few days prior. She was now dressed in a peasant's gown and held his camouflage smock, which was neatly folded up.

She had an anxious expression on her face as she handed the article of clothing back to its master. This gesture had completely caught Jonas off guard as he observed the farm girl with curiosity. She was

relatively pretty despite her humble appearance. Jonas quickly approached the young woman and gently grasped the smock, where he proceeded to don it over his field tunic. He smiled before nodding his head and responding with the words.

"Thank you!"

She had washed the smock and cared for it over the past few days with the intent to return it to its rightful owner. Though the girl did not understand the German tongue, she could tell that the foreign soldier was thanking her, and thus she wore a pretty smile as she responded in kind.

"You're welcome."

After saying this, she departed from the chapel, leaving the Austrian Captain by his lonesome. It was a pity that they did not speak the same language because he would not mind wooing such a cute girl and taking her back to Austria as a war bride. However, some things were not meant to be, so he quickly got back to work.

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Outside of the village that currently acted as a forward operating base for the Austrian soldiers was a small fireteam of Jaegers. These men were the foremost recon experts within Jonas' company. They were currently withstanding the apocalyptic storm while seeking refuge from the elements within an improvised dug-out shelter that the team had built into the earth.

If one did not observe the structure closely, one might mistake it for a natural mound. However, contained within this shelter was an elite team of soldiers from the Kingdom of Austria. Among these men was the soldier named Corporal Lach Wickten, who was cursing his luck as he dried off his wet body next to the fire.

"Just my fucking luck, I get chosen for a recon mission deep behind enemy lines, and I am stuck in the middle of the fucking wilderness during a world-ending storm!"

One of the soldiers next to him immediately scoffed before rebuking the Corporal.

"Quit your bitching; you are alive, warm, and have ample rations to survive on! Seriously, you have the honor to serve in one of the most distinguished units in the Royal Austrian Army, and all you ever do is bitch about it! If you hadn't already earned yourself a Wound Badge, I wouldn't put up with your shit."

Lach did not seem to mind the harsh criticism; after all, these soldiers were used to busting each other's balls; instead, he used the fork in his mess kit to dig into the canned beef that he had warmed up by the fire. With a shit-eating grin on his face, he returned fire to the other soldier.

"At least I can hit what I'm aiming at! 90% of the time you fire a shot, you miss your target. I am seriously considering writing a complaint to the high command so that they start charging you for the munitions that you waste!"

The squad leader chuckled when he heard this before commenting on the statement.

"He's got you there Brandt, I have seen recruits with better accuracy than you. Seriously, do you pull the trigger before you properly align your sights?"

The soldier named Brandt immediately began to curse out his squad members as he took a bite from his canned pork.

"Fuck you guys! I'll have you know that I scored expert marksman back in basic!"

Lach began to chuckle when he heard this before adding salt to the wound.

"Yeah, but those targets don't shoot back at you or move, for that matter. The moment anyone isn't standing still like a frightened rabbit, you miss your mark. You do know you are supposed to lead your target with your sights when they're sprinting, right?"

Once more, Brandt responded with a classy retort

"Oh fuck all of you!"

The five members of the Austrian Jaegers enjoyed their time together with some less than friendly banter as they waited out the storm. When it finally dispersed the following day, they would continue their mission towards the nearest central township to ascertain the degree of authority that the Crown of Portugal still had over its lands.

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General Arnulf stood alongside Strategos Palladius as the two men stood in the middle of the muddied trenches battered by the storm. If not for the hemp raincoats, which aided in repelling the water which poured down on them, they likely would have succumbed to the weather already.

Instead, the two men watched across the border of Granada and Portugal from a frontline position. The men beneath their command were huddled in their fortifications, waiting out the storm. Palladius broke the silence between the two generals as he spoke about the report he had read earlier in the day.

"Your Jaegers seem to have reported a mass sense of lawlessness within the borders of the Kingdom of Portugal. It appears that the men beneath the King's command have begun to desert en masse and ransack the country they were supposed to protect.

Do you think we will even face resistance when we march into their lands? Or will the Portuguese people think of us as liberators from the predators who roam freely across their realm?"

Arnulf scoffed as he heard this before presenting his gloomy outlook on the conflict that had yet to reach its climax.

"I think no matter what we do, the people of Portugal will resist us. After all, the Portuguese are devout Catholics, and the Pope has practically made King Berengar out to be the anti-christ. I would not be surprised if the people of Portugal blame us for what is currently going on in their Kingdom.

When the Reichsmarschall learns of the lawlessness that prevails in Portugal, I believe that he will personally lead the charge and fight through every village, town, and city until the people of Portugal have bent the knee to the Granadans, and by extension himself."

Upon hearing this, Palladius had a smug grin on his face, which did not go unnoticed by Arnulf; as such, the German General quickly crossed his arms as he spoke towards the Byzantine Strategos with a sense of hostility.

"You don't agree?"

Palladius continued to smile as he shook his head before revealing his thoughts on the matter, the rain pouring down upon his weathered face as he did so.

"Not at all, though I may not have known your King for long; I believe I understand his character well enough to accurately predict his reaction to the ongoing chaos across the border."

Upon hearing this, Arnulf got mildly defensive and shrugged his shoulders before responding to the General from the East.

"Well, go ahead enlighten me..."

The veteran Strategos continued to smile as he began to make his prediction about Berengar's upcoming actions when he returned from the Peace Accords in Aquitaine.

"I think your King has grown weary of this war; after all, it is not a conflict he wanted to be directly involved in, to begin with. I also know that he fancies the Granadan Princess. Thus, I think it is highly probable that he will retire to the Capital of Granada for the remainder of this conflict. Where he will delegate the training of the next generation of Granadan soldiers to us.

Once the Granadans have sufficient numbers, training, and equipment, he will dispatch them into Portugal with a minor degree of assistance in the form of artillery and reconnaissance units. For the most part, Berengar will begin to withdraw his forces back to Austria while leaving support units to continue aiding the Granadans in a war they will be by then capable of winning themselves."

When Arnulf heard this, he believed it was an equally plausible theory; as such, he proposed an entertaining idea.

"Your theory is interesting; how about we make a friendly wager?"

Palladius chuckled as he heard this before inquiring about the details.

"What are the stakes?"

Arnulf smiled as he spoke about the details in a casual manner.

"Nothing serious, I assure you. How about we say whoever loses this little bet of ours will owe the other a favor in the future?"

Upon hearing these terms, Palladius scratched his beard in contemplation for a few moments before nodding his head in acceptance.

"Deal!"

With this, the two Generals had begun to gamble on which of their predictions were correct.

#### Chapter 432 - Return To Granada

Berengar and Hasan stood within the confines of the Granadan Royal Palace; throughout their absence in Aquitaine, the situation within Portugal had deteriorated rapidly. Though the Austrian Jaegers and Grenadier Guards were initially sent behind enemy lines to disrupt the border, they soon were embroiled in a chaotic and lawless region where deserters from the Portuguese Army ravaged the land as nothing more than filthy brigands.

The true extent of this lawlessness remained unknown. Still, one thing remained certain, a massive army of foreign peasants would soon be arriving in Portugal, whether or not they were capable of restoring

order to the Portuguese Crown or would engage in the same criminal behavior as the soldiers of the Portuguese Army remained to be seen.

Despite the unruly situation in Portugal, it created an opportunity for Berengar. Though he had initially planned to outright invade the Kingdom, with its current state, there was little chance that the enemy would be rushing the Granadan Border any time soon. As such, he was communicating with his Generals and the Sultan of Granada about his newfound idea.

"Portugal is in an unprecedented state; much of the realm has become a wasteland where those who possess any semblance of might are capable of doing as they please. Thus, I have decided to shift my strategy; after all, if we were to invade the Kingdom at this point, it would only be met with resistance from not only what remains of the Portuguese Army but also the brigands and the people themselves.

Thus I have decided to maintain our presence on the border and begin rebuilding the Granadan Army. With our Support, over the next few months, a sufficient force can be armed and trained, fully capable of invading Granada by itself. Obviously, we will provide surveillance and long-range artillery support to the Granadans when they invade Portugal."

Arnulf immediately cursed under his breath when he heard this, and Palladius smiled; after all, the veteran Strategos of the Balkans was the winner of their little wager. Luckily it was just a favor owed to the man. Otherwise, Arnulf would be more irritated than he currently was. Though Berengar took note of the two men's expressions, he did not inquire any further about it and instead shifted his attention to Hasan with a broad smile on his face.

"What do you say? Do you think your Kingdom is up to the task?"

The young Sultan smiled as he heard this news; he was growing disheartened by relying on Austria to win this war; any chance to become self-sufficient in terms of military matters was something he greatly desired. Thus with a broad smile on his lips, he nodded his head.

"I will have you know that the men of Granada are more than up to the task!"

Berengar nodded his head as he heard this before responding to the young Sultan's words.

"Very well, we will maintain a presence at the Granadan-Portuguese Border. My soldiers will begin training your troops, and I will begin supplying you with the weapons necessary to win your wars. After all, I still have tens of thousands of Muskets and hundreds of my old cannons lying around in a warehouse."

After saying this, Berengar shifted his gaze to Arnulf and Adelbrand to give them their new orders.

