

Steel 791

Chapter 791 An Esteemed Guest From the Far East

Zhu Zhi stood on the docks of Trieste and gazed upon his surroundings with astonishment. At first, when his father sent him from the mighty and prosperous Ming Dynasty to some barbarian nation in the far west, it displeased him. Though he did not verbally protest, he had spent the entire journey to the shores of the Reich in a rather foul mood.

However, after making his way through the Kaiser's Pass, he shifted his view. After all, the massive steel bridges that stood high above the canal were impressive feats of engineering. Though he did not want to admit it, even his nation's best engineers would fail to create such things.

If the bridges impressed him, then the moment he entered the docks of Trieste, his mind was completely blown away. Trieste was not only an important trading hub in the Empire, it held its primary Naval shipyard. Though there were other such places spread throughout the Adriatic, Baltic, and the North Sea. The most experienced shipwrights in the Empire all called Trieste their home. It was because of this that the city was considered the second most important city within the Borders of the Reich, and thus received priority in regard to city planning, such as street lights.

Though, luckily for Zhu Zhi, it was still midday, and because of that, the street lights were not active. Otherwise, he might have had a heart attack. Though the streetlights were not lit, he did witness something else that deeply shocked him. A convoy of military trucks based upon Berengar's recent designs passed him by in the streets as they transported several tons of steel towards the shipyards where the hull of a massive vessel was nearing completion.

He was surprised to see such a monstrous vehicle, especially considering there were no beasts of burden pulling it. However, the shock he had in his heart towards the convoy of trucks failed to compare to that which he felt when his eyes fell upon the behemoth of a vessel that was being constructed in the shipyards.

He had always been prideful of the mighty fleet that the Ming Dynasty possessed, but this steel warship dwarfed even the largest vessel under his family's command. All of a sudden, he felt as if the pride and joy of the Emperor was a laughing matter.

This ship was the SMS Linde, the first in a line of super-dreadnoughts that Berengar intended to construct as his primary naval warships. One of these ships would be enough to challenge the entire world's naval might at this point in time.

However, he intended to construct ten ship fleets that composed of seven Linde-class battleships and three Honoria-class battlecruisers. As for the Adela-class cruisers, they would be used as escorts for the new cargo ships that were under construction.

Still, the sight of these massive steel ships nearly gave the Ming Prince a heart attack. He quickly looked away from the shipyards and asked one of his translators the question on his mind.

"How far away is the Capital where this so called Kaiser resides?"

The Prince had brought with him a series of interpreters in order to effectively communicate with the Germans. Thus, it took a few moments for the words to be translated from Chinese into German, and vice versa.

"Approximately three hundred and twenty-five kilometers"

Upon realizing that the Prince did not understand the metric system that Berengar had introduced to his Empire, the translators spent another few moments converting the number into the Ming system of measurement. The moment that Zhu Zhi heard the distance in terms that he could understand, he reacted with shock.

"So it will take us another few weeks to reach the Capital of this Kingdom? How do they manage to run their Empire so far away from their nearest shore?"

The translator who spoke German chuckled when he heard the Prince's remark. He did not mean to offend the eastern prince, but he had been doing business with the Reich for some time and could tell the Prince was out of his comfort zone after observing so many spectacular inventions throughout the port city. He corrected the man's thinking before pointing up towards the train station.

"All we need to do is take the train and we will be able to reach Kufstein in a matter of hours."

Upon hearing these words translated into his own tongue, the Prince had many questions on his mind, but ultimately decided to remain quiet and witness the event for himself. His group traversed through the city for some time before arriving at the train station, where they ordered a few first-class tickets to travel to Kufstein.

Zhu Zhi boarded the train with his party, and was surprised to see the luxurious interior of the first-class rail car. Throughout the entire journey from Triest to Kufstein, he witnessed many amazing sights before stepping off and into the grand capital of the German Empire.

If he had thought that Trieste was exceptional, then Kufstein was something out of this world. Steam boats flowed through the river that divided the city, transporting goods from the rest of the European Kingdoms which lie on the Rhine and Danube.

Vehicles drove through the streets in limited numbers, such as police cars, fire trucks, and the personal automobiles of politicians. Ultimately, he and his party got on a bus that was headed towards the Palace district, and gazed upon the impeccable German Architecture with astonishment in their eyes. From the colossal statue which sat upon the hill overlooking the city, to the Reichstag, the Grand Cathedral, and even the Arena which was undergoing construction. There were so many notable locations that caught one's attention.

That's not to say that the Ming Dynasty did not have their own incredible cities, but Kufstein was simply foreign to him. Out of all the diplomatic visits he had ever made during his life as an Imperial Prince, he was certain that he had never seen a city which rivaled Beijing. However, if there was one city that could claim such a feat, it would be Kufstein.

Eventually, the Ming Delegation reached the Imperial Palace, which belonged to the von Kufstein Dynasty, and stood outside its gates where the guards greeted them. Evidently, the Palace had been made aware of the Ming visit and had prepared for this occasion. The guards quickly made the Ming

Prince aware of the current situation. Which he was shocked to hear, considering how peaceful life was in the borders of the Reich.

"I apologize, your highness. However, the Kaiser is currently at war with our neighbors. He is currently marching towards Hungary as we speak. You chose a really poor time to visit. However, rest assured, we would be happy to entertain you in the Palace until he returns from his impending victory."

The Prince was astonished when he heard the Emperor was at war. He had not seen the slightest concern in the eyes of Germany's citizens. It was as if despite being at war with more than one Kingdom; they felt as if it had no effect on their daily lives. Even if the Ming Army were to go to war with barbarians on the frontier, it would still affect the lives of people within the realm in some small compacity.

Normally he would be outraged at this moment, however, he had seen many strange sights which lead him to believe that throwing a hissy fit in front of the German Palace was a bad idea. After all, though he did not understand the military capabilities of the Reich in their fullest context, he could tell they were not a power that should be trifled with.

If his father had dispatched his haughty younger brother, Zhu Li, to the Reich, he likely would have turned this unexpected outcome into an international incident. Thus, Zhu Zhi could only sigh and accept his fate with the dignity of an Imperial Prince.

"Very well. I welcome your hospitality. Please lead the way our journey has been long and tiresome."

The guards led the Ming Delegation to the Imperial Palace, where Linde stood at the entrance to welcome the man into her husband's home. She wore a sky blue dress, with white gold jewelry which was encrusted with topaz that had been imported from the Anangpur Empire. When Zhu Zhi gazed upon the redheaded beauty, he was truly surprised.

In his entire life, he had seen maybe three women who were as beautiful as she was. He did not know her relation to the Kaiser, but if she was greeting him, she likely held a high position in his household. Before he could speak, Linde curtseyed before speaking to him with a pretty smile on her face.

