

# Steel 441

## Chapter 441 - French Ambitions

While Berengar had begun his Conquest of the Kingdom of Portugal in the name of the Emirate of Granada, another war was waging throughout Europe, and that was in the heart of France. Due to Austrian interference, the factions that opposed the French Crown were equipped with a fair amount of firearms, thus turning the tides of war.

Under the guise of representatives from the now-defunct Iberian Union, the duchy of Aquitaine, and the Duchy of Burgundy, who was both in open rebellion against King Gilles de Valois, were well equipped to deal with the ongoing war effort.

Despite the collapse of the Iberian Union, Berengar's agents still managed to supply the enemies of France by claiming to be representatives of Aragon. Thus the arms trade between Austria and the rebellious French Duchies remained uninterrupted.

Despite the use of firearms by the enemies of France, the King had remained steadfast in his unwillingness to make use of the weapons provided to him by the Austrian Crown as a gift. For if he did so, he knew that the English King would undoubtedly make use of the scandal to cement his claim to the French Kingdom further.

Thus the Kingdom of France found itself in a rock and a hard place as they continued to wage war against their enemies, both internal and external. Few allies had backed the French Crown, and now they found themselves further isolated as the common people had begun to riot at the instigation of undercover Austrian Agents.

While this was ongoing, Prince Aubry was sitting within his chambers. At the moment, he was applying Austrian cosmetics such as lipstick to his feminine face. The Prince of France was dressed in a luxurious baby blue ball gown in the new style that had become common in the Kingdom of Austria.

Aubry had paid a substantial sum to acquire the dresses that pertained to the Austrian sense of Fashion. While he was applying his makeup, the Prince heard a knock on the door, which he quickly answered to with a lighthearted tone.

"It is open!"

Upon saying this, the Prince heard the door creak open, which revealed the appearance of his sister Sibilla. Though beautiful in her own right, she had always felt envious of her brother's cutesy and extraordinarily feminine appearance.

In a way, she was responsible for the way he had turned out, and after gazing upon Aubry's current appearance, a frown spread across her lips. However, rather than find conflict with her brother, she quickly began to address her reason for visiting.

"Portugal will fall to Austria and its allies within the next three months. Castile and Aragon are on the verge of being united and supplying our enemies. Father does not want to admit it, but if we wish to win this war, then we will need the support of Austria."

Aubry did not gaze upon his sister. Instead, he focused on applying blush to his cheeks; as he used his makeup, he spoke in a disinterested voice towards his sister's claims.

"What does that have to do with me?"

A cruel smile etched itself upon Sibilla's face as she approached her brother and tilted his head towards her face so she could look him in the eyes. After doing so, she kissed her brother on the lips before whispering something in his ear.

"I need you to personally visit the Austrian King when he returns from his little war. I don't trust anyone but my precious little brother to properly seduce the man and convince him to support our family's interests."

Aubry smiled upon hearing this message and nodded his head thrice; after doing so, he went back to applying his makeup before addressing his sister's request.

"That is fine by me; I've been meaning to meet this King Berengar. From what I hear, he is quite the capable ruler. If he is half as handsome as people say he is, then I am sure he will make a better lover than that limp dick bastard who turned against father."

The Prince was referring to his previous lover, the Duke of Burgundy. Sibilla knew this and immediately rolled her eyes before commenting further.

"I assume you will be able to complete the task?"

Aubry licked his lips with an excited expression as he turned around and faced his sister with a smile.

"I have always wondered what a German man tastes like!"

A look of disgust appeared on Princess Sibilla's face as she heard this; just how perverse was her little brother? However, it was quickly replaced with a sadistic grin as the young woman cupped her brother's face with her hands before whispering something else in his dainty ears.

"If you succeed in this task, I will reward you handsomely!"

A twinkle appeared in the eyes of the feminine Prince as he nodded his head once more, committing to the cause.

"You can rest assured, sis; I will make sure that King Berengar supplies our forces with the weapons they need, even if I have to give him my body in return!"

After hearing this, Sibilla smiled once more before departing for the door; she left a single phrase behind as she left her brother alone to finish his makeup.

"I am counting on it..."

After saying this, the Princess of France disappeared from her little brother's quarters, where the Prince got up from his seat and twirled around in his frilly dress while gazing upon his appearance in the mirror.

A feminine smile spread itself across his luscious pink lips as he winked and blew a kiss towards his reflection; as he did so, he made a solemn vow.

"Berengar von Kufstein, you will be mine!"

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While encamped in the Portuguese wilderness, Berengar felt a shiver down his spine before sneezing. He immediately wiped his nose before commenting on the situation.

"I better not be getting sick!"

He was far too busy of a man to be hampered by illness and thus he had resolved to take the necessary precautions to prevent such a fate. He had no way of knowing that the French Prince was at this moment conspiring to seduce him so that he would aid the de Valois dynasty. Instead he shifted his attention back to the map laid bare across his table.

A group of wooden figures represented the enemy forces. According to his recon units, the next city on their list of targets held a combined power of 20,000 soldiers within its vicinity. Most of these men were peasants from foreign countries. However, it was not something he felt the need to be concerned about.

His army was significantly larger and contained more than enough firepower to annihilate the enemy before they could cause any harm. Luckily for Bernegar and his army, King Luiz was forced to split the peasant crusaders into smaller armies to wrestle control over the major cities from the brigands and disloyal mayors.

At the current rate, this war would be over in a matter of months; then, he could finally return home to his family. Berengar shivered to think about how he would reject Henrietta's advances or how he would introduce his newest bride to his family. However, the fact remained that he was the man of the house and the King of Austria. Since he had decided to take a fourth bride, he would have to lay down the law to his family.

Berengar had no idea that the young Prince of France had set his eyes upon him. For if he did, he would likely take the first ship he could get ahold of and sail to the New World, never to return. Of course, he remained entirely unaware of Prince Aubry's machinations or that of his sister Princess Sibilla.

Thus the Austrian King had a broad smile on his face as he thought about returning home after so long. Though Granada was a beautiful place, he vastly preferred the cold mountain air of his Capital embedded deep within the Austrian Alps. He began to wonder whether or not his wives had given birth yet.

There were so many things that were bound to have transpired while he was away; he looked forward to seeing how advanced Austria had become in his absence and how far its railways had stretched. These were the thoughts on the young monarch's mind as he sat within his encampment, resting for the night.

By the dawn of the next day, he and his army would be on the march once more, for this war was far from over. By now, he had gained a fierce reputation for the devastation he had left in his wake. Everywhere the Army of the Triple Alliance went, death and despair remained behind.

They had slaughtered Brigands, deserters, crusaders, and the Portuguese Army on their journey, and there was far more blood to be shed in this conflict. However, Berengar thought nothing of it, whether his mind was conscious was numb after years of war, or he had grown into a sociopath; when confronted with such thoughts, he remained stoic and instead lit a hemp cigarette.

After taking a short break from his task, he snuffed out the oil lamp within his tent and climbed into bed. Tomorrow more blood would be shed in the pursuit of Conquest. He would rest easy on this night and set off first thing in the morning.

## Chapter 442 - Sacking Of Lisbon

The sound of gunfire echoed in the air as the defenders of the City of Lisbon desperately held on to the last man. Despite the overwhelming numbers and power of the enemy they fought, they continued to

defend their city against the invaders bravely. It had been weeks since the Triple Alliance first set forth into the Kingdom of Portugal, and now they had finally breached the Capital.

Berengar sat upon horseback as he strode forth through the ruined city walls, leading the Cavalry charge with a rifle in hand. He rapidly pulled back the bolt of his rifle before chambering the next round and squeezing the trigger, sending the projectile downrange and into the torso of the target.

The power of the 8mm round blasted the soldier's breastplate apart and dug its way through his innards, splattering what remained of his internal organs across the stone walls of the city. While the Austrian cavalry gunned down any man foolish enough to come close, they were flanked by the Granadan and Byzantine Infantry, who fired their muskets into the fray and clashed against the enemy with their bayonets.

Despite a hellish artillery barrage that had brought their city to ruin, the surviving defenders of Lisbon refused to surrender their arms. Instead, they fought with every intent to save their dying Kingdom. These men had not been paid in months and were underequipped. Yet, they mustered their courage with fierce determination and battled against the invaders.

However, against overwhelming numbers and firepower, there was only so much that they could do. Thus, the battle began to shift in favor of the Triple Alliance the longer it went on. Berengar continued to fire his weapon towards the enemy lines; each shot fired managed to find its way into the target's body, reaping their life in the process.

After firing the fifth round of his bolt action rifle, he quickly retrieved a full stripper clip from his web gear, where he proceeded to load his weapon; after ensuring all five rounds entered the built-in magazine, He slammed the bolt home before raising his gun and firing at more targets.