"Dispatch orders to our units behind enemy lines, command them to maintain their positions and continue their reconnaissance operations. I want a regular update on what is transpiring on the other side of the border. If there is even the slightest hint of an attempt to attack our troops in the trenches, I want to know about it beforehand!"

Berengar's generals saluted him briefly before responding in the affirmative.

"Yes, sir!"

After saying this, Berengar looked over at Hasan and Palladius before issuing their orders.

"What remains of the Granadan Army will withdraw from the Trenches and return to the Capital where they will undergo further training alongside the new conscripts. As for your soldiers, Palladius, keep them at the border and maintain a presence. I don't want the Portuguese to think we are withdrawing a significant number of troops from the border."

Hasan and Palladius both nodded their heads as they responded to this request.

"It will be done."

"You can rest assured, King Berengar, my troops will hold the line until a point where it is no longer necessary!"

After saying this, Berengar smiled; with this strategy, the war in Granada had transitioned; from an all-out offensive by the Triple Alliance to a security operation designed to train the Granadan forces to be



self-sufficient without needing to rely on Austrian Support. In other words, this next phase of the Reconquista was this world's equivalent of Operation Freedom's Sentinel.

Berengar knew he would be in Granada for at least another half a year because of this, thus making it his most extended campaign to date. He only hoped that his civil work would have made significant progress by the time he returned to the fatherland.

As for what he intended to do between now and then, that was simple; he would stay in the Granadan Palace and spend some time getting close to the Princess of Granada. After all, if he were to endure such a long period of time away from home, then he would not do it celibate.

Whatever may come of the relationship between Berengar and Yasmin, the young King of Austria knew that at the very least he was going to make sure to get under the princess's skirt. Thus he put on a friendly facade as he dismissed the meeting of Generals and placed a hand on Hasan's shoulder.

"This meeting is adjourned, come, my friend, let us get something to drink and speak further of our future conquest!"

Ignorant of Berengar's desire to spend some intimate time with his sister, Hasan quickly agreed to this request and played right into the Austrian King's hands.

"I will get my sister to pour our drinks for us!"

Berengar smiled and nodded as the two men departed from the war room and entered a more comfortable setting before long; Princess Yasmin was fetched from her quarters, where she was dressed in a skimpy outfit as she held a bottle of fortified wine in her hands.

She gracefully poured the substance into Berengar's and Hasan's chalices before climbing between them and wrapping her arms around the young Austrian King. Hasan's eyes instantly grew wide as he noticed this. He did not know when his sister and his guest had grown so close, but he was happy to see it.

This only meant that he was one step closer to achieving his goal of uniting their two houses in matrimony. Thus he began to play the part of his sister's wingman as he broached a question to the King from the East.

"Tell me, King Berengar, what do you think of my sister Yasmin? She is beautiful, is she not?"

Berengar smiled graciously as he took a sip of the wine from his chalice before nodding his head in agreement.

"Truly, her appearance is unrivaled in these lands, but her mature personality is what I find most attractive."

Yasmin blushed as she heard this flattery; she did not know whether or not Berengar was exaggerating. However, it did not matter; a compliment from a handsome and powerful man was something that she would accept. Upon seeing the reactions between his sister, and his guest, Hasan smiled before asking another question on his mind.

"Yasmin? What do you think of Berengar? Be honest; your Sultan commands it!"

A sultry expression appeared on the mature woman's face as she spoke on the matter.

"I think there is no man more handsome than he; in fact, I find his disfigurement quite appealing, it proves he has been battle-tested, and nothing is more attractive than a man who fights his own battles!"

Berengar nearly choked on his wine as he heard this; he had seldom heard such a compliment since he received the injury in mortal combat with his brother years ago; besides being comforted initially after his wound, his wives tended to avoid discussing it. Indeed in their minds, it was a blemish on his otherwise handsome appearance.

Thus he had a somewhat awkward expression on his face when he touched his eyepatch and the wounded eye beneath it. Upon seeing this, Hasan glared at his sister, clearly speaking about such a thing was considered rude. However, in the next moment, Yasmin leaned over and grabbed ahold of his hand before asking the question on her mind.

"May I see what lies beneath?"

Obviously, She was referencing the wounded eye, and as such, Berengar exhaled deeply before nodding his head. After doing so, he took off his eyepatch very slowly before revealing the scar he bore as a symbol of his foolishness.

One could make out the visibly shocked expression on Yasmin's luscious lips beneath her face veil as she gazed upon his battle scar, which had long since healed over the years. Berengar's blue iris was intact, aside from a thin vertical scar that cut through the center of it.

This scar connected the gap between the top and bottom of his eyelid, which also contained the same wound. The Granadan princess slowly reached out to touch the scar before halting her hand; she had almost forgotten to ask for permission and thus raised her voice before doing so.

"May I?"

Berengar silently nodded his head before the soft tanned hands of the mature Princess placed themselves upon his eyelids, a broad smile formed on her face as she did so; she had accidentally let out her inner thoughts on the disfigurement while she touched upon Berengar's wound.

"Such character, it is truly befitting of a warrior like yourself!"

Berengar was shocked when he heard this; the woman wasn't simply flattering him; she genuinely found his wound attractive. In the next moment, Yasmin lifted the veil from her face and pressed her lips against Berengar's as she shifted into his lap.

Hasan looked away awkwardly before coughing slightly; he intended to break the couple apart. After all, he knew where this was headed, and he had wanted to ensure their bond was a bit stronger before he allowed Berengar to bed his sister.

Yasmin narrowed her gaze upon her little brother upon hearing this interruption before standing up from Berengar's lap. She was displeased by Hasan's actions, he had pressured her so much into seducing Berengar, and now that she finally had him in her grasp, the fool had interrupted her. Seeing that the

atmosphere was ruined, she quickly grabbed ahold of the bottle and thrust it into her brother's hands before rebuking him for his behavior.

"Pour your wine yourself!"

After saying this, she stormed off, leaving Berengar and Hasan alone, in awkward silence.

### Chapter 433 - A Tacit Understanding Between Two Kings

Over a month had passed since Berengar returned to Granada; during this time, he had spent his days overseeing the Reformation of the Granadan Royal Army. Standing before him was a unit of recruits. The contrast between Berengar's 20th-century style apparel and the 16th-century Ottoman-style armor that the Granadans wore was worlds apart.

Despite this, these recruits were in the middle of drilling exercises for the sixth week of basic training. Berengar had drafted a new training regimen based upon the Austrian Royal Army's. Every soldier went through Ten Weeks of basic training, followed by specialized training for their role in the Armed Forces.

For the time being, Granada's Military comprised solely of an Army; after all, building up a proper Navy was a substantial cost, and until Berengar could replace his Frigates with more advanced steam-powered and armored steel vessels, he would not part way with any ships within his current fleet. Berengar and Hasan sat back and drank from their wine as they conversed about the ongoing changes in the Granadan Royal Army.

"With the agricultural improvements we have begun to employ, thanks to your generosity, we are now able to raise a substantially larger force of recruits. We project a standing professional army of 25,000 men within the next six months. When armed with the Muskets and artillery that you have provided, we will easily defend our borders. However, it will take a least a year to have an Army capable of invading Portugal. Do you intend to stay behind during this entire time?"

Berengar sipped from his wine as he listened to the young Sultan speak; after hearing the man's question, he calmly smiled before answering the question.

"With Austrian support in terms of artillery and reconnaissance, I assure you that the time frame will be significantly reduced. Your 25,000 men will be enough to act as the spearhead into Portugal. As we speak, my forces grow, and I will soon dispatch more artillery brigades to Iberia.

However, I will significantly reduce the number of infantry in the field; now that we have reached peace with Aragon and Castile, there is no need for so many infantry and cavalry stationed in the Region. As for me, personally, I still have some work to be done, and I won't be returning home until I have completed it."

Hasan smiled when he heard this; he believed that he knew the exact reason as to why Berengar was not ready to return home. Throughout this past month, the young Austrian King and the Princess of Granada had grown considerably closer, and yet to Berengar's dismay, he had not been able to seal the deal between himself and Yasmin. Despite this, Hasan believed that Berengar was determined to sleep with his sister, and thus he thought that the man would remain in Granada until this had been accomplished.

However, in reality, this was not Berengar's primary reason for staying with Granada. The Austrian King was outright terrified to return home; the reason for this was simple; the moment he arrived at his Palace, he would be forced to confront Henrietta's confession and give her an answer. This weighed heavy on his heart, as he had no romantic feelings towards his sister.

In Berengar's mind existed a duality of memories from two separate lives. He could say that he was no longer simply Julian Webber like he had initially thought upon entering this world. Throughout the years, the memories of the original Berengar had begun to take their hold over his heart, and he had often considered himself an amalgamation of the two individuals.

Thus despite having memories of another world, he still thought of Henrietta as his precious little sister and was greatly disgusted by the idea of incest. Despite this natural aversion, another feeling was embedded deep within his heart.

Perhaps it was because he never had a sibling in his past life, but the very thought of seeing his precious sister with another man troubled his conscience. He had no idea what to do about this awkward situation that had been forced upon him.

Thus the more time he spent in Granada away from his sister, the better. After all, it would give her the space she needed to think through her incestuous fantasies and would allow him to ignore his complex emotions by thrusting himself into the loving arms of another woman and drowning himself with booze.