"Welcome Prince Zhu Zhi of the Ming Dynasty. We have been expecting you for some time. I am Kaiserin Linde von Kufstein, second wife to Kaiser Berengar von Kufstein. I apologize on my husband's behalf for him not being available to greet you himself, but he is currently occupied with fighting our Empire's enemies. Please, come inside and rest your weary souls. I am sure the journey to Kufstein was long and arduous."

The moment the man heard that Linde was taken, he sighed within his own heart. He lamented the fact that he could not take such a supreme beauty home with him. However, after witnessing the advanced technology that was employed in the Reich, and the large steel battleship that was under construction, he had no desire to make an enemy of the Kaiser. Instead, he wore a friendly smile on his handsome face as he accepted Linde's kindness before entering the Palace.

"I thank you for your hospitality. The Journey has indeed been long, please if you don't mind, I would like to rest my feet."

With this said, Linde led the man into the Palace where she ordered the servants to help him get settled in. She would later share lunch with the man as Berengar's personal representative, where she would learn some interesting details about what was happening in the far east.

Chapter 792 Lunch with the Ming Prince

Linde sat at the head of the dining table within the Royal Palace. She was alone as she met with the Imperial Prince of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Zhi. The only other people present in the room were the man's translators, and members of the Reichsgarde whose duty was to protect the Imperial Family at all times.

The guards were ever watchful of the Imperial Prince. If he showed the slightest hint of hostility or seduction, they would not hesitate to apprehend him. However, the man was calm and collected. He had no intentions of pursuing Linde, no matter how attractive he might have found her to be. In fact, he was more interested in the war that the Kaiser was currently fighting and quickly inquired about it.

"You said your husband is at war, but as far as I can see, everybody within your Empire appears to be acting without the slightest concern in the world. Do you mind elaborating on why that might be? Pardon my curiosity, I just have never seen a nation at war act so carefree."

Linde took a sip from her wine, and a bite from her schnitzel as she entertained her guest from the East. While Berengar was away, she was the head of the household, which meant that she handled all the diplomatic visits. Though Zhu Zhi thought it was strange that woman held so much power, he was not going to make an ass of himself by commenting on it. The fact that the man had been so polite made Linde suspicious, but she kept it to herself and decided to grace the man with the information he desired. After all, it wasn't a secret.

"My husband, in his pursuit of power, has angered most of our neighbors, but none more so than the Papacy. In Europe, the dominant religion is also a political entity who holds considerable influence over all the other realms. To put it simply, my husband broke away from religious tradition in pursuit of secular authority, and angered this religious institution.

For the past ten years, the Papacy has been trying to dethrone my husband, and now they have declared a holy war against the Reich in their latest attempt to do so. At the moment, we are currently at war with a total of five different kingdoms and the Church itself. Most of these kingdoms share a border with us.

He has split our army to deal with these distinct threats, and is currently leading one fifth of our forces in Southern Italy. The latest information I have received from the front lines is that my husband has achieved an overwhelming victory against the forces of the Papacy, the Kingdom of Naples, and the Duchy of Burgundy. He is now marching towards Hungary to unite with his forces in the region and put an end to their opposition."

Zhu Zhi gazed in shock towards Linde. He was so surprised by this news he did not even taste the schnitzel as he dined on it. One nation was at war with five of its neighbors and had already taken three of them out of the conflict? How was this possible? He needed clarification and quickly asked about it.

"You're telling me that your husband is fighting a war with five enemies and is already victorious against three of them?"

Linde wore a smug smile on her pretty face as she took another bite of her schnitzel before responding to the man.

"Six enemies, and we have eliminated five of them. The Papacy may be a religious institution, but it has its own armies. Or had I should say, what's left of them have scattered to the wind."

Zhu Zhi was silent as he heard this news. He did not know if the woman was lying to him, but judging by some of the things he had seen on his journey to Kufstein, he was certain she wasn't exaggerating in the slightest. He quickly asked the next question on his mind.

"Just how long has this war been going on for?"

Linde did not even need to think about the answer, she quickly blurted it out as if it were the most normal thing in the world, not realizing how shocking the information must be for a man who was used to fighting wars for years at a time.

"A couple of months, no more than three. Why do you ask?"

Zhu Zhi was stunned once again. He simply could not enjoy the delicious meal that had been prepared for him upon hearing such astonishing news about the military prowess of the German Empire. He could only comment in disbelief.

"No reason... Your husband must be a capable general to pull that off."

Zhu Zhi no longer wanted to talk about Germany's war and instead broached another topic that he felt would ease his suffering.

"I am thankful for the hospitality you have showed me so far. I have come a long way, and this meal is truly delicious. The news of your husband's absence was slightly upsetting, but as a man who has been to war myself, I understand that such things take precedence. I guess I will have to be patient and wait before I can give him the news that I have come all this way to deliver."

Linde smiled gracefully when she heard this, but narrowed her eyes in scrutiny. When she initially learned Berengar's true identity, she had received a history lesson on the world Berengar had come from, which shared many similarities with the one they lived in now.

Naturally, she knew all about the Ming Dynasty, their culture, their prestige, their attitudes towards foreigners, and their military prowess. The fact that an Imperial Prince was treating her, a woman from what could be perceived as a barbarous Kingdom with such dignity and respect, meant something had spooked him on his journey through the Reich.

If he had come all this way to Kufstein to deliver some news in person, then there was naturally a request tied to it. Upon thinking about the strange power from the east who used steamships and advanced weapons, she could not help but conclude that the Ming were either at odds with them, or were wary of them and were seeking a powerful alliance to deter them. She was not afraid to inquire about the man's reason for visiting, and quickly did so after calmly taking another bite from her food.

"Are you referring to that eastern power with the wooden steamships?"

Upon hearing the woman so nonchalantly address the Japanese Empire, it shocked Zhu Zhi once again. He felt like his heart couldn't take many more surprises. However, his curiosity got the better of him and he quickly inquired about what she knew about the Japanese.

"You know about the Japanese Empire? Have you come into contact with them already?"

Linde searched her memory from the history lesson that Berengar had provided her with and immediately took note of the term Japanese Empire. From her understanding of history from that world, they should be on the brink of a major civil war.

If they were not using steamships and advanced weapons, then the veteran spymaster would merely chalk this up as a normal change in the timeline. After all, there were many changes in the western part of this world and the one that Berengar had come from. However, the existence of such modern technology combined with the shift in the timeline only confirmed Linde's original thoughts. There was a reincarnator among the ranks of Japanese society.

She knew quite a bit about the history of Japan, more so than she did about China. From the way Berengar spoke about them, they were impressive to rise from a small island nation to a major power which rivalled the European Empires at their height. However, she also knew that they were severely lacking in natural resources, as Berengar made this point abundantly clear to her.