While the muskets utilized by his allies battered the makeshift defenses of the hostile garrison, the true penetrative power came from the 5,000 Cavalrymen armed with the superior bolt action rifles. The men who were willing to waste their lives in a foolish attempt to resist the invasion of their city were cut down like wheat to the scythe.

As the blockade that was set up to prevent the advance of the Tripple Alliance came crumbling down, Berengar forced his horse, whose name was Glory forward, to hop over the piles of dead bodies and further advance into the city. The cavalrymen by his side rode forth into the narrow paths of the town as they gunned down any man who still bore arms.

The Granadan and Byzantine soldiers followed behind, opening fire on any soldier still standing in their path. Eventually, the massive horde made their way to the City's Castle, where they intended to drag the Portuguese King out from his hiding place and force him to surrender his Kingdom to Granada.

However, when Berengar and his men arrived at the City's Castle, they found it completely unoccupied. The gates were wide open as if they were welcoming the soldiers of the Triple Alliance to the seat of Portuguese power. Berengar was cautious of this scene and immediately ordered a unit of Infantry to go in and clear the building.

"Go forth and clear the building; I want King Luiz dragged before me within the hour!"

Upon hearing the orders of the Allied Commander, the Granadan and Byzantine troops saluted the young Austrian King before entering the Castle. As they did so, Berengar sat back with Palladius, who commented on the odd situation.

"I think that Portugal's King has long since fled the city and abandoned his people. He is probably marching north as we speak to the city of Porto..."

Berengar gazed upon the open Castle with a disgruntled expression; since the soldiers had entered the building, no single sound of conflict had occurred. What Palladius said was starting to appear to be the reality he faced.

Before long, the Soldiers who went into the interior of the large fortified structure came out with nervous expressions. There was not a single living soul within the Castle. Nor was there any sign of the Royal Family's bodies. It was as Palladius had said; they had long since fled the city. After hearing this report, Berengar stomped his foot in fury and cursed in his native tongue.

"Fuck! This bastard is determined to make this war lasts as long as possible, isn't he?"

After venting his frustrations, Berengar gave his decree on how to handle the city.

"The Royal Family is gone; they have left behind the city for us to plunder! I say we take advantage of it, loot everything of value, we will chase after Portugal's cowardly King once we have had our fill!"

After giving this order, the Granadan and Byzantine army began to tear the city apart, looking for every piece of silver or gold that they could find. Anything of any value was stripped from the city and sent to Granada.

As for Berengar, he sat back with his cavalry as he watched the looting occur. Those civilians who had survived the invasion were left cowering on the side as the foreign soldiers tore their city apart. They began to curse their King beneath their breath, as they realized now that they had been abandoned to their fate.

Berengar began to smoke a hemp cigarette as he sat on his horseback next to the Strategos of the Balkans, who began to comment on the ongoing looting.

"Are you sure this is wise? Granada will be conquering these lands; will this not foster resentment from the people to their new overlords?"

A plume of smoke came out of the young Monarch's mouth as he addressed his allies' concerns.

"Undoubtedly, however, Granada needs the wealth; this war effort had not been easy on their coffers. Regardless of how we handle the civilians, there will be an inherent resentment towards a foreign power that now rules over them. As long as it is managed to a tolerable degree, there is nothing to worry about.

If these fools want to cause trouble in the future, they only need to look back upon this day and see what happens when they resist the authority of Granada and its allies."

Palladius sighed as he heard this response before asking the following question on his mind.

"Can I have one of those?"

He was referring to the Hemp cigarettes when he asked this question. Thus Berengar nodded his head before dragging another one of the smokes out from his container and handing it over to the Byzantine General, where he then helped him light the cigarette.



The two men smoked in silence for the remainder of the looting. The city of Lisbon would never forget the humiliation they had suffered this day. However, Berengar did not care; such a troublesome population was not his to manage. Instead, he gazed off into the distance towards the city of Porto, where he swore in his mind that he would get ahold of the Portuguese King and make him surrender before this war was over.

The soldiers of the Triple alliance dwelled within the city they had plundered during the night. The following morning they would embark on a chase to see if they could capture the enemy King who fled his Capital for the next best city.

However, tonight the soldiers drank and feasted as they celebrated this victory. For they had no idea what they would encounter the next day, and it was best to enjoy your life when you could. Berengar retired to the city's Castle, where he slept in the royal bed-chamber of the Portuguese King.

As he lay on the silk sheets, he thought about what he would do when this war was over. Although he immensely enjoyed fighting on the battlefield, his technology was advancing rapidly; soon, there would be no need for him to visit the frontlines personally. Would he be an armchair general, sitting in the war room in Kufstein while his forces battled foreign Empires across the globe?

Or would he continue to lead his soldiers through every battle until he could no longer do so? These were the questions that haunted his mind as he drifted into a sweet slumber. He was sure of but one thing, he deeply regretted not taking a Portuguese woman to his bed because the night was cold, and he was truly alone in this vast Castle that belonged to a foreign monarch.

#### Chapter 443 - Tied Up Like A Common Hog

Having sacked the capital city of the Kingdom of Portugal, Berengar had begun to lead the chase in the direction of the City of Porto, where he believed the hostile King had fled to. His ultimate goal was to end this war quickly. Thus, he planned to capture the King of Portugal and force his surrender.

Unfortunately, after laying siege to the City of Lisbon, the cowardly King was nowhere to be found. He had fled the City he was tasked with defending and left its people to their fate. Thus, Berengar now not only wanted to force the man to surrender, but he also desired to punish him for his dishonorable actions.

After all, if there was one thing that Berengar hated, it was a coward. A King who would leave his soldiers to be slaughtered so that he could buy some time for his escape was no king at all, at least not in the eyes of the Reichsmarschall of Austria.

At the moment, Berengar rode upon his red horse, whose name was Glory, as he trod forth, with his army of roughly 50,000 men behind him. It had been days since they had conquered Lisbon, and though a small force was tasked to stay behind and manage the conquered region, most of the troops belonging to the Triple Alliance were now in the field.

Scouts had advanced, searching for any sign of the King of Portugal and his host. Finally, after days of searching, they had been spotted. One of the scouts among Berengar's forces returned to the main army with an excited expression on his face.

The moment Berengar saw this, he smiled cruelly; at last, he would be made aware of the enemy's whereabouts. The Scout eagerly approached his King before reporting the intelligence he had come to receive.

"Your Majesty, we have spotted a caravan heading towards the border of Castile that we believe to belong to King Felipe and his family. It appears he has decided to completely abandon Portugal to our conquest and intends to hide among the Castilians with who we have a treaty. "

The moment Berengar heard these words, he spat upon the ground in utter contempt. He could not believe that such a coward ruled over a once-mighty Kingdom like Portugal. If Berengar wanted to intercept the man, he was left with one option. He quickly questioned the soldier about the distance between his army and the party of the Portuguese King.

"How many days ride are we from his location?"

The Scout immediately pointed in the direction where he spotted the target and gave the available information.

"About three days ride towards the East from here. If you hurry, you can catch him before he reaches the border!"

With this said, Berengar snapped the reins of his horse and rode back to Palladius, where he gave him the orders he had devised within his mind.

"We have received word that King Luiz and his host rides for Castile; I will lead the Cavalry to the East where we will intercept him. You are to lead the majority of the army towards Porto. I want the City under siege by the time I return with the Portuguese King. Let us finally end this war!"

After saying this, Berengar did not wait for a response; his orders were absolute. Instead, he rode off and sounded the bugle where the 5,000 Cavalrymen followed in pursuit. They would ride for the next three days, with intermittent breaks before finding their target.

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King Luiz was exhausted as he neared the Castilian border. He had given up his dignity as a monarch and fled the City of Lisbon when he heard reports of the Army of the Triple Alliance rapidly advancing through his southern borders.

Despite his best efforts to control the chaos in his territory, it had rapidly spiraled out of his control. With Brigands declaring themselves lords of their territories, and a lack of currency to stabilize his collapsing economy, he had completely and utterly failed to defend his territory.

Reflecting upon this, Luiz cursed the ministers who raided his treasury and fled for foreign countries. If not for them, he may have been able to mount a proper defense against the invaders from the South. However, he had no idea that Lisbon had so rapidly fallen, nor that the Austrian Cavalry quickly was approaching his location.

Instead, he gazed upon his wife and children with a bitter smile. He had managed to scrounge up the last of his wealth so that he could live a decent life in Castile as a monarch in exile. After all, the Aragonese Crown was close to unifying the two Iberian Kingdoms; surely his former ally would welcome him with open arms?

However, just when he was about to enter his new life in the neighboring Kingdom, Luiz witnessed a group of horsemen gathering on the hill above them. The more time passed, the more men arrived until he gazed in horror as he noticed thousands of Cavalrymen flying the banners of Austria, charging towards him at full speed.

"Dear God in heaven..."