Thus he had a complicated expression on his handsome face as he answered the Sultan's question and continued to drink from the fortified wine contained within his chalice. Instead, he decided to shift the topic to something of greater interest.

"So tell me, Hasan, how do your people view their Sultan who engages in forbidden behavior? Drinking alcohol, eating bacon? I thought such things were against your faith?"

The young Sultan chuckled upon hearing this before commenting on the social challenges he faced as a secular ruler over a Muslim Nation.

"Every so often, some radical Imam rises to a position of prominence in an attempt to unite the ordinary people against me. However, I have no tolerance for zealots and immediately put those fools to the sword.

I have seen what madness fanatics will commit in the name of religion and want no part of it. My brother tried to have me eliminated because he thought I was too moderate; even one of my wives attempted to murder me in cold blood. If not for you, I would be a dead man, my name forever erased from history.

Honestly, I never would have had the nerve to challenge religion's stranglehold on my society if not for your German Reformation. I have seen what secular rule free from the command of religious fanatics has done for your Kingdom, and I too wish to prosper to such a degree.

So, I have begun to implement my social reforms to encourage moderate religious views and secular rule. I may not have the vast knowledge your Kingdom has access to, but I, at the very least, can encourage scientific thinking.

I won't lie though, there has been some fierce resistance against such things, the older generation clings to their superstitions, but they will be dead soon, I care more about influencing the youth, who will be the future of my realm, than the old fools who cling to the glories of the past."

Upon hearing this, Berengar smiled and nodded; Although Hasan was severely lacking in potential as a ruler and a general; it was his moderate views of religion that had made Berengar decide to prop up his state with their alliance. For if he could influence the Islamic World to be more moderate in their views, perhaps the religious extremism of the 21st Century would not come to pass in this timeline.

However, if Granada were to prosper in the future and become a significant power worthy of Austria's continued support, they would need a leader groomed from birth to an efficient politician and capable general.

This man was not Hasan; however, if Berengar were to marry Yasmin through matrilineal Marriage, he could potentially place his son with her on the Granadan Throne and create a robust and secular Sultanate of Al-Andalus. Thus Berengar had a warm smile on his face when he dropped a bombshell on Hasan, one that he was not expecting so soon.

"Hasan, my Friend, you once asked me to unite our houses through marriage. I will admit I was initially hesitant over such a proposal; after all, at the time, I did not have complete control over my household, and my wives can be exceptionally jealous.

However, I have become quite fond of your sister during my stay here, and she is not getting any younger. Thus, if you are still interested, I am willing to agree to your proposal, so long as it is via matrilineal marriage. After all, I already have two wives in my dynasty, and their children will be contending for my throne; the last thing I need is more competition between my offspring."

Hasan did not care that the marriage would be matrilineal; after all, he did not think that far ahead; all he cared about was the long-term alliance between their two kingdoms and the fact that his sister was finally about to be wed. Thus the young Sultan hastily nodded his head in agreement, unaware of Berengar's true intent behind this marriage proposal.

"I am still interested. We can host the wedding here in Granada before you return home. I'd love to see the look on your wives' faces when you bring home my sister as your newest bride."

Berengar laughed when he heard this, there was another severe advantage to marrying Yasmin and bringing her home to Austria, and that was the fact that such an event would shift his wives attention away from Henrietta's confession toward this newfound threat—allowing him to ignore the serious problem that lies between himself and his sister for some time.

Thus while the two Kings were watching the Grandan troops receive their instruction in the art of war, they had come to a tacit understanding that would forever change the landscape of European and Global Politics.

#### Chapter 434 - Fire And Maneuver

Ever since the Austrian Intervention in Granada began, the Research and Development Department of the Austrian Royal Armory had started fiddling around with the designs entrusted to them by their monarch.

Months had passed since they first began experimenting, and now at this very moment, they had devised a working prototype of a few weapons that would be crucial to Berengar's long-term plans for conquest, colonization, and defense.

The first among these weapons to be tested was sitting on a tripod within the Austrian testing grounds. This weapon was a water-cooled, belt-fed machinegun chambered in a 7.92x57mm Langes Gewehr cartridge. It was embedded in a mock trench system within a reinforced cement machine gun nest.

This magnificent weapon fed from 250 round stamped steel ammunition belts that could be clipped together for immense volumes of sustained fire. At the moment, a group of weapons specialists began to feed the belt through the other side of the weapon and bull back on its charging handle, thus sending the ammunition into the battery.

Once seated into position, the main gunner rested his feet on the two rear legs of the tripod before gripping the dual wooden handles stationed at the rear of the gun. After taking a deep breath, he aimed down the bore of the weapon towards the target, which was located roughly a thousand yards away, and pressed the weapon's trigger with his thumbs.

The weapon immediately began to chug away as dozens of rounds flew down range and into the targets. With a slight tap of the handle, the weapon could be shifted in either direction to roughly a quarter of a



degree or 15 MOA, which was sufficient enough to stop the advance of any armed force that wished to charge a trench line. In theory, a small number of machine guns, and supporting riflemen could effectively stop any charge they encountered.

While Berengar was resting in Granada overseeing the training of the Granadan Royal Army, Chancellor Otto von Graz was acting as the witness to this weapons trial alongside several high-ranking officers of the Royal Austrian Army.

These men were responsible for testing any weapons developed by the Royal Armories. Today was the first of many trials that these prototype weapons would go through before they could be approved for service.

Otto gazed in horror as he witnessed the substantial rate of fire and the devastation caused by the weapon in front of him. While he had long since retired from warfare, it was only now that he fully realized that when armed with such weapons, Cavalry would be utterly useless.

He could vividly imagine what would happen if the enemy were to attack an Austrian trench line, the sheer volume of death that would occur was unfathomable. The Chancellor wiped the sweat from his brow as he came to this horrifying revelation.

This single weapon changed the nature of warfare substantially; the old Chancellor finally understood why Berengar was not the slightest bit worried about defending the borders of Austria from all of its enemies. He also understood why there was an ongoing effort by the Army Corps of Engineers to construct a massive trench system around their borders.

If they could place hundreds of these guns, and the supporting artillery across their borders, with the necessary soldiers to arm them, there would be no possible way the Crusaders could enter into the Austrian Kingdom. Any attempt would be an outright massacre the likes the world has never seen before. With this in mind, Chancellor Otto took a deep breath and exhaled heavily in an attempt to calm his nerves. After doing so, he vocalized the thoughts contained within his mind.

"I underestimated you... I see now where your confidence comes from..."

One of the nearby officers heard this remark and knew very well who he was referring to as such a broad smile appeared on his face as he boldly announced their plan for border security.

"These weapons will be going through thorough testing over the next few months. However, if you think this is impressive, wait until you see the improvements to artillery that our scientists have been working on! By the time the Crusaders enter our borders, the 7.5cm FK 22 guns currently in use will be a thing of the past, delegated to our reserves. The true defense of our borders will be something far grander!"

Otto shuddered at the thought of an even more excellent artillery piece than what was currently employed by the army. Were the current field guns not enough to strike fear into the heart of every enemy soldier who marched against Austria and all its glory? Indeed the Research and Development team was even crazier than Berengar if they wished to replace the currently issued artillery so soon.

Despite this natural trepidation towards the idea of such rapid improvement, Otto had to admit the future of Austria was in good hands when he considered that the scientists of the Nation were now capable of making improvements to weaponry without the input of their genius Monarch. Thus he sighed in relief as he nodded his head before responding.

"That is good to know..."

Otto continued to gaze upon the machine gun trials. After thousands of rounds had been fired downrange, they ceased their sustained fire and cleared the weapon. Thinking that the demonstration was over, the Chancellor sighed in relief; however, in the next second, a wicked grin appeared on the Officer's face as he pronounced the test of the following weapon.

"That was the MG-22! It is a heavy machine gun designed with static defense in mind. However, it is not the only machine gun we have developed for use by our Army; next up is the MG-22(H)!"

Otto gazed upon the mock trench system that was set up with intrigue. Just what was this next prototype that had been developed. He quickly saw a soldier with a weapon that looked like a rifle on steroids; unlike the MG-22 Heavy Machine Gun that had just been introduced, this weapon had stock and a visible barrel; however, the barrel was strange to look at from his perspective considering that it was finned.

Unlike the Needle Rifles, which Otto was familiar with, this weapon fed from a 30 round box magazine which was inserted at the top of the gun, because of this it had offset sights. Before charging the firearm, the soldier who wielded it was quickly rocked and locked the magazine in place. After doing so,

he pulled back on the charging handle and began to fire a short burst at a target roughly three hundred meters out.

After scoring a direct hit on the straw target's breastplate, the soldier selected a nearby target and fired upon it. As he did so, several men armed with the G22 Bolt Action rifles and a squad leader armed with an MP-22 flanked the target with their weapons in hand and bayonets affixed.

With the tactics of fire and maneuver engrained in their minds, these men rapidly advanced on the target and eliminated it. Once the straw dummies representing an enemy squad were destroyed, the Machine gunner reloaded his weapon before picking it up and rushing towards another position of cover, where the team repeated their actions.