If the Japanese were Arming the Bengals, then they clearly had a reason for doing so. She just couldn't figure out what it was with her limited information. Thus, after several moments of silence, she prodded Zhu Zhi for more information.

"In truth, I know very little about the Japanese Empire, however from what information I have been able to gain, I can say with certainty that should we find ourselves engaging in an armed conflict with them, the Reich would emerge victorious. Why don't you tell me what you know so that when my husband returns home, I can do a better job of convincing him to support you?"

Zhu Zhi sighed heavily in relief when he heard that Linde's knowledge of the Japanese was limited. It meant he still had a bargaining chip. Though she was a woman, the Kaiser entrusted her to look after the dynasty's affairs while he was away at war, and she also seemed to be exceptionally intelligent. He felt as if he could trust her with the information he had gained from his father. After several moments of deliberation, he spoke with her about what he knew.

"If you know about the Japanese, then surely you know about the Joseon, right?"

Linde had a quick mind, and based upon the information she had received from Berengar, she could quickly extrapolate exactly why the Ming had decided to visit the Reich, especially after news of the Kaiser's Pass reached their ears. For the first time since the conversation had begun, Linde was utterly shocked, so much so that she dropped her fork when she heard this.

"You don't mean-"

Upon the seeing the redheaded beauty so flustered, Zhu Zhi felt accomplished and quickly cut her off before she could spoil his fun.

"Japan has invaded the Joseon Kingdom. They intend to annex the region and use its iron deposits for their own purposes. I don't exactly know why they would need so much iron, but that appears to be their goal."

Linde quickly thought through what this meant. It meant that Japan intended to rapidly expand their military over the next couple of years. The steam-powered turtle ships were not a threat to the German Navy, but if the Japanese managed to create battleships, it could pose a serious problem for the Reich. She immediately understood the intent the Japanese had for Korea, but what she did not understand was why they were involved with the Bengal Empire, and thus she quickly asked about that.

"If they're invading the Joseon Kingdom, then why are they also involved with the Bengal Empire?"

When Zhu Zhi heard these words, he was once more astonished. His contacts within the Japanese Empire had said nothing about Itami's visit to the Bengal Empire. Both the Ming Prince and the German Empress would continue to have a lengthy conversation about Itami and her Empire over a delicious lunch.

Chapter 793 Lunch With the Ming Prince Part II

Zhu Zhi sat back with a look of surprise on his face after hearing that the Japanese Empire was interfering with the political situation in the Indian Subcontinent. It was startling news. After all, the Japanese Empire was rapidly expanding its power and authority.

Soon the Japanese would eclipse the Ming if the Emperor sat back and did nothing. It was because of this that Zhu Zhi was interested in brokering an alliance with the German Empire. After all, they appeared to be the only ones capable of stemming the rising tide that was the Japanese military. The Prince was quick to interrogate Linde on what she knew about Japanese operations in India.

"What do you mean by the Japanese are involved with the Bengal Empire? How much do you know about the situation in the Indian subcontinent?"

Linde took a sip from her wine before answering this question. She had a stoic look on her pretty face as she blatantly informed the Ming Prince about what she knew regarding Japanese operations in India.

"I don't know the reason behind their actions, but I can tell you with certainty that the Japanese are selling weapons to the Bengal Empire. Emperor Asha plans to use these weapons to conquer the Indian subcontinent and unite the region under his banner.

The weapons that The Japanese Empress has sold the Bengals are fearsome, well beyond your capabilities to deal with. They are so troublesome that they might cause serious difficulty for our forces should we contend with the Bengals for control of the area."

This news stung Zhu Zhi like a hive of wasps. He could hardly believe that the Bengals had brokered such a deal with Itami, nor could he understand why the young Empress would sell them such weapons. In the end, he could only think of one possible reason that the Japanese would do such a thing, but he needed clarification from the redheaded beauty sitting across from him in order to be certain.

"Let me ask you this... Does the Reich have plans to interfere in India?"

This question surprised Linde, who halted her action of taking another sip from her glass when she heard these words. She was silent for but a second before responding to the man's question with one of her own.

"Why do you ask?"

It was at this moment that Zhu Zhi solved the puzzle that existed within Linde's mind as he stated his reasoning for asking such a serious question.

"Because if you do have plans for the region, and Japan is aware of your existence, they might be using the Bengals as a proxy to direct your attention away from their actions in Korea. I don't know what plans the Empress has in mind for the Joseon's iron deposits, but she needs time to implement them. If your Empire intimidated her, then she might use the Bengals as a means to buy time to complete her plans."

The words that Zhu Zhi spoke once again shocked Linde, but they made sense. The only problem she had with this line of reasoning was the fact that she did not know how the Japanese had learned of the Reich's existence. However, if the eastern empire was led by a reincarnator, then they would surely be threatened by Berengar's presence in this world.

By using the Bengals as a proxy, the Japanese proved that they were behind the Reich in terms of military technology, or else they would never resort to such a desperate gamble to buy time. The likelihood was the Japanese were just starting to industrialize, and it would take some time for them to make use of the iron in Korea to build their military. While Linde was thinking about this shocking information, Zhu Zhi outlined his primary reason for visiting the Reich.

"I will be frank, my father wants your weapons, or at the very least, he wants weapons that can contend with the Japanese should they bare their fangs against us. Name your price and we will pay it."

Linde twirled her finger within her wine as she thought about this request for a few moments. As the director of intelligence, she could make executive decisions such as arming foreign powers, especially if they were to be used as proxies.

If the Japanese were giving weapons to the Bengals to bog down the German armed forces, then it was only fair that she play the same game. Thus, after a few seconds of silence, Linde sighed heavily before revealing her thoughts on the matter.

"You're in luck. Our forces are in the middle of transitioning to new and improved weapons. Within the next two years, we will have hundreds of thousands of old firearms, thousands of artillery pieces, and millions of rounds of ammunition lying around collecting dust. Under certain conditions, I can promise to have some of these weapons refurbished and shipped to the Ming to be used on your border with the Joseon."

Zhu Zhi was excited to hear this news, but did not let it show on his face. After all, he was concerned with what these conditions were. He knew he was asking a lot of the Reich, despite this being their first diplomatic visit, and because of this, he expected Linde to make some serious demands of the Ming Dynasty. However, when he heard her words, he was surprised at how simple the woman's first demand was.

"My first condition is that the Ming Dynasty establishes a non-aggression pact with the Reich. Though I am not afraid of you turning these weapons against us, it is better to be safe than sorry."

This condition actually worked in the Ming's Favor, and Zhu Zhi was quick to accept it.

"That is not a problem. What is your next condition?"