The man's words were cut short as the thunder of a rifle echoed in the air, and a projectile whizzed past his face. This action had frightened the King to such a degree that he immediately rushed his mount to gallop forward at full speed, leaving his own family behind to be captured or killed by the invading force.

The Queen of Portugal and her young children gazed in shock as their King abandoned them for the brief glimmer of hope that he could safely make it past the Castilian borders. Thousands of horses rushed past them in the next moment, with a few hundred staying behind to secure their persons.

Berengar was at the head of the Cavalry as his mighty steed rapidly caught up to the King's mule. He had purchased a pack mule as his mount and fled under obscurity to save expenses and hide his identity. However, when faced with a proud Iberian Warhorse, the mule could not compete with its pursuit.

Berengar pulled out a weapon he had designed in a camp precisely to capture the Portuguese King. In his hand were bolas made from ordinary rope and stones; the mighty Austrian King twirled the weapon in his hands before casting them off towards his Portuguese rival.

With a skillful toss, the bolas flew through the air and wrapped around the man's upper body, forcing him to fall from his saddle and onto the ground below, where he struggled to get out from the device. Berengar wasted no time and immediately dismounted from his horse, where he approached the Portuguese King on the ground and began to fasten ropes around his limbs as if he were tying up a common hog.

The Portuguese King began to curse at his captor in his native tongue, which was met with a firm kick to the teeth. The once-proud King grunted in pain as a molar was dislodged from his jaw before falling into a slight pool of blood on the sand below.

As he gazed upon the man that stood in front of him, the fury immediately faded from his eyes as he saw the vicious smile upon his captor's face. As if Berengar was the devil playing with his prey, the young Austrian King picked up the restrained Portuguese Monarch and tossed him onto his shoulder before dragging him over to his horse and placing him on its back.

Despite the wound he had suffered, the Portuguese King refused to remain silent; as such, Berengar reached onto his belt and grabbed a handkerchief where he wrapped it around the man's mouth as a makeshift gag, silencing him completely.

As he was fastening the Portuguese King to his horse, the Colonel in charge of the Cavalry Brigade approached him on horseback and witnessed the sight. Upon seeing the wicked grin on his Monarch's face as he subdued a rival King, the Colonel felt a chill down his spine. Despite this instinct, he managed to find his voice as he began to speak to Berengar.

"Reichsmarschall! What should we do with the members of King Luiz's host?"

Berengar shifted his glance over to the King's family, who was both frightened due to their circumstances and outraged at their fallen King's behavior. Upon witnessing their conflicted expressions, the Austrian King laughed before making his decision.

"Bring them with us to Porto. I want the Portuguese People to see what has become of their cowardly King and his family!"

After saying this, Berengar jumped onto Glory's saddle, where he began to take off in the direction of his main army. By now, they should be approaching the City of Porto, which was the last bastion controlled by the forces loyal to the Portuguese Crown.

As the Austrian Cavalry strode forth into the fading sun, Berengar sang the words to the song "I wanna be in the Cavalry" with a vicious grin on his face and a prisoner tied to the back of his horse. He was departing to the next battlefield that was sure to be the end of this long conflict.

The sun rose in the east, and with it, the shelling of the city of Porto had continued under the command of Strategos Palladius. The Austrian Artillery brigade had been unleashing its firepower on the unsuspecting town throughout the entire night.

While Berengar was off on a quest to capture the Portuguese King who had begun to flee to the neighboring Kingdom of Castile, the main Army had been in the process of journeying to the city of Porto to lay siege to it.

Several days had passed, and Palladius had made sure not to shell it until the night prior, despite surrounding the city. He wanted to give Berengar some time to complete his objective before turning the city into a ruin. The destructive power of the cannons in use by Berengar's forces was something the aging Byzantine General swore he would never become accustomed to.

After an entire night of launching countless shells upon the city, it appeared as if it had been carpet-bombed from the sky above. There was not a single building in the town that was completely intact. Palladius had begun to doubt whether or not anyone was still alive.

Unlike the bombardment that the Austrian Army had put on the city of Florence, the field guns used in this 8-hour shelling were far more advanced and capable of firing 10x the amount of shells in a minute than the previous 1417 12 lb Field Guns were capable of.

Thus while only a few hours had passed since the bombardment had begun, thousands of shells had been launched from the 70 guns onto the city of Porto. As the sun rose further in the air, the sight of thousands of horses and the men who ride them could be seen in the distance.

Strategos Palladius gazed upon the approaching horsemen with a wide grin on his face. The men were flying the Austrian banners, and thus it was pretty obvious the King had returned. Thus he waved his hand, ceasing the bombardment and forcing it to a complete and total halt. Just as he was preparing to rush the survivors, the Cavalry had arrived.

Berengar rode proudly into the established siege camp with the Portuguese King tied to the back of his horse. The man was in rough shape; throughout the journey to Porto, he had received several beatings from the Austrian Monarch.

Among the ranks of the Austrian Cavalry were the other members of Luiz's host who had been dragged with them to the last bastion of Portuguese Sovereignty. Everywhere else within this once proud Kingdom was now either occupied by the Triple Alliance or any number of local warlords and despots.

Though Berengar suspected he would be able to officially end the war with his actions on this day, he knew that subjugating the various despots that occupied 75% of the Kingdom would be a task that Granada would have to undertake for years to come.

However, on the bright side, such a thing would allow Berengar to send his newest recruits into a proxy war to get the actual battlefield experience they would need to dominate this world in their future conquests. Thus he was pretty pleased with the result.

After dismounting from his steed, Berengar dragged Luiz from the back of his saddle and handed him over to the Granadan soldiers; the once-proud Portuguese King was now a prisoner of the Emirate of Granada. After doing so, he approached Palladius and saluted the man before asking for a status report.

"What's the situation? Has the city surrendered yet? Or are they still resisting?"

The answer to this was quite obvious, judging by how the Army of roughly 50,000 men surrounded the dilapidated city and were not inside it. Upon hearing this Palladius sighed before updating the Austrian King on what he had been doing in this time.

"Your Majesty, the city has been shelled for the past 8 hours; I don't even know if there is anyone left alive within its gates!"

Berengar scoffed at this comment before grabbing hold of one of Luiz's family members. He wrote a letter and handed it to the captive as he did so.

"Take this to the city, and if there is anyone capable of receiving this document, then give it to them. If you do not, I will kill your mother and your siblings!"

The small child gazed in fear at the foreign King who had issued such a bold threat. However, he managed to find his resolve and nodded before running off towards the ruined city. When Palladius saw this, he asked Berengar the question on his mind.

"What was in the letter?"

A wicked grin appeared on the young monarch's face as he grasped upon the veteran Strategos' shoulder and educated him on what he had just done.

"Not much; I merely informed them of their King's cowardly actions and implored them to surrender. I also may have made a threat in regards to what I would do if they continued to resist. Something along the lines of destroying the rest of the city, and everyone in it."

Palladius gazed upon Berengar with a cautious expression before voicing his thoughts allowed.

"You are ruthless; you know that, don't you?"

In response to this, Berengar merely chuckled before stating his opinion on the matter.

"I want to go home to my family, and I have grown weary of this conflict. I have spent far too much time bailing my allies out of their mess. The sooner I can wash my hands of this dumpster fire, the better."

Palladius sighed as he nodded his head in response; he understood Berengar's reasoning for his brutality, even if he disagreed with it. After a while, a man emerged from the ruined city gates with a white flag in his hands and several hundred soldiers by his side. The men tossed their arms away before approaching the camp of the Triple Alliance. The man who held the white flag began to introduce himself when he finally stood across from the commanders of the Army that had so ruthlessly bombarded his city.

"I am Duarte Batista, mayor of this city. Under the terms you have presented, I surrender unto you King Berengar of Austria, as well as your Allies. I only make one small request, that you spare what remains of my city! As for this cowardly fool who calls himself our King, do what you desire with him; it is of no concern to me!"



Berengar smiled in response to this before nodding his head in approval; as he did so, he declared his intentions.

"Very well, I accept your surrender; I hereby declare that the Emirate of Granada has annexed the Kingdom of Portugal, you and your people shall forever serve Sultan Hasan Al-Fadl and the members of his house as loyal servants. As for the reconstruction of your city, Granada will make sure that it is fully rebuilt to its former glory, as a proud Jewel of its future Empire!"

The mayor bowed his head towards his conquerors before being dismissed. As for Berengar, he began to stretch his back and exhale deeply. It was as if an enormous weight had been lifted from his heart. While he was relaxing for the first time in a while, Palladius raised the question on his mind.

"What now?"

Upon hearing this, Berengar continued to stretch his weary limbs, all while announcing his plans for the future of Granada.

"Now we return to the Capital, for insurance purposes, we will leave behind a small army of Granadan Soldiers. Once we have returned to the city of Granada, I will discuss in further detail how we will handle the current situation in regards to the Occupation of Portugal. If your Emperor so desires, then you can dismiss your forces and return home.