The officers began to clap as they witnessed the demonstration of the new weapons for a squad-level unit and the tactics presented to them. Otto was once more flabbergasted; he could not believe that firearms would advance so much in the past five years to the point where the age of Knights and Chivalry would come crashing down so quickly.

He began to say a quick prayer for the souls of the poor fools who would march on Austria at the behest of the Pope and his mad obsession with ending King Berengar's reign. Perhaps Berengar indeed had struck a deal with the devil to change the world by himself so rapidly; it was not something an ordinary man could do.

After witnessing the terrifying display of advanced weapons and tactics, Otto sighed to himself before concluding the test. So far, the prototypes had been successful, but they would have to undergo far more rigorous testing if they were to be approved for use in the Austrian Royal Army.

He could not begin to imagine what Austria would look like by the time of King Berengar's death. For the first time in his life, Otto had become dismayed by the fact that he would not live to see such a future. He was confident that it would be a glorious sight. However, he would embrace his duty as Chancellor and help his son-in-law run the country for many years to come.

Thus the first extensive test of the next-generation weapons was completed; it would still be a few years before such weapons could be employed in mass. Yet, Otto felt oddly confident in their chances of defending the Fatherland from the entire world if such a need should arise. He knew within his heart that he had made an excellent choice in wedding his daughter to his nephew, even if it was initially for a stake in Kufstein's mines so many years ago.

## Chapter 435 - Climbing The Noble Hierarchy

While the Department of Defense belonging to the Kingdom of Austria had begun to test the next-generation weapons designed by their sovereign. The Research and Development Department was working on an exciting piece of artillery.

Having received field reports from the lack of support to light infantry units behind enemy lines, Jakob Schmidt, the son of Ludwig Schmidt, had come to the logical conclusion that a form of lightweight and maneuverable artillery capable of being rapidly deployed by a small team of infantrymen needed to be developed.

He had delegated the responsibility of his Department to the development of Berengar's next-generation weapons designs entirely. At the same time, he worked with his father to develop a new weapon that could be used to fulfill the demands of indirect fire and support.

At the moment, a small prototype was sitting on the floor of Ludwig's workshop; it was the 7th prototype designed in the past few months since Berengar left for the war in Iberia. Past designs included miniature cannons that could be taken apart and carried either by horse or on the back of multiple soldiers.

However, these devices proved during testing with Mountain Troops to be exceptionally heavy and took far too long to deploy effectively. Thus the idea of a pack howitzer was immediately scrapped. Instead, the current prototype in the hands of Ludwig and Jakob was a 27-inch steel tube in a form that was oddly reminiscent of modern mortars from Berengar's past life.

This Mortar included a base plate for use as a standard infantry mortar that could be quickly detached to lighten the weight. To use the weapon without the base plate, the gun had a handle bolted onto the barrel, and the soldier's foot was used to stabilize the weapon. This lighter-weight variant was designed for use with light infantry and commando units.

Depending on whether the base plate was used, This Mortar weighed anywhere from 15 to 40 pounds and fired a 60mm high explosive projectile that had an effective range between 2,187 and 3,500 yards. Of course, this was just a prototype, and it was far from being feasible for actual service.

Still, the concept was in place, and a prototype had been made. Thus Jakob and his father both had broad smiles on their faces as they gazed upon this brilliant weapon. The old engineer grasped his son on the shoulder and gave him a thumbs up.

"I'm proud of you, boy! I thought you were mad when you suggested that we try something other than a lightweight variant of a traditional field gun. However, if this weapon works as well as I think it will, we may have just provided a sufficient level of force to our troops stationed behind enemy lines!"

Jakob smiled as he heard his father's praise; throughout his entire life, he had sought to succeed the older man in his endeavors; over the past five years, he had seen his father go from working on trebuchets to breechloaders. The rapid ascent in technology that Austria had progressed to was unfathomable to his young mind.

There was only one man responsible for such a thing. It was King Berengar; without his educational reforms, young men like Jakob would not have the mathematic or scientific knowledge to figure out how to make such advanced weapons.

A rising portion of the population was educated to a substantial degree, and brilliant minds were constantly working on expanding upon the knowledge provided to them by their King. Although Berengar was viewed as an intelligent man whose intellect was equal to none within the Kingdom of Austria; he was not omniscient, and thus there were plenty of brilliant minds within the millions of people who inhabited Austria who could add to the ever-increasing pool of knowledge.

These two men had contributed substantially to the development of arms for the Kingdom of Austria. Though Ludwig was getting on in years, he was happy to know that his son could continue his legacy and aid the young Monarch in his pursuit of power. Thus, Ludwig began to speak to his son with some difficulty.

"My boy, I had seen you grow from a gifted but foolish child to a brilliant young man; when you were a kid, we had nothing, and I could barely afford to feed you and your brothers. If not for King Berengar and his educational reforms, I am sure that you would never accomplish much in life.

However, look at you now; you have become the head of the Research and Development Department of the Royal Armory! I am proud of you son, I won't be in this world for much longer, but I am happy to know that his Majesty will have someone greater than myself to rely upon in the future..."

Jakob had a bitter smile; he was all too aware that the likelihood of his father living much longer was slim; he was already an elderly man and considered exceptionally old in this era. Though there had been a rapid increase in medicine, and health it was unknown just how much that would affect the average lifespan. With a smile on his face, Ludwig began to lecture his son further

"You are a man now, Jakob; it is time for you to get married, and have a child of your own. I don't want to die before I meet my grandkids you little bastard!"

After saying this, Ludwig lightly smacked his son across the back of his head breaking the solemn atmosphere that had previously stifled the air. Jakob laughed lightly as he recovered from the impact. Due to his father's actions, his family had become noblemen, even if it was among the lower families.

He could finally marry a nice noble girl and start a family. He had been so obsessed with work that he had utterly neglected any form of social function for several years now. Ludwig wore a toothy grin upon seeing his son's reaction as he asked his son an important question.

"Now, my boy, is there any girl who has caught your fancy? I can pull a favor with the King to put in a good word for you!"

Jakob was shocked when he heard this; since when did his father and Berengar have such a good relationship? He was unaware that in the early days of Berengar's ascent to power, the two men were drinking buddies.

While he knew that his father had acted as the best man at the King's first wedding, Jakob had assumed that this was simply because Berengar had no friends. This was partially accurate considering all of Berengar's friends were also his subordinates aside from Hasan.

After thinking about it for a few moments, Jakob realized that he knew virtually no women, and the ones he did know were already married. Had he really spent his early adulthood absorbed in education and employment? Upon seeing the stunned look on his son's face, Ludwig's expression sank before he dared to ask the question on his mind.

"Boy, when was the last time you talked to a woman?"

An awkward smile appeared on Jakob's face as he openly admitted his borderline celibate lifestyle.

"It has been at least two years..."

Ludwig immediately slapped his forehead as he thought that he had completely and utterly failed as a father. After doing so raked his fingers over his bottom eyelids before coming to a decision.

"Alright, I'm a noble now, so it looks like I'm going to have to find you a wife! You're incapable of doing it yourself. Boy, consider this my last gift to you before I depart from this world!"

Jakob was stunned to see his father willing to go through so much effort so that he could have a grandchild before his death. After all, his brothers were still reasonably young as Ludwig had them late in life. Thus the older man truly believed that his firstborn was his only hope to see such a thing before he passed.

Before Jakob could interrupt, Ludwig pulled out a bottle of whiskey that Berengar had gifted him earlier in the year; it was aged for five years and was among the first batch of Berengar's distillery. There were very few of these bottles in existence, and most of them were stashed away in the cellar of the Royal Palace.

Ludwig immediately popped open the bottle and poured himself and his son a glass of the fragrant substance.

"Boy, I'll have you know that the King owes me a favor; after all, if it weren't for me, he would have died at mining town! Well, technically, it was that redheaded lass of his who informed me, but still, I was the one who was able to alert Eckhard to muster the militia! I will call in this once-in-a-lifetime favor in an attempt to get him to use his kingly influence to find you a beautiful and well-behaved bride.

After all, our family is wealthier than most of the Dukes nowadays! You may not be the best-looking man in Austria. Still, when I die, you and your brothers will be among the wealthiest; that alone can probably help you marry some woman from a declining noble family, especially with the King's support!"

Jakob thought about his father's gesture for a moment before he noticed a severe flaw in this plan; as such, he quickly voiced his concerns.

"But father, there are no declining noble families in Austria! With his Majesty's reforms, even those impoverished noble houses have gained significant wealth through the ownership of their lands!"

Ludwig smiled once more with his signature toothy grin before raising his voice in objection.

"Who said anything about marrying an Austrian woman? There are plenty of impoverished noble families in the neighboring Kingdoms. I can get his Majesty to give us a much more prestigious title and a plot of land in Switzerland with enough coercion!"

After all, plenty of noble houses have been wiped out in the region from the War of Independence, and Berengar is still distributing their lands to men of merit from our Kingdom! You wait, boy, our house will rise, and perhaps we will even get a new surname befitting of nobles such as ourselves!"

Jakob stared at his father in disbelief before a wide smile appeared across his face. As he did so, he envisioned himself as a mighty Count, or Perhaps a Duke, with several factories under his command and multiple beautiful wives. He nodded his head before responding to his father's bold claims as he thought about this.