Linde wore a pretty smile as she made her next demand of the Ming Prince. She found that when making excessive demands, men were more willing to accept them if a beautiful woman was being friendly to them when she made her request.

"My second request is twofold. The Ming Dynasty opens its ports for trade with the Reich and treats our Empire as an equal."

This request was a bit difficult, and Zhu Zhi could not give the woman an immediate answer. The Emperor would normally reject the fact that she was requesting to be considered an equal. However, Zhu Zhi had seen the capabilities of the Reich firsthand, and knew that her request was not out of line in the slightest.

He would dare to argue that the Reich was superior to the Ming Dynasty, thus she was actually showing face for the Emperor by demanding to be treated as an equal. Even though Zhu Zhi thought this, he would have to convince his father to agree to this request. Thus, he sighed heavily before answering Linde's request.

"I will need to convince my father to accept this request, but I am confident in my ability to do so. Let's move onto your third demand..."

Linde smiled once again as she took a sip from her wine before explaining to Zhu Zhi her final request for the Ming Dynasty.

"My last request is simple. I would like for your Empire to allow my agents to smuggle weapons through your border with the Joseon so that we can properly train the locals to resist the Japanese occupation. Since the Empress of Japan seeks to turn the Bengal Empire into a proxy against my husband's army, then I will do the same to her with the Joseon. Obviously, you can maintain complete and total deniability if the Japanese were to learn about our operation."

Zhu Zhi thought about this request in silence for several moments. Linde was asking a lot from the Ming Dynasty with this request. By allowing the Germans to smuggle weapons through the borders of the Ming Dynasty in an attempt to arm and train an insurgency against the Japanese, she was practically asking the Ming to become enemies with Japan.

However, when he thought about the last part, which was total deniability, Zhu Zhi felt as if he could convince his father to agree to such demands. As long as the Ming pretended like they had no idea what the German smugglers were doing on their border, then the Japanese could not justify an invasion of China. Thus, after several moments of silence, the Ming prince spoke up.

"I can't agree to this request immediately. I will need to return to my father and convince him to accept these demands. However, I want to ask you before I commit myself to such an action. Can you guarantee that you will keep your word? I suppose what I'm really asking is, do you have the authority to make such an agreement?"

Linde smiled as she finished the last of her wine. Of course, she had the authority to make such a deal. Not only did she hold the title of Kaiserin, but she was also the director of Imperial Intelligence. This negotiation revolved around arming an insurgency in a foreign county. Such a thing was not only within the scope of her command, but was an active part of her duties.

The only difference was that this time she would be dealing with a different generation of weapons. Still, the precedence had been set by Adelbrand, who, with her help, equipped the Royal Andalusian Army with these exact weapons. Besides, in the off chance that Berengar protested this trade deal, Linde would just use her death grip over his heart to convince him to fulfill this arrangement. Thus, she wore a confident smile on her face as she nodded her head and sealed the deal.

"You don't need to worry. I may not seem like it, but I have a significant amount of control over the Reich's foreign affairs. Ultimately, the Kaiser's word is law, but he trusts my judgement enough to allow me to make such critical decisions. When he returns home, I will inform him about everything we have spoken about, and I am certain he will agree that my decisions were not only necessary but also prudent."

Zhu Zhi could not tell, but Linde's mind was filled with lewd thoughts of being rewarded by her master for her actions while he was away at war. Because of this ignorance, the man had a happy smile on his face as he made his intentions clear.

"Very well. If that is the case, then I shall trust your word. I will stay in the reich for the next few weeks before heading back to my homeland. I would very much like to see how mighty your Empire truly is. Once again, I thank you for your hospitality."

Linde snapped out of her daze and recovered her graceful demeanor as she nodded her head in agreement before getting up from the table and departing from the room.

"It has been my utmost pleasure, Prince Zhu Zhi. If you need anything, simply ask, and if it is within my power, I will assist you."

Zhu Zhi watched as Linde's sublime figure disappeared from the room and shook his head before expressing the thoughts on his mind.

"It is a shame that such a beautiful and capable woman is already taken. If my wife was anything like her, I would consider myself to be the luckiest man in the world..."

Chapter 794 Stumbling Upon a Random Talent

Itami stood in the city of Busan at the head of her army. Within the past 24 hours, her soldiers had landed on the shores of Korea and asserted control over the southern city. The Japanese had demolished the majority of the Joseon Army in a single battle, and now they were free to steamroll across the land in pursuit of their conquest.

The local Joseon citizens were gathered in the city square, surrounded by the Japanese soldiers. They were shivering in terror as they witnessed the albino beauty take the stand. In Itami's hand was her current sword, which took the form of a kyu-gunto. She had put aside her old Katana for the time being, and instead focused on the current aesthetic her armed forces took.

The jewel steel blade of the kyu-gunto was pressed against the cold floor of Busan, where Itami's delicate hands wrapped over its pommel. She glared at the audience that was gathered before her before speaking loudly and clearly. Her words were being translated to the people of Busan by an interpreter as she boldly declared the annexation of the Joseon Kingdom.

"My name is Itami Riyo and I am the empress of Japan. today marks the dawn of a new era. An era of co-prosperity where the Joseon Kingdom and the Empire of Japan have united into one entity. Your army is defeated, buried on the beaches outside this city. What few defenders you have left have fled to the hills and abandoned you.

With the defeat of the Joseon army, I hereby annex this Kingdom and rename it to the Prefecture of Korea, where it shall be protected until the end of time by the brave soldiers of the Empire of Japan. No longer shall you pay tribute to your Ming overlords, instead you shall pay tribute to me, your new empress!

So long as you all behave yourselves, I promise that you shall be given a certain degree of autonomy. However, resist my rule and see how quickly your lives shall change for the worse. I may come here as a conqueror, but I always treat my subjects with justice.

For those who work alongside the Empire of Japan, I promise you a prosperous life. For those of you who resist our rule, your fate shall be worse than death! Now, kneel and show your support for your new empress! Immediately after saying these words, the Japanese soldiers lifted their weapons in the air and chanted their war cries.

"Tennōheika Banzai!"

Begrudgingly, the citizens of Busan knelt on the ground and bowed their heads as they chanted these words, in fear that refusing to do so would result in their deaths. They had no idea what these foreign words meant, but they pronounced them to the best of their ability.

After climbing down from the makeshift platform that had been constructed in the center of the city, Itami was greeted by a young Korean woman who was dressed in an extravagant hanbok. She appeared to be from a wealthy family, perhaps the local nobleman's daughter. Before the girl could approach Itami, she was stopped by the guards. Itami paid little attention to the young beauty until she heard the woman speak in Japanese.

"Your Majesty, I wish to serve you. I have long since heard of your exploits and know that you are seeking talented individuals. I am trained in the ways of alchemy, and am willing to learn what you have to teach me. Please accept me as your disciple!"