I, however, will leave behind a rotation of soldiers deployed to the region to ensure the continued training of Granadan troops, as well as support them in their efforts to assert their authority over their newly conquered province."

Having said this, Berengar did not wait for a response. Instead, he began to walk away towards a tent. He made one last demand of his ally to the East as he did so.

"If you need me, I will be getting some much-needed sleep. I trust that you and your forces can take down the camp without my interference."

After saying this, Berengar forced his way into someone else's tent, where he rested upon the cot within. Leaving Palladius to stare at him with disbelief, he did not know why but he had a certain feeling that the Kingdom of Austria would forever have its claws embedded within the Emirate of Granada.

The veteran Strategos of the Balkans immediately became wary of any future dealings with the young Austrian Monarch in fear that the man would turn the Byzantine Empire into a subordinate state. While reflecting upon this, Palladius left a comment behind as he ordered his troops to tear down the camp.

"I underestimated you Berengar von Kufstein, I will not do so again..."

#### Chapter 445 - Hungover Politics

The sun rose in Granada, the young King of Austria lay sprawled out on his bed naked next to his newest bride. On his nightstand was a golden chalice with the slightest residue of fortified wine dried and sticking to its gilded center.

After returning to Granada, with the former King of Portugal in tow, Berengar had celebrated the night with the many soldiers who had taken part in the combat operations. He spent the remainder of the night making love to his wife.

However, now he groaned as he slowly reached consciousness, his head was pounding, and he felt as if he were neither living nor dead. His deep sapphire eyes stared at the ceiling, though he could only see its well-carved surface with his left. As he struggled to regain control over his thoughts, a single phrase escaped his lips.

"Fuck my life."

Having said this, a series of memories from his past life flooded his brain, causing further agony to his already poor state. He could immediately remember that he had spent several years of his past life waking up to an alarm clock saying a similar sentence as his first words every morning.

It took well over thirty minutes for him to rise to a standing position, and the moment he did so, he felt wobbly. At this moment, Yasmin awoke; she was in a similar state, and rather than say good morning to her husband, she immediately rushed to the window and vomited the liquid contained in her stomach.

Berengar, ever the gentlemen chose to ignore this fact and merely decided to slowly but surely get dressed in proper attire before descending the staircase. Upon reaching the bottom level of the Palace, he immediately found a passed-out Hasan lying defenselessly on one of his grand sofas.

The moment Berengar saw this, he groaned before kicking the man in the leg, immediately waking him up in a startle. It took several moments for Hasan to notice that the person who had woken him from his drunken stupor was none other than his friend and ally Berengar von Kufstein. Berengar did not hesitate and instead began to speak to Hasan with a grave tone.

"Get you, servants, to brew some coffee; we're going to need it for the discussion that we need to have."

Hasan immediately nodded his head as he rubbed his eyes before calling out to his servants.

"Get the coffee ready!"

He had no idea where they were located, but they were sure to hear his cries. Thus while waiting for the coffee to be properly brewed, Berengar and Hasan walked over to the Dining Room. Despite their victory celebrations, the men had not had a proper conversation on where to go now that the Portuguese King had officially surrendered and agreed to annexation.

After a few minutes of moaning and groaning, struggling to recover from their dreaded states, the coffee was set before the two monarchs as they immediately began to sip from their cups. Berengar had long since started exporting the substance into Granada via his trade routes through the Byzantine Empire, and it had become quite the lucrative trade.

Now he was finally enjoying the fruits of his efforts and was thankful that he had gone through the difficulty to achieve this. After taking several large gulps from the brew, the young Austrian King sighed heavily before commenting on the situation at hand.

"Three-fourths of Portugal lies in the control of various local warlords and despots. Though we have seized the critical centers of Portuguese Control, there will still be intense fighting in the months to come. I will be withdrawing back to Austria within a fortnight.

During this time, I intend to set up a joint task force between several of my officers and your military; the goal is to put down any resistance within Portugal and exert Granada's control over the people.

With your permission, I would like to station an expeditionary force of between 5,000 to 10,000 men of various units in Granada to aid in the development of your Army and assist in combat operations against the rebels."

Hasan dwelled on this plan for several minutes as he thought about the condition of his forces; with the Austrians and Byzantines withdrawing, he would ultimately be left with an army of roughly 25,000 men to contend with the remnants of the Portuguese Army who now acted as local warlords and despots. He would also need to maintain the border with his limited number of soldiers, greatly diminishing his combat capabilities.

Thus the Sultan was quite pleased that Berengar was willing to dispatch a fresh unit of a sizeable force to aid him in expanding control and influence over the recently conquered regions. Ultimately he nodded his head after taking another sip from his coffee before agreeing to Berengar's terms.

"Very well, I look forward to cooperating with your forces in the future. As for the Byzantines, I assume they are packing up and leaving Iberia for good?"

Berengar nodded his head slowly before revealing the information he had received.

"Palladius is required back in the Empire, and the forces he brought with him are needed in the Balkans. There is turmoil in the east, I am not entirely sure of the situation, but from what my agents have gathered, the Islamic states are preparing in the shadows for something big, possibly a Jihad..."

Hasan scoffed at this notion before commenting on the other Islamic States who existed across the globe.

"Pfft, Fools, if Byzantium was able to dominate their enemies in North Africa with the old weapons you gave them, imagine what they will be capable of with the new ones. I doubt it will end well if those fanatical fools declare a Jihad!"

Berengar chuckled when he heard this before making fun of the moderate Sultan.

"Oh so, Granada will not answer the call to Holy War?"

The young Sultan immediately glared at Berengar for making such a jest before declaring his intent.

"I do not need to get involved in the religious conflict; I have other concerns to deal with. I still have to maintain my control over Granada and Portugal, rebuild from the damage we have caused in our invasion, and secure my borders against my Catholic enemies. If those fools want a Holy War, then they won't be able to count on me to support them..."

Berengar smiled in silence; he took another sip from his coffee before switching the subject to something more personal.

"Since I will be leaving within the next few weeks, I will be taking your sister back with me to Kufstein. Are you sure you will be alright without your big sister to take care of you?"

Hasan scoffed once more at this snide comment before wearing a proud smile on his face.

"I am not a little kid who relies on his big sister to get by in life; besides, I have two wives to keep me company. I'm sure whatever grief I may feel with my sister's departure can be appropriately treated by the two of them. Speaking of which, I hear you have a beautiful young sister who will soon be of age. Why don't you marry her off to me?"

A stern frown appeared on Berengar's face as he heard this before placing his ceramic cup down upon the table. After doing so, he made a short but bold statement.

"Don't even think about it!"

Hasan chuckled lightly before slapping Berengar on the back in response to this.

"I see you have a sister complex, huh? Just remember, your taboo thoughts are fine, but you should never act on them... Sooner or later, you will have to wed your precious little sister off to some other man!"

Berengar immediately shrugged his friend's hand off his shoulder before chastising the man.

"I have a sister complex? You are one to talk!"

Hasan merely laughed at such a defensive comment and began to sip from his coffee once more. He had enough fun at Berengar's expense, any more, and the King of Austria might actually get mad, and the young Sultan of Granada was all too aware of what happened when Berengar was angry.

Thus the two men continued to banter for some time. After a while, breakfast was brought to the table, and the seats were filled with Yasmin and Hasan's two wives who gazed lovingly at their men. Berengar had drunk more than his fair share of coffee during this process to help overcome his hangover.

With this new phase of the War in Iberia, Berengar would soon return home. A semi-permanent unit would be stationed in Granada, who would regularly rotate with other soldiers to ensure that Berengar's Army maintained some form of combat experience between his effective campaigns.

While Berengar planned to conduct combat operations in Portugal, the Aragonese King worked hard to unite his Kingdom and his neighbor Castile. Though the fighting had been fierce, soon, a new Kingdom would arise in Iberia, and in the end, there would be two powers fighting for control of the peninsula in the years to come.

Chapter 446 - A Long Awaited Reunion

As Berengar had promised, he spent the next two weeks lazing about in his manor at Gibraltar with his loving new bride by his side. The couple seemed to get along exceptionally well and had spent much of the time in the bedroom. After all, Berengar had grown weary from months of conflict and needed something to lift his spirits.

During this time, men and resources swapped from the Iberian Peninsula to the Kingdom of Austria; for some time to come, there would be a massive transition in the state of the Emirate of Granada. However, eventually, Berengar got onto his royal clipper and returned home to the fatherland.

With such a swift ship, the journey was relatively smooth, and in a matter of days, he and his new bride arrived in Trieste. The moment Berengar stepped off the docks, he could barely recognize the port city. Nearly half a year had passed since he first stepped foot in Granada with the intent to put an end to the Iberian Union and the Catholic Church's ambitions.