"I agree with this vision of the future!"

Ludwig chuckled before slapping his son on the back; as he did so, he left a parting piece of advice to his son.

"Good, now make sure to work hard because all of the benefits that I provide our family will fly out the window if you don't prove to be of equal use to our King!"

Jakob gulped down the saliva pooled in his mouth upon hearing these words; after doing so, he quickly got back to work on his mortar design while his father gazed upon him with pride.



## Chapter 436 - Beachside Relations

Months passed, and with it, Berengar's wives came ever close to the due date of their pregnancy. While they were struggling with the thought that they would give birth to their children without their husband present. Berengar was enjoying himself within his Manor, which was located on a hill above the beaches of Gibraltar.

The first batch of recruits from the Royal Granadan Army had graduated basic training. These soldiers were now undergoing the specialized training necessary to fulfill their position within the Armed Forces of Granda. During this time, Portugal continued to bleed from the chaos that enveloped its realm, while King Luiz struggled to reclaim the lands that were lit ablaze from the warbands of heavily armed brigands that once served him faithfully.

The foreign crusaders comprised of primary peasants who had taken up the call to arms to fight against an unholy alliance between the German Reformation and Islam found themselves engaged in brutal conflict with the deserters of the Portuguese Armies, their numbers drastically reduced and stretched thin across the small Kingdom to the West.

Currently, Berengar was resting on a wicker sunbathing chair with a parasol over his head and a blended drink in his hands. He was dressed in a pair of hemp shorts and lying next to the Princess of Granada, who wrapped her arms around him with a loving smile. The young couple had become quite fond of one another during this time, and a wedding had been undergoing preparation.

Even though Hasan had initially instructed Yasmin to seduce and bed Berengar in an attempt to trap him into marriage, for whatever reason, he had shifted his opinion. Thus, the young couple had not slept together yet, as Hasan insisted that his sister's virtue remain intact until her wedding.

Of course, Berengar, an impatient and lust-filled man, had used his vast knowledge to find a way around that rule. Thus he had secretly introduced his newest fiancée to alternative methods so that they may entertain themselves. Therefore they had been spending quite a lot of time together in the Austrian King's beach Manor, enjoying each other's bodies in every way that would not violate the Princess' apparent virtue.

However, all good things must come to an end; as Berengar continued to sip from his drink, a servant rushed forward and handed him a letter. Contained within this document was the news that the time for their wedding had arrived; it was just in time too. Seeing as how the Granadan Troops and Austrian Artillery were about ready to deploy into Portugal for the sake of their conquest. Thus Berengar got up from his seat and looked over his bride-to-be as he commented.

"It appears we are required within the capital. The wedding is fully prepared and awaiting our arrival."

When Yasmin heard this, a sly smile spread across her beautiful face as she teased her fiancé.

"So you're not going to invite your other wives or your family for this occasion?"

Berengar chuckled when he heard this and grabbed ahold of the woman's plump rear, bringing her closer into his embrace.

"I am pretty sure those girls would try to kill you out of jealousy if I brought them to our wedding. I am also certain that my family would not easily approve of me marrying a Moorish woman. Thus I won't request their attendance. Besides, I'd like to see the look on those bitches faces when I bring home a foreign woman as my war bride!"

Yasmin immediately shoved Berengar aside and climbed on top of his lap; her bountiful breasts were barely contained by the thin fabric that comprised her bikini. Under Berengar's orders, he had made her a rather skimpy swimsuit for use around his Manor and private beach. As she pressed him down beneath her weight, she flicked him on the forehead before lecturing him.

"I am not your war bride!"

Berengar chuckled in response and kissed her on the lips, his tongue parting through its entrance and intertwining with hers. After doing so, he released himself and laughed softly before responding.

"I am at war, and I am marrying you while away from home. Thus you are my war bride!"

Yasmin merely scoffed at this before wiping back the bangs from her forehead; as she did so, she reached into the young Austrian King's shorts with a wicked smile on her face.

"How about we have a quick one before the road?"

Berengar smiled as he heard this before giving a command to his servant nearby.

"Fetch the olive oil! and quickly!"

Upon hearing this, the servant nodded before running off to the Manor and returning with a bottle of olive oil. He did not know why Berengar had requested such a thing so suddenly, but he was quickly dismissed by the Austrian King and ordered not to return.

After this Berengar made sure he was alone with the Granadan Princess before he pulled down her bikini bottom and filled his hands with olive oil before applying it to her tan plump. After playing around with her cheeks for a while, he slid his oily fingers into the hole where he began to apply the oil to her innards making sure it was fully prepped for what was to come. The busty Granadan Princess bit her lips as she moaned in pleasure. After a while, she could no longer contain her lust and broke her silence.

"Put it in!"

Berengar chuckled as he heard this, it had been a few months since he began training her hole for his use, and now it would appear that the woman was addicted to it. However, he was not ready yet; he quickly pulled down his shorts and put his member in front of her face.

Like a bitch in heat, Yasmin immediately knew what to do as she placed the object of her desire into her mouth and took it to its base repeatedly. By now, she was so experienced with this act that she no longer gagged upon reflex.

Only after he was well prepared did Berengar turn the woman around and slowly slide his shaft into her rear; the moment he did so, her lower lips gushed in orgasm. Berengar was not surprised; out of all of his girls, Yasmin was what he would call a squirter. Thus he thought nothing of it and immediately began to thrust his hips back and forth like a piston; the more he did so, the louder the Princess's moans became.

Fearing that he would attract the attention of his servants, Berengar pressed the woman's pretty face into the soft sand of the beach and began to exaggerate his movements even further. Despite the rough treatment, Yasmin only grew wetter as she climaxed once more. Berengar himself was not even close to finishing; as such, he gave the Princess no reprieve as he continued his sexual act.

While this was ongoing, he gripped the woman's substantial breasts and hung onto them as he pumped his hips; the soft flesh filled up his hands and felt as if they were overflowing from his grasp as he did so. Yasmin's stomach was flat and slightly toned despite her substantial bust and broad hips. She carried all of her weight in her breasts, and rear making her a beautiful woman to the eyes of a man like Berengar.

After making love in an unorthodox method for well over an hour, Berengar finally reached his conclusion, where he pulled out his shaft and shot his liquid all over her pretty, tanned face. The sight instantly turned him on more; unfortunately, they did not have the time to go multiple rounds. Thus the young Austrian King immediately rose from his seat and gave the Princess some advice as he set forth to the Manor.

"Clean yourself up. Afterward, we will depart for the capital..."

Yasmin was in a state of total bliss and could barely comprehend his words; as such, she lied naked on the beach for well over ten minutes before rising from her position and cleaning herself off in the Sea. After doing so, she returned to the Manor and dressed in something far more appropriate. Thus, the young couple departed towards the City of Cordoba, where their wedding would be held.

Their little romantic adventure on the beach would remain unknown by the various powers, thus securing her alleged chastity and allowing Berengar to fulfill the terms of his agreement with the young Sultan Hasan.

When they finally arrived within the gates of the City of Cordoba, several days would have passed, and the couple would be quickly rushed to their wedding. After all, there was a war to be fought, and the Granadan troops were just about ready to see combat.

The duty of a King was never complete, and Berengar was just happy that he could avoid his troubling emotions for the time being in the arms of a beautiful woman. When he finally returned home from Austria, he knew that he would have created more trouble than if he had denied his relationship with Yasmin. Then again, that was a worry for another time.

## Chapter 437 - Granadan Wedding

Berengar stood in the middle of the Mosque of Cordoba dressed within the traditional wedding attire of the people of Al-Andalus. He felt out of his element, as he was not accustomed to dressing in such an eastern sense of fashion. Regardless he went along with the ceremony as he felt it would be rude to deny the customs of his newest wife and her people.

He waited on the arrival of his beautiful bride as he gazed upon the magnificent architecture, which was a testament to the supremacy of the ancient state of Al-Andalus. If not for this war, the city and this treasure of a Holy Site would not have fallen back into the hands of the Moorish people of Iberia.

In a way, Berengar was directly responsible for this event by propping up and aiding the once declining State of Granada. However, he felt it was fair, in this timeline, the Hagia Sophia remained in the hands of Christendom. Thus it was only natural that the Islamic people maintained their control over the Great Mosque of Cordoba.

As he waited for the bride to arrive, the young monarch stood next to his Generals Arnulf and Adelbrand. The two men were dressed up in their most luxurious service dress for this occasion. Though Berengar wanted to do this event secretly, he needed two male witnesses, as was the tradition for an Islamic Wedding. Thus he selected his two Generals and bound them to secrecy under pain of death.

After all, Berengar had yet to announce to his troops that he would be marrying the Granadan Princess, let alone his family back home. Though Berengar had fostered secularism and religious moderation within his own Kingdom, he knew there would be more than a few people who despised the idea of a Christian King marrying a Muslim Princess.

Especially his brides, he had not even told them he had taken on another lover while away at war, let alone that he had agreed to marry her. The entire thing was rather sudden; if not for the fact that the Kingdom of Portugal was rapidly descending into lawlessness, he might have been on the frontlines within the borders of Portugal at this moment, and unable to get close to Yasmin.