Itami stopped dead in her tracks when she heard this. The truth of the matter was she was in dire need of chemists and other scientists. Those beneath her command were slow to embrace new ideas and were stuck in their ancient mindsets.

Because of this, Itami had to do most of the research into chemistry herself. It was a miracle that she was even able to produce a chemical manufacturing plant whose sole purpose at the moment was manufacturing mercury fulminate for early primers.

Upon expecting this young woman, Itami realized that she was no older than eighteen, and given enough time and education, she could be molded into a proper chemist.. Thus, Itami gazed over at the woman with her signature icy look before asking for her name.

"What is your name?"

"Min-Ah... Hwa Min-Ah!"

Itami gazed up and down at Min-Ah. She could not tell the shape of her body beneath her hanbok, but the woman had beautiful facial features. She had dark eyes and hair, but skin as pale as snow. If Itami were a man, she would certainly fall for the girl at first glance.

However, she was a straight woman, and because of that, she could only admire the girl's beauty. Itami was also paranoid, and because of that, she was unsure why this girl would approach her of her own accord directly after the annexation of her homeland. Thus, she quickly interrogated Min-Ah to find out the reason behind her actions.

"You say you want to be of service to me? I have but one question. Why?"

Min-Ah was surprised when she heard Itami questioning her reason. Her father was a wealthy merchant who had business dealings with Japan. She had long since heard of the rise of the War Goddess, and Itami's attempts to modernize Japan. The fact that a woman could have such a supreme position of power led the girl to believe perhaps she, too, could be someone of influence in Japan, unlike in her homeland.

Of course, Min-Ah never expected the Japanese to invade and annex her homeland, but that didn't really matter to her so long as she could make something of herself. After-all she was an ambitious girl and wanted more in life than to be some bastard's housewife. Thus, she was quick to voice her reasoning to the Japanese Empress.

"Here in the Joseon Dynasty, as a woman, I can't even hope to achieve anything great. At the most, I will be married off to some man. However, in your Empire, so long as I am useful, I can make something of myself. Please, teach me your knowledge so that I can help you and your ambitions! I want to be remembered in history as something other than just a pretty face..."

The girl's ambition intrigued Itami. It was rare to come across a woman with such determination. Truthfully, her entire administration was filled with old men whose heads were stuck in the past. If she had a hope of defeating Berengar, then she needed people who could innovate. Perhaps Min-Ah would be the first of her subjects to accept Itami's new ideals. Thus, after careful consideration, Itami agreed with the Min-Ah's demands.

"Very well. I will take you under my wing, and teach you the ways of science, however you will be under constant surveillance. I don't know if you have any ulterior motives or not. If you can agree to being watched while under my employ, then I will teach you everything I know. Perhaps you can be of some use to me!"

Upon hearing this, Min-Ah jumped for joy, and attempted to hug Itami, but was quickly held back by the Empress's guards. Until Min-Ah could prove trustworthy, she would be kept at an arm's length from Itami.

Thus, after annexing Busan, Itami had come across a random talent. One who would prove useful in the field of chemistry. Perhaps Itami had just found her version of Aldo von Passau. Or perhaps Min-Ah would remain nothing more than a pretty face. Only time would tell...

Chapter 795 Colonial Expansion

While Berengar was fighting his war against the Catholic world, and Itami sought dominion over the Korean Peninsula, the German colonies grew and expanded as more young men and women were selected to settle into the New World.

Aside from the pre-existing colonies of New Vienna, New Swabia, Berenstadt, and Neu Hafen. The Germans had founded colonies in what, as once known as Florida and Texas, in Berengar's past life. These settlements were connected to the rest of the colonies by trade through the sea, and after some small skirmishes with the locals, these colonies had begun to thrive.

As for New Vienna, it was no longer a small colony of a few hundred men and women. It was the largest colony in the new world, with over ten thousand German families living within the settlement. Day-to-day life was peaceful, thanks to the skilled diplomacy of Arnulf von Thiersee. The local tribes rarely found fault with the Settlers of New Vienna and they coexisted in peace.

Cobblestone streets stretched throughout the city limits, and frachwerk houses littered the landscape. The fields made use of the horse powered machines that Berengar had invented long ago, and were filled to the brim with crops. One thing was certain: New Vienna was not lacking when it came to a food surplus. Still, under the orders of Arnulf, the food was carefully stored in case of a bad winter, and any excess was sold to the neighboring native tribes at a fair price.

As a colony on the other side of the Atlantic ocean, the latest advancements in civilization had yet to reach the shores of New Vienna. Because of that, there was a distinctive lack of industry. Instead, the colony relied on both animal and water power to accomplish their daily tasks.

Though the Colonial Expeditionary forces existed to defend the area, militias had popped up in the various small towns that existed outside the city of New Vienna. The expansion of the German Colony had been negotiated with the native tribes, and Arnulf had paid a fair price for the land.

This was something that upset many of the settlers who believed in the fatherland's propaganda, who told them it was their divine right to conquer and settle the new world to the fullest extent. It was because of this that several men were gathered in the local beer hall where they drank their fill while complaining about their lives.

"Who the hell does the Grand Duke think he is? You all know I make a living by hunting animals and selling their hides! I went out to my favorite hunting spot yesterday and got myself a fucking bear! However, when I brought it back home, Arnulf and his cronies seized the pelt from me.

Why would he do such a thing? Because apparently I was hunting on Mohawk lands! What lands? These filthy savages don't even have the concept of land ownership in their tribes. I swear to god, that fucking bastard's whore of a wife is influencing him to act against the interests of the German people!

I'll tell you what, if the Kaiser knew about this injustice, he would do something about it! I hear the other colonies are able to fully expand as they please, and if the natives kick up a fuss, they just deploy the

Colonial Expeditionary Corps to deal with them. What the hell have the five thousand cunts who were sent to New Vienna done in the past few years aside from enforcing Arnulf's laws that favor the natives?"

Multiple men drank from their beer glasses and nodded their heads in agreement with the hunter's words. There was a rising sentiment of disagreement among the colonists with the pacifistic approach Arnulf had when it came to expansion.

Though the tribes prospered alongside the German settlers with Arnulf's peace, many of the more nationalistic Germans were offended that they simply weren't taking what they needed by force. It was because of this that another man was quick to voice his discontent in addendum to the hunter's tale.

"Yeah, I had a similar problem. I was fishing north of where I normally do, and I caught a dozen fish in one day! However, when I returned home, they were confiscated because apparently those fishing grounds belonged to one of the native tribes, I can't remember which. I mean, let's be honest, all of these savages look the same.

Fuck, I spent all day catching those fish, and that bastard Arnulf gave them away to the natives. What the hell kind of bullshit is that? If you ask me, it is his native wife who is influencing him into favoring those savages. I mean, some of the things he has done as colonial governor are borderline treasonous.