In this time, the city of Trieste had rapidly industrialized; by now, the railroad stretched from Kufstein to Trieste and was fully operational with telegraph wires and stations embedded throughout the entire journey. Smoke filled the air as the fires of industry burned bright within the massive port city.

The streets were fully paved, and factories were operational. Men and women went to their jobs, while children stayed in their schools. No more excellent sight was available than the Shipyards, which were engaged in the lengthy process of laying down the first of Berengar's newest vessels. Of course, this light Cruiser was only in the initial stages of development and would still require years before it was sea-ready.

When Yasmin gazed upon the incredible sight of the Industrial Port city, she could hardly believe her eyes. Compared to the medieval state of Granada, Trieste was on another level. Upon seeing his newest bride's response, Berengar smiled and wrapped his arm around her shoulder before whispering in her ear.

"If you think Trieste is shocking, wait until you see the capital!"

It took the Granadan Princess some time to recover as she thought about her husband's words. Ultimately she smiled in anticipation, waiting to see just how marvelous the city of Kufstein was. Berengar walked in the streets, where the people gazed upon him with respect and immediately conversed among themselves.

"The King has returned!"

"Is the war over?"

"Who is that foreign woman by his side?"

The people of Trieste immediately began making up all sorts of ideas about Berengar and Yasmin as the couple walked to the train station. Upon arriving, Berengar pulled out his wallet and gave the appropriate amount of silver thalers to buy a ticket to Kufstein.

On the dashboard of the Train Station, there was a map of currently existing railways. Berengar was shocked to see how much progress had been made, as the railways now stretched from Kufstein to Salzburg, to Graz, and down to Triest.

Though he wasn't too shocked, after all, the transcontinental railway of the USA was built in a matter of six years, and the Kingdom of Austria was substantially smaller than the old USA from his past life. After seeing this, he nodded with a smile as he and Yasmin boarded the train, which shortly after that departed for Kufstein.

As they traveled, a telegraph was sent back to the Capital informing the Royal Family of Berengar's return, though it neglected to mention the foreign beauty by his side. Yasmin gazed in awe as the train rapidly moved along the tracks at a speed of over 60 mph; at their current rate, it would take them a matter of hours to arrive in the Capital City.

On the way, they had passed by several cargo trains transporting raw materials from the mines of the Alps to the other cities. Which caused a sense of delight to appear in Berengar's eyes; this meant that his country's industrialization would progress far more rapidly than it had in the past.

Eventually, the couple made their way into Kufstein's train station, where they stepped onto the sweet soil of the Austrian Capital and made their way from the heart of the city to the Palace. The mix of Medieval, and renaissance architecture, when combined with the might of industry, was a marvel to behold. The people were dressed in relatively modern fashion compared to the Granadan Princess, which immediately caught her eye.



The great walls of Kufstein had expanded once more to include the newest section of the city, creating yet another star barrier around the city, with the garrison doing their jobs of protecting each entrance to the next layer. The newest variant of cannons was mounted on the walls, manufactured in enough supply to replace the pre-existing muzzleloaders.

Those old siege guns would be refurbished and either sent to the Reserves or sold to allied nations for use in defense of their cities. However, none of that was any concern; as Berengar and Yasmin reached the gates of the Royal Palace, the princess stared in awe at the massive structure home to the Austrian King and his family.

Upon entering its gates, Berengar was immediately greeted by his wives, children, and sister. By now, his wives had already given birth to his offspring and had recovered quite well from experience. Henrietta was the first to leap into Berengar's arms and hug him tightly before pecking him on the cheek with her luscious pink lips.

"Welcome home, big brother!"

She was so enamored with her precious big brother's return that she failed to notice the tanned beauty by his side. However, Berengar's wives immediately noticed the presence of another woman and frowned at him. Linde gave her husband a murderous glare as she asked the question on all of the girl's minds.

"Who is she?"

Berengar felt a chill down his spine as he noticed his second wife's perturbed appearance. As for Adela, she was in an even fouler mood; she knew exactly who this woman was and immediately began to protest.

"Darling, while we were worried for your safety, giving birth to your children, you went off and married that Moorish whore?"

Yasmin's German was not the best, and thus she did not take notice of the insult. Instead, she gazed with an awkward expression as she struggled to find a way to introduce herself to her husband's other wives.

Berengar scratched the back of his neck awkwardly; Henrietta was still clinging onto him, giving a fierce glare at the newest woman to snatch her brother away from her. Meanwhile, A baby boy and girl were in the arms of Adela as she gave him a vicious stare. She had given birth to two perfectly normal fraternal twins.

Honorina held an infant boy in her arms while giving a curious gaze at Berengar, among all of his wives, she was the most open-minded in sharing the man she loved with other women. Thus she did not care that he brought home yet another woman so long as she aided Berengar in some significant way.

Linde had two baby girls in her arms, one was Helga, and the other was her newest child, as Hans and Veronika clung to the Second Queen's side. Hans had an excited expression on his face as he boldly asked his question.

"Did father bring a new mommy home? She's so beautiful!"

Berengar's girls immediately stared at the boy giving him a scowling glance. Despite this, he either did not take notice of it or didn't care as he instead gave his father a solid thumb's up, signaling his approval. Berengar struggled to contain the tear that had formed in his eye as he thought to himself.

My boy will one day be a true man of culture!

However, instead of outright saying this, he nodded his head and introduced his newest acquisition.

"Everyone, this is Princess Yasmin Al-Fadl, my newest bride. Due to certain circumstances, we are now married, and our alliance with the Emirate of Granada is now stronger than ever! Treat her well; if you don't, I will know and will punish you accordingly."

Henrietta, Honorina, and Adela felt a slight tingle in their bottoms as they remembered the vicious spanking Berengar had given them quite some time ago and immediately tensed up. As for Linde, she had a look of excitement in her eyes as she reflected on the same experience.

Ultimately, Berengar walked forward and introduced himself to his newest children, he started with Adela and her two children where he reached out to grab ahold of the two twins with a fatherly expression on his face.

"So, what are the names of these two beautiful children?"

Adela pouted as she begrudgingly gave up the info that her husband had requested.

"Since you were away at war, I took the liberty to name them, the boy is the elder of the two twins, and he is named Kristoffer; as for his sister, she is named Katherin!"

Berengar nodded his head in approval towards these names before giving them back to their mother and moving on to the next child which was in Honoria's arms; she had a sly smile on her face as he handed the boy over to her father before making a snide remark.

"You already know this little tyke's name, Alexandros!"

Berengar smiled and nodded his head once more as he took a brief moment to hold on to his baby boy. After kissing the infant on the forehead, he gave Alexandros back to her mother before walking over to his baby girl with Linde and inquiring about her name.

"This is?"

Linde smiled and kissed her husband on the lips passionately as she marked her territory before the newest bride. After doing so she handed off the baby girl to her father and boldly declared her name.

"This is Ilse! Your beautiful daughter, don't you ever forget!"

Berengar smiled as he heard this; now that introductions were out of the way, he led his family back into the Royal Palace; after all, he and his wives had much catching up to do, even if they were in a fit of jealousy at the moment. Of course, his wives would not let him off easy for galavanting around in some foreign land; they would make sure to use up every ounce of his energy in the following night.

## Chapter 447 - Breakfast In The Royal Palace Of Austria

Berengar sat at the head of his table; after spending all of his energy satisfying his frustrated wives the night before, he was completely and utterly exhausted. He couldn't even find the energy to get dressed this morning after his bath. Thus, he was sitting in a black silk robe with golden embroidery and wearing nothing else.

Yasmin had been excluded from the festivities, at least for now. After all, she was the newest addition, and the other girls were not too keen on her being involved in their nightly debauchery just yet. However, she did not mind; after all, she was far more mature than the other girls and came from a culture of polygamy. On top of this, she had spent the last few weeks doing nothing other than spending time with Berengar in a profoundly intimate manner.

However, when Yasmin was sitting by his side while the others rested, she fed him a breakfast dish from her own culture that she had personally cooked. Something that Berengar he only recently became accustomed to. After all, when dealing with women from the backgrounds of royalty and nobility, it was not common for them to learn how to cook themselves.

Despite this, one of Yasmin's hobbies was cooking, and thus she was more than happy to prepare a meal for Berengar and his family. Berengar was pleased that the woman took the time and effort to cook her dishes; after all, he had always desired to eat a woman's home cooking in the previous life. Especially when one considered that he was primarily responsible for his own meals from a young age.

Thus he entertained the woman who spoonfed the dish into his mouth; after he had swallowed the food, the foreign beauty immediately grabbed a glass of fresh milk and pressed it to his lips allowing him to enjoy its cool sensation as it dripped down his throat. He was indeed in heaven at this moment. Truly, enjoying a hedonistic lifestyle at home was far better than living in the mud and blood of the trenches.

While this scene was underway, the sound of steps coming down the stairs could be heard before Berengar witnessed Adela entering the room with an excited expression on her face. She had smelled the food and greatly anticipated breakfast; however, when she gazed upon Berengar and his new bride, her expression sank.