However, when left to his own devices, he naturally spent his time with a foreign beauty and thus had grown quite fond of the woman. Recognizing the need for more control over his ally to the West, Berengar had hatched a plan to place his progeny with the Granadan Princess on the throne.

At the moment, none of that was important within the mind of the young King; instead, what truly mattered at the moment was that he would be marrying a beautiful woman of significantly more emotional maturity than his current, younger brides. After all, what man didn't want a mature beauty among his harem?

After a while, everyone had arrived, and the bride was brought up to the groom by her brother; since her father was already deceased, it was up to Hasan as the head of their house to give Yasmin away to Berengar.

Yasmin was dressed in a Tyrian purple and gold kaftan, with a matching headdress and her usual face veil concealing her beauty. Berengar was dressed in similar colors, in the Moorish style of fashion. As she stood next to Berengar in front of the podium, the couple signed their names on the marriage contract.

After doing so, the Imam said a brief sermon about the holy texts of Islam, particularly pertaining to marriage, and then ceased. Unlike in a Christian wedding, it was not acceptable for the groom and bride to kiss during the ceremony, which would have to wait until after they were alone.

After concluding the brief ceremony, the gathered procession, who were essential members of Granadan society, returned to the Palace of Cordoba, which currently acted as the residence of Hasan, so long as he stayed within the city.

A feast began with all kinds of food being brought out. Berengar enjoyed the exotic dishes while drinking from a glass that contained fruit juice. Unfortunately for him, he was not allowed to drink at this event; after all, even though he may not be Muslim, the people who surrounded him were, and to make a good impression on his allies, he abstained from his usual vice.

Adelbrand and Arnulf began to converse with Berengar as he sat at the table next to his newest bride. A few days prior, they were made aware of Berengar's marriage to the Granadan Princess. However, after removing her face veil at the wedding ceremony, they were shocked to see that she was such divine beauty.

They instantly grew jealous of Berengar for adding another gorgeous woman to his harem. Arnulf was the first to speak to his monarch as he congratulated him upon his newest marriage with a bit of a bitter expression on his face.

"Congratulations, your majesty! You have claimed yet another bride for yourself, and with it, secured a long-term alliance with Granada!"

Berengar chuckled as he silently nodded in response; while he did so, he eyed Hasan, the man had a giddy smile on his face as he played with an exquisitely crafted 1422 Service Revolver. The gift that Berengar had decided to give his bride's family was such a weapon. This pistol, in particular, was a work of art, as it utilized hand-crafted ivory grips, which contained a golden 24k gold coin inscribed with the Granadan Coat of Arms within the center of the grips.

The blued steel metalwork was embellished with a sleek gold damascene finish, fit for a king. As for the hammer and trigger, they were fully covered in 24k gold plating. Berengar had become so fond of this pistol, which he had ordered to be manufactured during the months of his tenure in Granada, that he had a matching revolver made for himself that acted as a symbol of the two nations' unity.

The only difference between his revolver, and the one gifted to the Sultan, was that his weapon had a golden coin that contained the crest of Austria embedded within its ivory grips. Not only were these revolvers beautiful pieces of art, but they were also entirely functional firearms. The Sultan eventually walked over to his new brother-in-law and thanked him for his gift.

"My brother, this is an excellent weapon! I look forward to testing it shortly!"

Berengar laughed at this; he knew that neither Hasan nor his people would be capable of reproducing such an advanced weapon any time soon; as such, he was more than happy to gift a single revolver and a small amount of ammunition to keep his new brother-in-law happy. Thus he smiled and responded to the man he could now call brother.

"You are most welcome; I too am I lover of firearms, especially ones as beautiful as yours; I'll have you know I was so impressed with the end product that I had a matching revolver made for myself that has only a minor alteration to the coat of arms embedded in the grips."

Hasan nodded as he heard this; it was appropriate for the two Kings to have such masterful works of art. Thus he patted Berengar on the shoulder and said in a voice so low that only the two of them could hear.

"Have fun breaking in my sister tonight! I promise you that she is a virgin!"

Berengar rolled his eyes at such an inappropriate comment; he was already well aware of this fact as he had seen her naked many times and had even played with the other orifices of her body. However, he did look forward to finally entering that previously forbidden cave of wonders. Thus he smiled and nodded his head while replying.

"I look forward to it!"

After speaking with the Sultan and his guests for some time, Berengar and Yasmin retired to their bed chambers, where they were eager to strip their clothes and consummate their marriage. After fully undressed, Yasmin laid on the soft mattress with her legs spread as she uttered the words.

"Come, my husband, claim what is rightfully yours!"

Berengar gulped the saliva that had pooled up in his mouth as he witnessed the sight and hopped into action. He immediately started by stimulating her moist cavern with his tongue as she did the same to him. After they were both prepared, he took the first plunge into her depths and felt a state of bliss overtake him as he did so. Taking a woman's virginity was always an intense pleasure to a conqueror like the Austrian King.

After fully committing himself to his new wife, the young couple would continue to screw like rabbits for the remainder of the night. After all, Berengar wanted to imprint his mark on his woman's womb fully and hopefully impregnate her in the process. Yasmin would find herself having difficulty walking for days to come by the time the morning came.



Berengar gazed down the tangent sights of the rifle in his hands. He quickly pulled the bolt back before slamming it home. If there were a round chambered in this weapon, it indeed would have been ejected with this motion.

However, it was empty, and thus nothing had occurred. As the bolt moved rearward and forward in a smooth motion, the sheet metal dust cover attached to the bolt followed it throughout its entire journey.

After gazing upon the pristine bluing on the steel parts of the rifle which were matched with a fine walnut stock, Berengar realized that he may have gone too far with the quality of these weapons. Regardless he was well pleased with the result of his designs that had finally made their way into the frontlines of Iberia.

This weapon was the Gewehr 22, primarily based upon the Kar98k from his previous life. Though, he had taken some creative liberties to ensure that it met his sense of aesthetics. Aside from that there were some minor functional improvements but overall it was a superior combat rifle to what his soldiers were currently equipped with.

This rifle was just one of many that had made their way from Austria's factories to the Emirate of Granada. Weeks had passed since Berengar had married Princess Yasmin, and the day for the invasion of Portugal drew near. So much so that he could not enjoy a brief period of respite with his newest wife.

As the Royal Granadan Army became more self-sufficient, the Austrian soldiers who supported them began to withdraw back to the Fatherland. By now, all that remained of Austria's forces within the region were the 1st Cavalry Brigade and the 1st Artillery Brigade. There were also those few individuals from the Jaeger Regiment who were still operating deep behind enemy lines providing Reconnaissance to the Triple Alliance.

In the place of the Austrians, the bulk of the Forces that would be partaking in combat operations within the Kingdom of Portugal was that of the Granadans and Byzantines. With the three nations combined, it was an army of about 50,000 men in total. While Berengar had initially planned to leave behind a larger contingent of Infantry to aid his allies, the reality was that it was simply unnecessary.

The Kingdom of Portugal was lit ablaze from the conflict between the impoverished Portuguese Crown and the various deserters who had taken up arms as brigands and highwaymen to extort the people of Portugal for all their worth.

Unfortunately for King Luiz, his treasury was emptied mainly by members of his Council who had fled to either Castile or Morroco to start a new life; even his Marshal had run away from his responsibilities in fear of an Austro-Granadan invasion.

Thus Berengar was confident that 50,000 men with the support of Artillery and Cavalry would be more than enough to overcome the Army of crusading peasants who accompanied the remainder of the Portuguese Army. After all, their ranks were heavily depleted in the fight against the Portuguese deserters.

After carefully inspecting the weapon, Berengar shoved it into the hands of the Colonel, who was tasked with leading the 1st Cavalry Brigade. The Austrian King gave his loyal officer an order as he did so.

"Ensure that our troops are well trained with these weapons before we march on Portugal. I want our cavalry to be able to shoot and reload while on the move!"

The Colonel quickly saluted his King before responding in the affirmative.

"Yes, your majesty!"

With that said, Berengar smiled before dismissing the Colonel. When the officer was finally out of sight the Austrian King gazed upon the crates which contained weapons as a brilliant idea appeared in his mind.

Since he would be fighting this war as a member of the Cavalry, it was best to practice before the violence had begun. Thus he instantly grabbed hold of a rifle from one of the crates; after doing so, he checked some of the nearby casks, where he found one that contained several spam cans of ammunition.

Berengar proceeded to open these spam cans and loaded the steel stripper clips with the ammunition. Once this had been achieved, He placed the clips into his leather webgear before slinging in his rifle on his back.

Having prepared himself for the task ahead, Berengar traveled to the Royal Palace of Granada, where he entered the stables. Inside, these stables contained a Proud Iberian Stallion. One could say this blood-bay horse was a predecessor to the infamous Andalusian breed from Berengar's past life.

The young Austrian King quickly attached a saddle to the horse before placing his foot within the stirrup and dragging himself on top of it. This red horse was named Glory, and it was a gift given to him by Hasan during Berengar's wedding to the Granadan Princess.

Berengar had owned many mounts over the years since Erwin's death at the Battle of Oberstdorf. Yet until now, he had never come across a steed as fine as this. Glory was a warhorse that was born and bred for a single purpose: battle.