For example, did you hear about the price that Arnulf paid in order to settle the lands that the town of Adelstein was established upon? I heard it was an outrageous sum of goods, and he voluntarily gave them over to the natives in exchange for ownership of the land. What the hell? This goes against everything the Kaiser has said about colonization of the new world. We are not supposed to be negotiating; we are supposed to be conquering!

That colony down south, what is it called Lindeburg? The one between here and the colony of Neu Hafen? Yeah, I heard they wiped out the natives in the area. Apparently, those savages attacked one of the colonists, and as a result they went on a campaign of extermination, wiping out every native within a thousand square kilometers. That's what we should be doing!"

The man was referencing a Colony that had been established in what was previously known as Florida in Berengar's past life. Shortly after the German Colonials settled the land, there was an incident where a young girl was kidnapped by a local tribe. She was horrifically abused during her captivity, and when the Germans found out what she had suffered through, they went on a rampage, slaughtering every tribe they came across.

To the German people of the new world, this fierce retaliation was a statement. German citizens were untouchable, and if any harm came to them, the full might of the German Expeditionary Corps would befall any tribe unfortunate enough to have angered the Reich.

However, Arnulf's reaction to this news was a statement of condemnation. Something that many of the citizens beneath his governance were deeply upset about. After hearing rumors of what the girl had gone through, half of the settlers in New Vienna had the urge to go out and fight the nearby natives, who had nothing to do with the incident.

All of these thoughts were going through the minds of the men as they got drunk and voiced their complaints in the only place they knew it was safe to do so. Ultimately, the hunter who originally

complained about his pelts being stolen voiced an idea that would change the landscape of North American politics for decades.

"It is obvious that Arnulf cares more about the wellbeing of the natives than he does about the Kaiser's will or the glory of the fatherland. I say we round up everyone who despises the current order and march north, where we will establish our own settlement. One that is truly loyal to the Kaiser. A colony that is not afraid to fight with the natives for control of this bountiful land. For Kaiser and Fatherland!"

At first, there was utter silence when the men heard these words. After all, despite their grievances with the current political situation with the nearby tribes. New Vienna was an extremely peaceful place, where the quality of life was the highest in the New World. If they gathered up their families and left, it would be a difficult few months, or even years, before they reached the level of luxury they lived in now.

However, the more they thought about it, the more they realized there were hundreds of citizens like them who were pissed off about the peaceful policy with the natives, and the fact that new land was negotiated for instead of taken. If they all worked together, they could make a better life.

In the end, the will of the kaiser was the deciding factor. These men felt that Arnulf was disloyal to the Kaiser's vision of a manifest destiny, and they would rather die before being disloyal to the man who made all of this possible. Thus, every man in the beer hall shouted their support for this plan and elected this hunter their new leader.

In the next few weeks, a thousand families would depart from the colony of New Vienna and head north to the lands that were once known as Ottawa in Berengar's past life. Where they would found the colony of Berenwalde. It would be the first time since Berengar's rise to power that two German territories would come to arms with one another, as a brief colonial dispute would follow the annexation of Algonquin lands.

Chapter 796 Aztec Expansion

Tlexictli stood upon a large rock overlooking the city in the valley below. The overlapping steel scales of her armored vest shimmered underneath the scorching sun. In one hand was a short spear, and in the other was a wooden round shield that had the hide of a jaguar covering the panels. Upon her waist was a sheathed machete, which was fashioned in the style used by Colombians in Berengar's past life.

The Aztec ambassador to the German Empire had returned to her homeland while the Kaiser was off at war with his neighbors. Upon her arrival, she found her people were engaged in a bloody campaign with their neighbors.

Not being one to fear conflict, Tlexictli quickly took up the spear and marched against her enemies. With the power of german steel in their hands, and the steeds of the fatherland at their command, the Aztec Army had transformed into a powerful entity that no other Mesoamerican civilization could contend with.

In her absence, the Aztecs had waged wars of conquest against all their neighbors. Now the only petty kingdom which remained was the Tututepec. After the Aztecs conquered this small kingdom, the only power that could oppose the might of their empire was the Mayans to the south.

Thrilled that his daughter had returned home, the Aztec Emperor tasked her with leading his forces to conquer their last sovereign neighbor. Upon witnessing the city preparing its meager defenses in fear of the Aztec army, Tlexictli could only sneer in disdain. The weapons that the Germans had sold to the Aztecs were beyond the limited capabilities of a stone age civilization. She quickly called out to the army, which stood within the hills and gave her commands.

"Charge!"

An army of ten thousand men and two thousand cavalry charged down the hills and towards the poorly defended city. Until now, the mesoamerican civilizations had no need for walls around their cities. That had proved to be the undoing of many of the Aztecs neighbors. After all, the Germans had taught their protectorate a new style of warfare, and the sieging of cities was one such aspect.

Tlexictli led her forces down the hill and into the front lines. A mix of steel scaled armor and jaguar hides clung tightly to her overly muscular body as she thrust her spear towards the first enemy she came into contact with.

The Aztec infantry crashed through the enemy's wicker shields as if they were a knife through butter. Meanwhile, the archers stood back at a distance and rained down a volley of arrows upon the city's defenders. Tlexictli cared little for the stone weapons of her enemies, after all her vital areas were well protected with steel scales, and because of that she madly dashed forward with her short spear, thrusting it through the shield of her opponent, and into his body.

The man cried out in agony as his blood and guts spilled to the floor, before Tlexictli ripped the spearhead from his flesh. All around her the Aztec infantry were cutting through their opponents like wheat to the scythe.

The short spear was Tlexictli's favorite weapon, a long, almost sword like spearhead sat upon a short wooden shaft. It could be wielded adeptly with one hand, and was capable of frightening lethality, especially against the poorly armored stone age opponents that she was facing.

Two men surrounded Tlexictli as she withdrew her spear. Despite the situation, she was not the least bit frightened. One of the men swung at her with a war club, however she simply lifted her wooden shield and deflected the blow upwards where she used her short spear to thrust into the man's heart.

The thin padded armor worn by her enemies had no chance of stopping the sharp steel short spear that the woman wielded. Once this man was dead, Tlexictli did not hesitate to shift her weapon towards the other man who had foolishly attacked her.

Blood splattered across the Aztec princess's steel clad torso and marred the shimmering scales with its filth. Despite this, there was no sense of disgust on Tlexictli's pretty face, only a savage smile as she jumped at her opponent and thrust into his neck with her weapon.

Tlexictli had to admit, as much as she despised Berengar for what he had done to her people, without his aid, the Aztec Empire would not be able to expand to its current state. Not only were the weapons they wielded greater, but they also had a massive increase in agricultural output.