As for Yasmin, she merely smiled politely as she continued to feed her husband. Not wanting to invoke Berengar's ire, Adela sat down at the opposite side of the table and crossed her arms in a fit of fury. She began to tap her foot on the floor as the Servant came over and gave her a cup of coffee and a portion of the food that had been prepared.

Before long, Linde and Honoria arrived and witnessed the scene. Unlike Adela, Linde had no intention of sitting by and pouting as she watched her new rival's actions; she immediately counterattacked as she began to defend her claim on her man.

Since the moment that Linde had first laid eyes on the Moorish beauty's mighty bosom, she had felt threatened. The second Queen refused to let a woman with a bigger bust steal her place as the favorite of the King's wives. Thus she began to give her husband a shoulder rub and a kiss on the lips as she greeted him.

"Good morning, master! Did you enjoy last night?"

Berengar had a smug smile on his face as he nodded his head before responding to his second wife.

"Of course I did. However, I am afraid I will be spent for a few days; you girls took all the life out of my body..."

Upon hearing this, Linde smirked at Yasmin as if she had accomplished some form of victory. However, Yasmin did not mind; instead, she noticed that Berengar's drink was close to being empty and immediately got up to pour him another glass. At this moment, Honoria had taken her chance to hop into Berengar's lap and make her demands.

"Daddy... Feed me!"

Upon seeing the cutesy expression on the Byzantine Princesses' face, Berengar sighed before grabbing ahold of his fork and feeding the food upon it directly into his third wife's mouth. Before long, Yasmin returned and began doing the same for Berengar. Adela gazed upon the two women who were shamelessly mingling with the newest addition to Berengar's harem with a gawking expression.

Did they not already agree to treat her with hostility? Why were they not making Berengar suffer for bringing home yet another woman without notice? It was at this moment that it dawned upon her that she was sitting alone at the other edge of the table, along with the kids who were old enough to eat on their own while her husband enjoyed his time flirting with three other beauties.

However, despite suffering a loss and being betrayed by her sisters, Adela was ultimately a stubborn woman at heart. Since she had said she would treat Yasmin with hostility and make Berengar suffer for a few days, she would not abandon her principles and join the others to play with her man shamelessly.

At this moment, Henrietta came down the stairs with wet hair and wearing a silk robe that could barely contain her bust; it also showed off her long ivory legs perfectly. When Berengar noticed this, he was surprised; since when did his sister grow to such an extent?

Henrietta was seemingly unaware that her robe no longer fit her properly and sat down by her brother's side with a broad smile, showing off her substantial cleavage. During her brother's absence, the Austrian Princess had turned sixteen, and thus now that she was of age, she wanted to fulfill her promise to compete for her beloved big brother.

However, when she entered the scene to greet him, he was already surrounded by his wives, which inwardly frustrated her. Thus all she could manage to say as her brother stared at her inappropriate appearance with a complicated gaze was.

"Good morning, big brother!"

It took Berengar a few moments to break his gaze away from his own little sister's mature body; when he finally did, he was met with the stares of his women, who looked at him with angered expressions. Immediately a single thought came to his mind.

Oh, fuck! Did they notice me staring at Henrietta?

However, before he could finish this line of thought, Henrietta shifted her legs to a point where he could see her inner thighs; though her nether regions were not in full display, it was enough to force Berengar to avert his gaze.

Upon seeing that her seduction attempt had failed, Henrietta began to pout, though, after a few seconds, she began to smile once more; for now, it was enough knowing that her beloved big brother could look at her with such a lust-filled gaze. Adela was the first to speak about this absurd situation and immediately cleared her throat as she lectured Henrietta.

"My dear cousin, you are dressed in a rather unbecoming manner; why don't you go put on something more appropriate before you eat..."

Henrietta immediately wanted to protest this statement, but when she looked around, she immediately noticed the malevolent glares that were being cast her way from Berengar's wives. Thus she could not help but sigh as she got up from her seat and departed; she made sure to flaunt her plump ass as she walked up the stairs. Berengar looked for but a second before his chin was grabbed onto and forced into the sky blue eyes of Linde, who whispered something in his ear.

"Don't even think about tasting your flesh and blood, or we are all going to have a problem..."

Berengar's attention was immediately snapped back to reality as he realized the murderous glares he was receiving from all of his wives, including Yasmin. This was a point universally agreed upon by Berengar's harem; they would never allow him to taste the forbidden fruit that was his younger sister. Thus to ease tensions, Berengar began to break out into awkward laughter as he tried to deflect the issue.

"Me and Henrietta? It will never happen! You are all worrying too much! Do you think I'm that kind of guy?"

All of his wives stared at him with deadpan expressions as they nodded their heads in unison when he said this. As if he could read all their minds, Berengar immediately knew they were thinking the same thing, and that was simply.

Do you even need to ask?

Shortly after that, Henrietta returned dressed in far more appropriate clothing, and the breakfast between the Royal Family of Austria continued as if that awkward display had never occurred in the first place. Berengar was certain that he needed to put an end to Henrietta's feelings quickly, or else he might fall prey to his darker instincts.

## Chapter 448 - Status Report

With the war in Iberia entering a new stage, and the King of Austria returning to the fatherland, Berengar had much work cut out for him. He was currently sitting in his office, surrounded by a group of ministers who represented the different aspects of Austria's development.

The first among these men to speak was Field Marshal Eckhard. He voiced his report regarding the conscription of soldiers, their training, their outfitting, and various other factors that went into the rapid expansion of the Austrian Army.

"Your Majesty, I will have you know that we have more than doubled our Army's size. Over the past six months, since you have established conscription, we have trained and outfitted a total of 250,000 Soldiers. Currently, the Needle Rifles have been produced en masse and given to the soldiers and we have begun the introduction of the 7.5cm FK 22 field guns.

In total, we have ten standard Divisions capable of being deployed and acting independently or together under joint commands across Europe and the Mediterranean. We are currently working on producing sufficient numbers of the next-generation weapons to be employed among specialty units such as the 1st Jaeger Brigade and the Jagdkommandos.

We project that the next generation of weapons will thoroughly replace the current weapons used by our infantry units within the next three years. So you can rest assured that by the time the Crusaders make their way to our lands, they will be dealing with a vastly superior armed force.

While you were gone, there has also been significant progress in developing lightweight artillery that can be employed by a single squad of soldiers in the Field. The current prototype is very promising, and I am sure you will be pleased with the results."



Berengar looked over the dossier that Eckhard had given him and was incredibly pleased with the Army's progress. It numbered roughly 250,000 soldiers in total now and was by far the largest and most powerful military globally.

The young King knew he would have to introduce some updated artillery to accompany the advanced weapons of the infantry. However, aside from that, his military had reached its max potential until things like the combustion and diesel engines could be manufactured en masse.

However, what drew his interest the most was the progress of the border defenses. As such, he quickly shifted his gaze to his Field Marshal and asked the question on his mind.

"Marshall von Halstatt, please do explain the progress the Army Corps of Engineers has had at our current borders."

Upon hearing this, Eckhard did not hesitate and quickly began to speak of the massive trench system built around the borders of the Kingdom of Austria.

"At the moment, much of the land between Tyrol and Bavaria has been thoroughly entrenched, with a dedicated faction of Border guards handling its defense. There are roughly a hundred meters of barbed wire between our border and into the Bavarian lands; this massive wall of wire stretches across the trench line that has been constructed.

As for the reinforced cement structures you have designed for future machine gun nests, they are undergoing construction as we speak. By the summer of next year, the Tyrolean-Bavarian border will be thoroughly secured. Currently, the Border Guard assists refugees from the other German States in resettling in our lands while protecting the borders from undesirables.

I must inform you that the escalation of violence in the Kingdom of France has caused an uptick in French peasants migrating from their homes and towards our borders in the hopes that we will let them in. However, under the command of her Highness Queen Linde von Kufstein, they have been turned away with force if necessary whenever they arrive. Berengar smiled when he heard this remark before commenting on Linde's actions.

"That woman knows me so well. The French can stay in their lands; it is not our responsibility to look after the hungry and poor masses of the world. If they are not German, they are not entering our

Kingdom! Now Eckhard, are there any other major concerns I should be made aware of in terms of military matters?"

The veteran Field Marshal immediately shook his head in response; he had caught up with his King on everything he needed to know. Thus Berengar shifted his attention to Chancellor Otto von Graz before asking the question on his mind.

"Tell me, Uncle, what news do you have for me in terms of the development of our Infrastructure?"

Otto immediately handed the young King his dossier, where he began to speak out on a summary of the things that had been accomplished during Berengar's absence.

"To put it simply, the railway and telegraph lines have stretched from Tyrol, across Salzburg, and into the Kustenland. Our projections are that within another two years; your Royal Railway will reach across the Entirety of the Kingdom of Austria, The Grand Duchy of Switzerland, and the Kingdom of Bohemia.