After mounting his steed, Berengar rode towards the training grounds where his cavalry was getting acquainted with the new weapons. Five thousand men and their horses began to load their guns as they jumped over obstacles and fired at straw targets with their new bolt action rifles.

They immediately ceased their activities when they witnessed their King in front of them. Berengar did not waste time; he quickly unslung his rifle, where he reached into his web gear and pulled out a stripper clip that contained five rounds of 7.92x57mm LG where he placed the stripper clip into the action of his rifle and loaded the weapon, after doing so he pushed the bolt forward which instantly sent the stripper clip fling off of the gun and onto the ground below.

After doing this, he ushered Glory forward where he proceeded to aim the rifle, while charging towards his target, with the reins in one hand that was also grabbing ahold of the rifle's forend, the Austrian King skillfully fired his shot into the target before quickly pulling the bolt back and chambering another round.

He fired another projectile downrange as he did so, narrowly missing his next target; he continued to ride his mount into combat while firing his five shots into their targets. His soldiers gazed upon him in awe before following suit. During this time, Berengar would spend several hours instructing his soldiers on using the new weapons and how to use them as cavalry effectively.

By the time he finished this action, he had returned to the Granadan Palace and locked Glory away in the stables; he entered the main building to see his newest wife waiting for him. She had a warm smile on her pretty face as she quickly approached him and kissed him on the lips.

"Husband, you are finally home!"

Berengar smiled as he received such a special greeting before resting his hands around the woman's waist. It was a pity that the Invasion of Portugal was around the corner, or else he would surely take the woman on a honeymoon.

Now that he thought about it, he hadn't taken any of his wives on such an essential aspect of their marriage. He swore then and there that he would need to do so in the future when he was given the opportunity. For now, he would have to make do and entertain his wife in the bedroom.

As such, he grabbed ahold of her without saying a word and dragged her up to the bedroom, where the couple would engage in intimate relations for the rest of the night. After all, war was around the corner, and soon Berengar would be away from her arms. Thus he wanted to make the most of what little time he had available to him to engage in worldly pleasures with a foreign beauty.

## Chapter 439 - Empire In The East

On the other side of the globe, far away, lies a mighty Empire. Within its borders was the ancient city of Nanjing. While Berengar was waging war against the Catholic Kingdoms of Iberia, the Ming Dynasty saw an unprecedented time of peace and prosperity.

However, despite this, its Emperor had recently passed away, leaving his son and heir, a ten-year-old boy named Zhu Li, as the de-facto ruler of China. This boy was currently tapping his finger repeatedly on the armrest of his chair with a disgruntled expression on his face.

His mother, who was the Empress Dowager, was, in reality, the true power behind the throne, Zhu Li was merely a puppet for her, and he knew it. Because of this, the woman was standing away from her

son, scolding one of the Admirals beneath his command. Zhu Li secretly eavesdropped on their conversation in silence.

"You have brought this rusted, old piece of Junk from your travels and demand to show it to the Emperor? I will not allow you to put fanciful ideas of a mysterious, and powerful barbarian Kingdom to the West in the Emperor's head!"

The Admiral immediately began to protest against the Empress Dowager and spoke in contrast to her harsh words.

"This is a vital piece of military technology, far more advanced than our hand cannons. Supposedly the Kingdom it was captured from has employed these weapons in the thousands! If we do not learn to replicate this firearm, then I foresee that our Army will eventually fall behind those Western Kingdoms!"

The Empress Dowager scoffed at this comment before reprimanding the Admiral for his seemingly preposterous insinuation.

"You are an Admiral, not a General; it is not your job to think about the affairs of the Army! You overstep your bounds, Lin Feng!"

When Zhu Li heard these words, his brows peaked with interest; as far as he was aware, the world revolved around the Ming Dynasty. The idea that some barbarians had created a powerful Kingdom intrigued his young mind. Almost as if it were something out of a fictional tale. Thus the boy Emperor called out to his mother and Admiral with an excited tone in his voice.

"Bring the item to me, and I will determine whether or not it is of any value!"

Though the Empress Dowager may be the true power behind the Throne, Zhu Li was still the public face; thus his mother was forced to respect his position. As such, the Empress Dowager scowled for but a moment before she put on a motherly facade.

The Admiral known as Lin Feng instantly walked towards the young Emperor, where he held onto a blanket; inside this blanket was a powerful weapon from the West that he had encountered on his travels with the great fleet of the Ming Dynasty.

Lin Feng knelt before his Emperor and unwrapped the silk blanket to reveal a battle-worn firearm. This firearm was none other than an Arkebuse used by the Byzantine Armies on the field of battle in North Africa. Zhu Li gazed upon this device with excitement as he inquired about its origin and function.

"What is this, and where did you find it?"

With a stoic expression on his face, Lin Feng began to spin a grand tale about how he came across such a mighty weapon from the West.

"You see, your Majesty, As you know, I have been leading your great treasure fleet across the oceans in an attempt to spread the glory of our Empire. While far away in a land known as the Timurid Empire, I came across a nobleman who was more than happy to pay tribute to you. He gave me this firearm, which he claims was employed in a great battle in the land known as Egypt.

It had been acquired by a lowly scavenger whose name remains unknown. However, this man sold the weapon, and it eventually made its way to the Timurid Nobleman! Supposedly it was employed by a great Kingdom known as Byzantium!

However, the nobleman who gave me this weapon assured me that it was not constructed in Byzantium but even further west in the lands known as Europe. Where precisely this weapon was manufactured, the Timurid Nobleman is unsure of. Still, wherever it was built, it is said that it is a Kingdom where rivers of molten steel flow through its capital city, and technology is advanced to the level that rivals the gods!"

The Empress Dowager immediately scoffed at this notion; this entire story was simply ludicrous. She could hardly believe the Admiral had bought into such ridiculous rumors. As for Zhu Li, his eyes were sparkling with delight as he asked for further information on the weapon.

"So, how does this weapon work?"

Lin Feng began to describe the weapon's function with a smile on his face.

"First one fills the bore of this firearm with powder, followed by a lead ball. Then after they have packed it down with the ramrod they light a match, which is attached to this hook. After doing so, they fill powder in this pan and then pull this lever here, which sends the match onto the pan, igniting the gunpowder and propelling the lead ball downrange. Supposedly it renders any form of armor utterly useless at close range."

The young Emperor had an excited expression on his face as he envisioned this weapon in use. As such, he quickly made a decree that was much to his mother's ire.

"We must replicate this weapon and see if it truly lives up to the tales! Send word to the Army; I want them to study and reproduce this weapon as quickly as possible!"

The Admiral smiled upon hearing the Emperor take his side; after doing so, he gave a smug glance over to the Empress Dowager, where he continued boasting of his victory in silence. The boy's mother struggled to contain her nerves as she witnessed this; however, ultimately, she managed to calm her wrath before commenting on the matter to her son.

"If that is what the Emperor wishes, then I will make sure it is done!"

However, Zhu Li gazed upon his mother with contempt as he countered her words.

"No, mother, you are much too busy aiding me in managing the realm, I will leave this matter to the military!"

For but a brief second the Empress Dowager gave her son a murderous glare that the boy Emperor met with one of his own. However, in the very next moment, she returned to her loving facade and nodded her head in silence.

"Very well, if that is what you want, so be it."

After saying this, Empress Dowager departed, leaving her son by his lonesome. As for Admiral Lin Feng, he was dismissed by Zhu Li shortly after. The boy sat upon the Dragon Throne, contemplating how to retain the power bestowed upon him by the heavens. If he left his mother to her own devices, she would usurp what little authority remained in his hands.

After a few moments of silence, the Emperor sighed and rose to his feet. After doing so, he departed from the throne room, where he proceeded down a hallway in the royal palace. Eventually, he came across a small room in the corner of the building. Zhu Li hesitated for a few moments before knocking on the door. A weak and timid voice called out from the other side; there was a hint of fright in its tone as the words resounded throughout the corridor.

"Who is it?"

Zhu Li gulped the saliva that had pooled up in his mouth before hardening his resolve. After doing so, he called out to the anxious voice behind the door.

"It is Zhu Li!"

He could hear the fear in the voice wash away as the door suddenly opened and revealed a six-year-old girl who practically looked like a porcelain doll. This girl had albinism and thus had pale skin, white hair, and pink eyes. A warm smile was on her face as she latched onto the Emperor before saying the words.

"Big Brother is back!"

The boy-emperor patted his little sister on the head and entered the room, shutting the door behind him. After entering, he sat down, while the young girl prepared him some tea. After doing so, she sat down across from her brother with a happy smile on her face. It had been some time since her precious big brother had come to visit her, and thus she was filled with joy at the moment, that is until he asked the question on his mind.

"How has mother been treating you, Jia Li?"

The moment the girl named Jia Li had heard this, her expression sank, and her glance shifted away from her brother's eyes. That action alone was enough to give the boy Emperor an answer. His fists curled



with rage as he understood what had transpired in his absence. The poor girl had suffered their mother's abuse and neglect for too long. Upon seeing her brother was angry, the small girl known as Jia Li grasped ahold of his hand with her own two dainty paws and gazed upon him with a bittersweet smile.

"I'm okay..."

Upon hearing this, Zhu Li could no longer contain the tears in his eyes and immediately latched onto his little sister before making her a solemn vow.