While the woman was thinking about Berengar, an enemy combatant had launched a spear at her with his atlatl. It took Tlexictli but a moment to react as she quickly raised her shield, which caught the

oncoming weapon. The man had thrown the weapon with such force that it had embedded itself in the wood, turning the Aztec princess's shield into a useless hunk of junk. She was quick to toss the shield aside and use her free hand to unleash the machete on her waist.

With a hint of fury in her eyes, Tlexictli rushed towards the man who had thrown the spear at her with both weapons in hand. With her right hand she thrust her short spear forward, which was parried by her opponent, only to come over the top of his weapon with her steel machete, which embedded itself in the man's neck, severing his carotid artery in the process.

Blood spewed from the man's neck as Tlexictli continued to hack at the wound with her machete until the head was completely severed from the man's shoulders. The Aztec princess let out a loud roar as if she was the very animal whose skin she wore before leading her forces forward into the enemy's crumbling ranks.

When fighting against steel armor and weapons with stone age technology, who would emerge victorious was obvious. Quickly, the forces of the Kingdom of Tututepec scattered and fell back. The moment they realized the battle was lost, they sought to flee the city with their families. Though they did not know where they would seek shelter from the Aztecs, they knew anything was better than being enslaved by the mighty empire.

Though human sacrifice had been abolished within the Aztec Empire, the extensive slave trade was larger than ever. Most of the slaves ended up producing cocoa and latex for the Germans. However, the extremely unlucky ones would be sent to the gold mines to extract enough of the material to pay tribute to the Reich.

Thus, it was no wonder that these men fled for their lives rather than be captured. The moment the rear ranks broke away and collapsed, the Aztec Army crashed over the city like a giant tidal wave. The warriors of the Empire slew their enemies with steel in hand as they took control of the city.

Within the hour, the last bit of resistance had fallen, and the inhabitants of Tututepec were brought out to the city's center. Tlexictli gazed upon their sunken expressions and declared the annexation of the Tututepec Kingdom.

"I am Princess Tlexictli of the Aztec Empire, daughter of Itzcoatl, and ambassador to the Empire of the Gods. As of today, the Kingdom of Tututepec ceases to exist as a sovereign state. With this conquest, you are now all citizens of the Aztec Empire. Those who resisted our rule shall be enslaved. As for the rest of you, you shall now pay tribute to Tenochtitlan as your overlords.

Obey our rule and we shall be merciful. Resist further, and a life of pain and misery awaits you. I shall leave a garrison here to protect your lands from the Mayans. As for who shall preside over you, I will let you choose a representative from among your people to act as the governor of this city and the surrounding regions. If your tribute to Tenochtitlan is late, you can expect harsh reprisal."

After saying this, Tlexictli turned her head and climbed upon the back of a nearby horse. She and the rest of her army, who were not selected as members of the local garrison, rode off in the capital's direction. The last of the petty kingdoms that surrounded the Aztec Empire had fallen. All that remained was to determine who was more powerful. The Aztecs or the Mayans.

Tlexictli knew with the help of the Germans there was no force in the new world who was capable of defeating her people. All her people had to do was kneel before the Kaiser and pay tribute to his realm. She had to admit, compared to what was happening across Europe at the moment, her people had suffered very little in the wake of Berengar's conquest.

She thought about the man's graceful appearance as he marched off to war. She swore that when he returned home, she would wrestle with him. After all, she had been spending each and every day in Kufstein learning the artform known as submission grappling. She was confident in her abilities that she would be able to beat the man. Thus, Tlexictli had a new goal as she returned to the heart of the Aztec Empire as a conquering hero.

Chapter 797 Hungary Surrenders

The German army arrived on the borders of Hungary, crossing through the safe passage that had previously been established for the purpose of trade. After all, it would be suicide to march through their own minefield. Berengar sat on Horseback as he led the cavalry past the bridge.

Surprisingly, the Hungarian Kingdom had decided to meet him at the border. He was prepared to open fire on them and eliminate what remained of their army. However, they were flying white flags symbolizing that they had come to discuss peace.

Berengar did not desire to end the war so swiftly, he still had to place his puppet on the throne of Hungary. He was prepared to deny any and all conditions that the Hungarian emissary presented to him. However, to his surprise, the man he had in mind to take the place of the new King, held the old king as a hostage.

The Hungarian monarch was bound and chained as he was dragged out to meet with Berengar. Who gazed upon the scene with a cautious glare. Viktor pulled out the Hungarian crown from his satchel and knelt before the German kaiser as he presented it.

"Kaiser Berengar von Kufstein, I along with my compatriots, have overthrown our monarch, and now present the crown to you. We wish to halt the bloodshed before any more of our men are killed in this pointless crusade. The Papacy is dead, the Kings of Europe have all either perished or gone missing. The throne of Hungary is yours. Please do with it as you wish!"

Berengar scoffed as he grabbed hold of the Hungarian Crown. The last thing he wanted was to merge Germany and Hungary. He knew the results of such a diverse Empire and did not want the internal strife such a thing would create. Instead, the Kaiser asked the man a question while holding onto the crown with hesitation.

"Are you Vászoly Viktor?"

The Hungarian nobleman raised his head in shock as he heard these words. He did not expect someone as powerful as the kaiser to know his name. He quickly nodded his head thrice before responding to the question that was presented to him.

"Yes, your majesty. I'm surprised that you know my name?"

Berengar smiled gently before placing the crown on the young man's head, which shocked the Hungarian army as they witnessed the event.

"Vászoly Viktor, I name you the King of Hungary. From this day forward, your Kingdom shall pay tribute to the Reich as a protectorate. In order to cement this suzerainty, you will agree to betrothing your sister Noemi to my first son, Hans. From this day forward, the Vászoly family shall reign as the monarchs of Hungary. Now rise King Vászoly Viktor!"

It took a few moments for Berengar's words to register in Viktor's mind, however after a few moments of silence, he raised to a standing position and swore a vow of loyalty to the Kaiser.

"I King Vászoly Viktor of Hungary, hereby swear eternal loyalty to the German Empire and the von Kufstein dynasty. From this day until the end of days, the people of Hungary shall pay tribute to the Reich in exchange for your protection."

The Hungarian Army remained silent as they lamented their loss of sovereignty. They knew when they initiated their coup that they would have to exchange something in order to spare their lives. They just did not know that they would be forced to become a tributary of the Reich. However, this meant that they, at the very least, would not starve in the coming years.

Over a million young men lie dead across Europe, others were stranded in the far corners of the Mediterranean with no way home. Most of the European Kingdoms would have difficulty maintaining their fields, and would surely suffer from famine in the near future. By becoming a tributary of the Reich, Hungary could rely on the ever-increasing food stores of Germany to survive. Albeit they would have to pay a fair price, but it was better than starvation.