As for the development of the Capital, it has grown in size. As I assure you are aware, we have had to erect another wall to protect the people, and the area between that wall and the others are filling up as we speak.

As you may be aware, Triest is now close to being fully industrialized, while Salzburg and Graz are also undergoing significant progress. Before long, Innsbruck, Kufstein, Graz, Salzburg, Triest, and Vienna will all be industrial cities, capable of producing many goods to be transported across your two Kingdoms via the railway, and the rest of Europe via more conventional trading methods."

Upon hearing this, Berengar's smile doubled in size; he was delighted to hear that they had made such substantial progress in such a short period. Perhaps by the time he united all of Germany, his Kingdom would be a fully industrialized nation. However, there was something else he wished to discuss, and thus, he immediately shifted his attention towards Linde, who was standing by obediently dressed in her service uniform.

"My Queen, is there anything you wish to report to me in terms of international matters that I should be made aware of?"

Linde was hesitant to speak for a while, but after a few moments of awkward silence, she began to open up about the knowledge her agents had relayed back to her.

"There are a few matters of importance. First and foremost, Our neighbors are undergoing a massive economic decline and even entering a state of famine after you have slaughtered the 500,000 men who entered Iberia, hoping to put an end to Hasan's reign.

As you are aware, most of those men were peasants. Thus, there is a significant gap in men capable of toiling the fields in the neighboring Kingdoms, especially Poland-Lithuania. They have suffered the worse out of our neighbors and blame it directly upon you.

They did not just send farmers; they sent thousands of their soldiers thinking the war with the Teutonic Order was over. However, the Golden Horde is in a state of civil war thanks to our intervention. Due to some significant operations behind the scenes, the Eastern-Coalition has halted its advance into the Rump State that is the current Teutonic Order.

Famine ravages Poland-Lithuania and France; after all, despite the French King not wanting to get involved, tens of thousands of his peasants sought glory and a place in the afterlife in Iberia rather than deal with the ongoing war between the English and French Crowns.

This brings me to my next point; my agents have reported that although operations are going smoothly with the supplying of the enemies of France with firearms and training. The French Crown still refuses to adopt the weapons we have given him. As a result, Prince Aubry has departed from Paris and is heading towards Kufstein as we speak.

If my information is correct, he seeks an audience with your Majesty, for what exactly I am unsure. I am certain that you are aware of the rumors regarding the French Prince?"

Berengar chuckled when he heard this before mocking his wife.

"They say he has a face as beautiful as any woman and a sinful body. Aren't you afraid that such a slutty trap might catch your husband's fancy?"

Linde's face twisted with revilement before she began to tease Berengar in front of his other ministers.

"I'm more worried about my husband lying with his sister than some amorous twink from France. However, I am positive that neither of those two scenarios will occur..."

Berengar sat with a grim expression on his face when he heard this remark; he would make sure to punish Linde for saying such a thing in front of the others later that night. However, for now, he had business to attend to. As such, he stood up from his seat and gave his orders to the men and one woman gathered.

"Alright, I have heard enough; you are all dismissed. If I need your services, you will hear from me; until then, continue with your business."

With that said, the gathered ministers departed, leaving Berengar alone within his office, staring out the windows of his Palace. The unintended consequences of the Peasant Crusade to Iberia were sure to have disastrous effects for Berengar's neighbors and the Catholic Church as a whole.

#### Chapter 449 - The French Prince Arrives

Berengar was within his study, smoking a hemp cigarette as he gazed upon the documents in his hands. Although he had spent a few days reacquainting himself with his wives upon returning from war, the work of a ruler was never truly fulfilled. Thus once more, he had thrust himself into the endless throes of paperwork.

After exhaling a large puff of smoke, the young monarch heard a knock on the door. Refusing to put out the cigarette, Berengar responded before taking another hit.

"It is open..."

Upon saying this, the door crept open to reveal his first wife Adela, who was dressed in a sapphire gown. Upon seeing his lovely wife enter his room, Berengar assumed that she was here to make amends. However, the sentence she spoke was anything but.

"There is a visitor here for you; they claim to be a part of the French Royal Family..."

There was a look of utter disgust on the young woman's face as she said this. Berengar was quite surprised to hear this; the French Prince had arrived quicker than he had estimated. Thus he decided to put out his cigarette in his ashtray before standing up and approaching his young wife.

"Lead the way!"

Adela rolled her eyes before departing from the Office with her husband in hand; before long, they arrived in the Great Hall, where Berengar gazed upon a small host of visitors. He searched for the French Prince but could not find him. However, his eyes fell upon a beautiful young woman who was exceptionally petite; this woman had honey blonde hair and emerald green eyes and was dressed in the current fashion trends of Austria.

Berengar mistakenly assumed this person's identity to be Princess Sibilia. Thus, he approached her and bowed before introducing himself. The stunning French woman held out her hand with a pretty smile upon seeing this, and Berengar placed his lips upon it. After doing so, he made his introduction.

"Princess Sibilia, I must say you are as beautiful as the rumors have claimed. However, I am a bit confused. I was led to believe that Prince Aubry would be the one to visit?"

The woman presumed to be Princess Sibilla immediately giggled in an effeminate manner before covering her mouth. After doing so, she spoke in a high-pitched voice that matched a woman's.

"Your Majesty, you are not mistaken. I am Prince Aubry de Valois, and I must say you are as handsome as the rumors say!"

Berengar immediately felt his mind shatter as he heard these words and struggled to mask his disgust in his actions. Did he seriously kiss the hand of a man? Meanwhile, Adela was in the corner smirking at his actions, thinking to herself.

It serves you right for being a playboy.

Of course, Berengar had no way of knowing what his wife was thinking and instead began to pull away from the effeminate French Prince awkwardly.

"I apologize for my actions; I assumed you were your sister... Tell me, Prince Aubry, why are you here in Kufstein, and why are you dressed like that?"

Prince Aubry continued to smile as he placed one of his dainty hands on his cheek; after doing so, he twirled around in his dress before leaning in close to Berengar.

"What's the matter? You don't like my appearance?"

The young Austrian King was immediately put in a difficult spot, this was, in fact, the Prince of a neighboring Kingdom, and he had to, for the time being, maintain diplomatic ties with them. After all, his plan for fracturing the French Kingdom relied on putting on the facade of friendly relations with his eventual neighbor to the West.

Despite this, he immediately tried to distance himself from the effeminate Prince. However, the moment he did so, Aubry followed him and latched onto his arm with a sultry smile before asking the question on his mind.

"We can discuss business later; why don't you show me around this wonderful Palace of yours?"

Berengar had a distressed expression on his face as he looked over at his wife with a pleading gaze in his eyes. However, despite this anxiety, Adela merely scoffed before walking off. She knew Berengar would never sleep with a member of the same sex, and thus this was her punishment for him bringing home another wife without notice.

Thus Berengar was forced to endure being a tour guide for the Prince of France. The first action that the young monarch took was to introduce the current location to his guest.

"This is the Great Hall, where my throne is present. Frankly, I don't stay here often and am instead usually found in my Office."

Aubry took this comment with great interest; after all, his father, the King of France, was practically glued to his throne, and it was where he usually conducted business. To see that the mighty King of Austria rarely used his throne room was unique in the boy's mind.

On multiple occasions, Berengar tried to wrest his arm away from the effeminate Prince; however, every attempt to do so was met with fierce resistance and a warm smile. It became abundantly clear what this trap's intent was, and the King of Austria made a silent vow not to fall prey to his tricks.

However, since this guest was a member of a foreign Royal Family, he had to show some restraint in his action. Thus he kept a calm facade as he continued to walk Aubry through his palace and show him every quarter of his court.

After entering the dining room, Berengar and Aubry witnessed Honoria eating lunch; the moment she gazed up and saw her ex-fiance locking his arms around her husband, the food fell from her hands and onto her plate. She was stunned to witness the sight and immediately got up from her seat where she rushed over to Aubry and slapped the Prince across his pretty face. After doing so, she began to curse him out.

"Get your hands off my man, you filthy tramp! Who the hell let you into this palace?"

Though the French Prince was enraged that a woman would behave in such a manner towards him, he refused to let go of Berengar's arm and instead put on a cruel smile as he mocked the Byzantine Princess.

"Oh Honoria, it has been some time since we last met. I am glad to see you found yourself a husband. However, there is no reason to be so jealous; Berengar and I are just getting to know each other, isn't that right?"

Berengar smiled awkwardly as he heard this. Ultimately, he decided it would be best to separate from Aubry now that Honoria was enraged and thus pushed him aside before scolding his guest.

"Honorias right, I didnt want to say anything because you are a guest, but your actions are rather inappropriate. It would be best if we kept a safe distance between us..."