"When I am older and have taken back the power of the Throne, I promise I will make that woman pay for what she had done to you!"

The young girl had a bitter smile on her doll-like face as she held onto her brother, comforting him. It would be well over an hour before the boy Emperor emerged from his sister's room. When he did so there was a hint of newfound purpose in his eyes. He had concluded that if he wished to end his mother's tyranny, he would need the backing of the Army; luckily for him, a new and powerful invention had just entered his hands.

Unknowingly by virtue of providing weapons to his allies, Berengar's influence had begun to spread to the far east. It would be some time before Berengar's future Empire encountered the Ming Dynasty. When it finally did, there would be monumental changes to the timeline that was partially a result of his interference in this world.

#### Chapter 440 - The Horseman Of War

The day had finally come, Berengar sat on the black leather saddle of his horse whose name was Glory. In his hand was a hemp cigarette which he smoked to calm his anxiety. Trailing behind him was an army of 50,000 men who had just breached the Portuguese Border without incident.

The young Austrian King was dressed unusually. He did not choose his everyday field uniform as he led his Cavalry. Instead, he wore the uniform of the Austrian Hussars, which was based upon the uniforms issued to German Hussars during the Great War of his past life.

Atop his head was a fur hat, which in its center there was a bold Totenkopf emblazoned upon it. This hat was inspired by the legendary "Death's Head Hussars" of his past life and was the standard uniform of all Hussars within his Army's Ranks.

As for the weapons they were equipped with, a G22 Rifle slung around their backs and a Cavalry Saber strapped to their waists. Berengar was supplied similarly, fully prepared to engage in combat with the enemy wherever they might appear.

The majority of the Army was comprised of Granadan and Byzantine Infantry. As for the Austrian soldiers, all that remained within the Iberian Peninsula were two brigades, one of Cavalry and another of Artillery. Other units that still existed in the field were specialized soldiers embedded deep behind enemy lines, accurately assessing the enemy forces and their positions.

As Glory strode forth, showing off its beautiful red coat, the Strategos Palladius Angelus rode next to the Austrian King. As he gazed upon the eager expression on Berengar's face and that of the Austrian Cavalry, which displayed their inherent bloodlust, he began to quote scripture.

"And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword."

Berengar reflected on this for a brief moment before chuckling; as he did so, he began to make a jest towards the aging General from the East.

"Are you implying that I am The Horseman of War?"

Palladius gazed upon the scene of the mighty Army that had gathered for a single purpose, to destroy the Kingdom of Portugal, and nodded his head with a stoic expression before speaking his thoughts on the matter.

"If the shoe fits..."

This response immediately caused Berengar to laugh as he looked back upon his Army. He raised his sword in the air and encouraged his Cavalry with a sarcastic command.

"You hear that, boys? I am the Horseman of War! So, ensure that no flesh is spared!"

The Cavalrymen among Berengar's ranks began to break out into the laughter as they heard this jest. If their King was the Horsemen of War, that meant they were an army of the damned. As for the Granadan and Byzantine troops, they had a less enthusiastic response to Berengar's sense of humor.

After all, unlike the Austrian soldiers, these men were very superstitious and steadfast in their religious beliefs. Thus they sat in silence as they prayed to their respective deities for forgiveness. With a foreboding aura, the Army of the Tripple Alliance Marched into the Kingdom of Portugal without incident.

It did not take long for conflict to begin; Berengar's Army had advanced so rapidly that they had wholly caught the brigand warbands who occupied the Southern Portuguese villages off guard. The moment they gazed upon the massive Army on the horizon, the deserters and criminals began to flee for their lives.

However, Berengar refused to allow the men to retreat. As such, he unslung his rifle and flipped off the safety as he aimed down his sights at a man roughly three hundred yards out. He silently squeezed the trigger, and the thunder of his rifle went downrange and through the back of the fleeing criminal.

Blood splattered onto the land, and the projectile pierced through the hostile target's armor as if it were butter before embedding itself in the bloody mud below. With this action, Berengar gave his order to the Austrian Cavalry.

"Kill them all! Leave no brigand alive!"

With this command, the 5,000 Austrian Cavalrymen charged forth with their weapons in hand, rapidly firing and reloading their new weapons on the move, gunning down the few hundred brigands without any form of mercy.

In the end, the deserters of the Portuguese Army who had formed a small Warband and occupied this land were gunned down without mercy. As Berengar rode into the village and gazed upon their corpses, he spat upon the corpse of one of the slain men before commenting on the matter.

"Not even worth their weight in piss..."

Palladius gazed upon Berengar as he heard this with a weary expression. The Infantry had not even fired a shot, yet the Cavalry had so quickly slain the Warband that occupied this village. As he could see, the villagers had been mistreated during the occupation of the brigands.

Those who weren't outright slain or raped huddled in fear of what the Austrian's might do to them. Upon seeing this, the Strategos of the Balkans quickly asked what Berengar intended to do with them.

"What will happen to the villagers?"

Berengar glanced over at the aging General from the East and responded with a stoic expression.

"Leave them be, they pose no threat, and there are no longer any hostiles within the village. There is no purpose for a senseless slaughter of innocents."

For all his bluster, the Austrian King abided by his own rules of war. Thus under his command, the Austrian soldiers treated the villagers they came across rather cordially, offering medical assistance and spare supplies to the people who suffered under the collapse of their Kingdom.

After treating the civilians, the Army continued on their journey. Along the way, they came across many villages in similar situations; under Berengar's orders, the brigands and deserters who occupied these villages were slaughtered without the slightest hint of mercy. As for the villagers, if they did not resist the invasion, they were spared and treated well.

Eventually, the Army of the Triple Alliance finally came across a sizeable force located within the walls of the City of Faro. Despite the bankruptcy of the crown, mayors of local towns managed to maintain some degree of wealth and control over their City and their Garrisons.

Upon seeing the Austrian Army enter its borders, the Garrison of the City was immediately on alert as they began to load their trebuchets for war. However, against the superior firepower and range of the Austrian Artillery, such weapons were useless.

Berengar had a wide grin on his face as he gazed through his binoculars and witnessed the sight of the enemy preparing for combat. If they had outright surrendered, he would have been disappointed.

However, by loading their trebuchets, the enemy declared their intent to resist; as such, the Austrian King ordered the 1st Artillery Brigade to set up their guns and bombard the city's walls. The soldiers of the triple alliance waited on standby as the 7.5cm FK 22 cannons were set up into position and loaded.

After a few moments, the first barrage of cannons went off; as their roars filled the sky, the shells rained down upon the Medieval walls. In a blast of hellish fire, the once-mighty stone walls immediately crumbled upon the impact of the High-Explosive shells utilized by the Austrian Army.

Though Palladius had heard rumors of how effective the new Austrian cannons were, he had never witnessed their destructive power until now. He gazed in awe as he saw the city's walls come crumbling down from a single barrage.

He immediately dreaded the possibility of War with Austria and thanked God that the Princess had married this cruel and brutal man. For under the fire of such overwhelming force, even the mighty Theodosian Walls, which had stood the test of time, would fall apart as if they were made of mud.

However, the Artillery did not stop with a single barrage; they instantly loaded the second barrage and fired another seventy shells into the city with a complete and total disregard for life and property.

Berengar had devised his own rules of war; among these rules was the stipulation that his soldiers were not allowed to massacre unarmed civilians. However, this law was limited; For example, collateral damage was wholly disregarded.

In Berengar's mind, the primary objective of war should be to wage it in the most efficient manner possible, ensure the quickest victory, and maintain minimal casualties among his troops. Thus, shelling an enemy position was considered valid and lawful even if civilians were harmed in the process.

Destroying an enemy-occupied city, which would otherwise result in intensive urban warfare and massive casualties among his troops, was also considered valid regardless of how many civilians lived there.

After all, he had witnessed the inefficiency of the American Military in the Middle East as they risked their soldiers' lives in an attempt to limit civilian casualties of the enemy state. In his past life, thousands of American men had died when a carpet bombing of a hostile-occupied city could have easily handled the situation.

Thus the shelling continued, as hundreds of shells were launched upon the city, devastating its Garrison and civilian population. After roughly 1,000 shells were fired on the City, Berengar held up his hand, signaling the Artillery to cease their operations. After doing so, he gave the command that would ultimately seal the fate of the City of Faro.

"Take the City and show no mercy! You have my permission to kill any man, woman, or child who shows even the slightest sign of armed resistance to our conquest!"

With this order given, 50,000 men charged towards the crumbled walls of the city; their goal was simple, to put down any form of resistance that remained. However, after such a hellish barrage, not a single soul that survived was willing to resist any further.

The remaining garrison members immediately threw down their weapons and submitted to their conquerors. Thousands of people lie dead without the garrison even firing a shot. There was no purpose in remaining defiant when faced with such overwhelming firepower.

Thus Berengar and his Army had captured the first major city of Portugal. As for the rest of the Kingdom, it would slowly but surely be invaded by the Army of the Triple Alliance in the days to come.

The devastation that followed in the wake of Berengar's advance throughout Portugal and the reports of the Austrian King riding on the back of a red horse would forever depict King Berengar von Kufstein as the personification of war among the Christian world.