Aubry immediately puffed out his cheeks as he began to pout; he could not believe that Honorias had gotten in the way of his plans yet again. She seriously had the worst timing. Of course, what came next further aggravated the French Prince. Honorias immediately wrapped her arms around her husband and kissed him passionately before giving Berengar a fair warning.

"Dont fall into this boys trap. I know you are not that type of man, but I have seen many otherwise normal men fall prey to his spell!"

Berengar chuckled before patting Honorias head; as he did so, he spoke the words that would make Aubry all the more determined to seduce him.

"Dont worry; Im not like that. You would only have to worry if he was a woman!"

Of course, this statement did little to ease Honorias anxiety, and thus she opted to stay with the two men during the duration of their tour. So long as the effeminate French Prince was in Austria, she would keep her eyes on him.

Unlike Adela, and Linde, she did not trust Berengar with Aubry; after all, she was too aware of how captivating he could be to other men. After touring around the entire Palace, Berengar introduced Aubry to his room before giving him a little lecture.

"These are your quarters for the duration of your stay in Kufstein. You are free to walk about the city and do as you please so long as you dont violate the law. Though you can eat at any of the wonderful restaurants in our city, I encourage you to be back at the palace in time for dinner at roughly 6:00 PM."

Aubry silently nodded his head before sitting on his bed with a smile; as he did so, he made an offer to Berengar, which greatly disgusted the young King.

"Ill be fine; you can leave now unless you want to stay and give me a message?"



Berengar immediately rejected the French Prince's notions and departed from the room. He swore that no matter what it took, he would not fall prey to his schemes. After all, he was not that type of man. Of course, the moment he left the room, Aubry began to pout and swear to himself that he would accomplish his objective. Thus a battle of seduction between the French and Austrian Crowns had begun.

## Chapter 450 - The Devil On Your Shoulder

Within the city of Kufstein was a group of Byzantines allegedly within the borders of Austria for the purpose of trade. If there was one thing that the Austrian Government had come to be successful at, it was none other than border security.

Even with their cover identities that were thoroughly prepared by the powers behind the Second Prince of the Empire, these men, like any other visitors to the Kingdom, had gone through a thorough vetting process.

At the moment, they were hawking wares in the form of wine and silk at the trade district of Kufstein City. However, behind the scenes, these alleged merchants were here for a far less noble purpose. For three weeks now, they had watched and waited in the trade district for the opportune moment to assassinate Princess Honoria.

Yet, despite this, the Byzantine Princess had never entered the streets of Austria. Instead, she spent her entire time within the safety of the Royal Palace, so much so that these men were beginning to lose all hope of completing their mission. Because of this feeling of despair, one of these men finally had enough and immediately began cursing at the other in Greek.

"For Christ's sake, we have been here in Austria for three fucking weeks, and we still have not even gotten the slightest glimpse of the Princess!"

Immediately his compatriot slapped him across the back of the head and began to chastise the man for making such a foolish comment.

"Quiet, you fool, that redheaded bitch has spies everywhere in this damned country. The fact that we have remained undiscovered so far is a blessing from the Lord God almighty!"

The first man immediately scoffed at his companion's behavior before scolding him for his actions.

"You're being paranoid! I doubt any of these barbarians even speak Greek! Yet you assume we are being watched every moment of the day!"

However, unbeknownst to this man, there was indeed a spy nearby at the next stall keeping an eye on these men from the Byzantine Empire. As a safety precaution, for any visitors to the Kingdom who were staying for longer than a period of a week, there was an agent of Austrian Royal Intelligence sent to observe them and their actions multiple times a day.

This spy was trained in five different languages, one of them being Greek, and thus she immediately heard the mention of the Princess and the hushed conversation that followed. It quickly became apparent that these men were not ordinary merchants. Therefore, she had the urge to report this to her superior right away.

However, she did not do such a thing. Instead, she fulfilled her duty and closely observed these men for a bit long in an attempt to gain any more valuable information about their reason for being in Kufstein. The first man immediately poured himself a cup filled with the wine they were hawking and began to speak once more, albeit in a slightly lower tone.

"Once that bitch is dead, we can return to the Empire and get paid! I can't wait to buy a nice villa within the city of Antioch!"

The more cautious of the two men looked around to see if anyone was listening before approaching his more wild counterpart and began to give him a stern talking.

"If you say another word of this in the open, I swear to God I will cut your throat myself!"

The vicious glare and the bold threat by his ally immediately caused the man to shut his mouth; the only sound to escape his lips was an unintelligible mumble. However, the Internal Security Agent nearby had

received all the intelligence she needed. Thus, she paid for the vase in her hands from the nearby merchant's stall and scurried off into the crowds of nearby people.

Before long, she rounded the corner, where she placed an envelope filled with actionable intelligence into a dead drop. After doing so, she left the area and surveyed the following targets on her list. As for the document, it remained in its location until a man came and collected it not five minutes later.

A week had passed, and a fully detailed report was in the hands of Linde as she stood before Berengar and Honoria who were gathered in the Office of the Royal Palace. By now, every detail about the men, including the aliases presented on their travel documents and their actual identities, were within the hands of Austrian Royal Intelligence.

If not for the telegraphs built between Kufstein and Trieste and the high speeds of the Clippers in service to Berengar's Intelligence Network, then there would be no feasible way for them to gather such vital information in such a short time.

However, in a week, Austrian Royal Intelligence had cross-referenced all of the information they had gathered about these men with Palladius' intensive spy network. In the end, the potential assassins had been identified as freelancers employed by a client known as Dalmatius Kerularios, who was a Strategos within the Byzantine Empire and a well-known backer of the Second Prince.

After spreading this information out in front of Berengar and Honoria, Linde waited patiently for their response. Honoria had a sad expression on her face; she could hardly believe that her brother would try to have her killed. However, Berengar was the first to pose a question about the intelligence that had been gathered.

"Where are these men now?"

Linde put on an amicable smile, as she stood at attention. Though the man in front of her was her husband, he was also her boss and her King. Thus she acted like a professional as she answered his question.

"Currently, the two men, as well as the three other operatives involved in this conspiracy are under constant surveillance. We have teams on standby to arrest and interrogate them at a moment's notice.

However, since we already know their identities and their purpose, I suggest we silently eliminate them and send their heads back to their employer as a message."

Berengar had a vicious grin on his face; for whatever reason, he always got excited whenever Linde expressed a cruel plan of action; as such, he nodded his head in response before giving her permission to enact this plot.

"Very well, we will handle this your way. I also will approve of further funding to counter espionage. I am surprised to see that these men went so long without being detected; if Honoria had in fact left the Palace and visited the Trade District, something could likely have happened to her."

The Second Queen of the Kingdom of Austria smiled upon hearing this; she would never turn away more funding for her organization. As such, she bowed respectfully before her husband before thanking him for his generosity.

"Master, I am pleased to serve you, and am thankful for this gift!"

Upon hearing this, Berengar dismissed his second wife; it was only after she had left the office did he grab ahold of Honoria and hugged her in an attempt to comfort her.

"It must have been a bit of a shock knowing that your brother had tried to kill you. If there is anything you wish to discuss, just know that I am here for you..."

The Byzantine Princess gazed up at her husband with her mint green eyes; a small tear dripped from her cheek as the young King wiped it away. Honoria struggled to find the words to express her thoughts for a few moments before speaking with a voice filled with trepidation.

"How did you feel when you found out that your brother tried to kill you?"

The Austrian King sighed heavily in response to this question before revealing his feelings on the matter.

"Bitter, vengeful, hateful, depressed, and honestly quite confused. I only had one brother in this life, and he tried to kill me on multiple occasions. I kept asking myself why he would do such a thing; in the end,

he simply wanted the inheritance. Obviously, I made him pay with everything he had before I took his life."

A bitter smile formed on Honoria's face as she nodded her head after hearing about Berengar's experience with a similar situation. After several moments of deep introspection, she came to a conclusion. A stern gaze appeared in her eyes as she voiced her thoughts on the situation she found herself in.

"Very well... Since my brother wishes for me to die, so be it, I have no choice but to retaliate, I will bring him to his knees so that he begs me for my mercy, and once he does, I will deny him it, and end his pitiful existence once and for all!"

A cruel smile curved itself upon Berengar's lips as he heard this; he pushed the woman's hair to that to his side as he kissed his wife upon her graceful neck; as he did so, he menacingly expressed his thoughts.

"And I will be right here by your side, aiding you in every step of your journey as the Devil on your shoulder..."

Honoria nodded in silence as the villainous couple began to plot their revenge against the Second Prince of the Byzantine Empire and all the men who supported him. Thanks to the Agents within the Internal Security Branch of Austrian Royal Intelligence, the plot against Princess Honoria had been thoroughly squashed. Though the Prince would not know it for some time, he had invoked a monster within the heart of his little sister, one that the devil on her shoulder constantly fed.