After remaining silent for some time, Berengar spoke up. It quite surprised him that the Hungarian nobles had rebelled against their king and gift-wrapped the man for Berengar's vengeance. Berengar gazed into the eyes of the shivering monarch with a cruel smirk on his face as he questioned how he would execute the man.

"I must say, you have been a thorn in my side since you first sent troops into Bohemia all those years ago. However, now that I finally have you, I am completely undecided about how I should kill you. You know what? I think I might just boil you in pitch. That should be a suiting end to your reign of terror. You fucking Catholic bootlicker!"

The Hungarian King pleaded for mercy, but it was no use. Berengar had decided to execute the man. It would send the message that the era of Catholicism had ended. With this monarch's death, the only Catholic King who would be left in the world was Aubry, and he was not exactly a symbol to rally behind.

"Please... My kaiser, have mercy on me! I swear I will do whatever you ask of me so long as you spare my worthless life!"

Berengar sneered in disdain when he heard the man begging him. Where was his resolve to enter the pearly gates of heaven? As a result, Berengar kicked the man in the head and ordered his guards to take the former monarch away.

"Take this coward away. The man is not even worth his weight in piss!"

The Hungarian Army watched as the soldiers of the Reich carried the former king of Hungary away. However, their attention was quickly diverted when Berengar addressed the new King with a modicum of respect.

"King Vászoly, you may return home with your men in peace. You have much work to do if you wish to recover from the substantial losses that your people have suffered in this senseless conflict. I will send an emissary in the coming days who will negotiate your official surrender. As for your sister, consider her a ward under my protection until the day my son comes of age and marries her. You can trust that she will be well provided so long as she lives in Germany."

Viktor bowed his head with the utmost respect as he responded to Berengar's orders in the most courteous way possible.

"As you wish, your Majesty. I will be happy to accept whatever terms you present to me. I thank you for your benevolence in this regard."

After saying that, the Hungarian King departed back to his capital. He indeed had much to do in the coming days if he wished to recover from this disaster of a crusade. As for Berengar, he looked north towards Poland and ordered his troops to deploy to their next target.

"The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth has been an eyesore for too long. It is time we humble them. It is a shame the Polish King is dead. I suppose the Grand Duke of Lithuania will suffice as a tribute to our conquest."

With this said, the German Army marched into its eastern neighbors. Their purpose was twofold. Dissolve the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth into two separate states and impose puppets on both thrones.

After all, it would be nice to have a buffer state between the lands of the Reich, and that of the Rus. Though Berengar did not intend to allow the Rus to unify in his lifetime, it was impossible to say whether or not they would eventually get their shit together and unite against his successors.

The Kaiser figured he would have to come up with a long-term plan to prevent Russian unification from ever happening in this world. Thus, as Berengar was marching his army east into Poland-Lithuania, he was conceiving a devilish plot to disrupt Russia's natural progress from happening.

With Hungary's surrender, the war was entering its ending stages. All that was left was to defeat the remnants of the Polish-Lithuanian Army and those of Burgundy. Once he had installed his puppets in those two regions, the war would be officially over, and the era of German Hegemony would come to fruition.

Once the war was over, Berengar planned to relax for a few years, and focus on civil development. Unfortunately for him, the Rise of the Japanese Empire was around the corner, and the moment he returned home, he would be bombarded with the intelligence Linde had collected on this matter.

There was truly no rest for the Kaiser in his life. After defeating one enemy, he would be thrust into another theater of war. Such was his life for the past ten years, and for the foreseeable future. Of course, he did not know about the existence of the Japanese Empire, or their plans for the Indian Subcontinent, and because of that, he was able to look forward to a peaceful future he foolishly thought was on the horizon.

Chapter 798 Roommates

Word had come over the wire that Hungary had officially surrendered. Linde gazed at the telegram that sat on her husband's desk and smiled. She had worked hard to redeem herself in the eyes of her husband after getting in the way of his plans for Hungarian succession. Without him even noticing, she had anticipated his moves perfectly.

By dispatching her agents to the Kingdom of Hungary to stoke the ire of the noble families, Linde had ensured that the former Hungarian monarch was ousted before her husband ever set foot in his lands. She also worked behind the scenes to strengthen Viktor's claim to the throne.

Despite previously holding animosity towards Noemi, and the young girl's plans to monopolize Han's attentions, Linde was forced herself to overcome her emotions, and act in the interest of the Reich. However, that did not mean that she would treat the girl so kindly. Today it was her responsibility to greet this new ward, and establish her living quarters within the Imperial Palace.

Linde had gone out of her way to specifically make Noemi's life difficult, not in any overtly aggressive fashion, but in the form of passive aggressiveness. Thus, she had a cruel smile on her pretty face as the redheaded bombshell planned to take her vengeance against a teenage girl who was at least ten years younger than herself. If Berengar could witness the pettiness of his favorite bride, he would only shake his head and make a crass remark about the vile nature of women.

However, he was not present for this occasion, and as a result, he would not bear witness to the spectacle that was about to occur. After reading the telegram, Linde pulled out a lighter from Berengar's desk drawer and lit it a flame, once the document was turned into ash, she departed from her husband's office, and returned to the master suite where her clothing, accessories, and cosmetics lie in wait for her.

Linde had gone all out with her appearance, more so than usual. Though the woman prided herself on her natural beauty, she had gone the extra mile by fluffing her hair and applying the finest cosmetics manufactured in the Reich to her elegant face. After ensuring that she looked her best, Linde placed a small tiara on the top of her hair.

This tiara was made of white gold and was encrusted with sky blue topaz gemstones which matched perfectly with her dress. In fact, her necklace, earrings, and wedding ring were all made of the same minerals. The piercing of one's ears was not a common practice in the Reich. In fact, any form of body modification was considered taboo by society at large. As a result, the women of Germany relied on clip on earrings to adorn their lobes.

After ensuring that she was at her best, Linde confidently strode out to the courtyard to greet the young minx which sought to steal her firstborn's attention. Upon exiting the Palace and entering the courtyard, Linde noticed the carriage which had been used to transport the girl to the palace.

The young empress had to admit, this girl had a remarkably similar appearance to herself. She might even consider the possibility that Noemi was a long-lost half-sister if she wasn't so sure that her late father had never visited Hungary in his life.

Noemi gazed upon Linde's beauty and stopped in her tracks. Her mouth was practically agape. This was the second time she had met with the Empress, and she was even more beautiful than before. She instantly lowered her head in shame. She did not know why she was brought to the palace, but after her

last meeting with Linde, she suspected that she was in trouble. The young Hungarian beauty immediately tried to defend herself, but was surprised to see Linde's reaction.

"Your majesty, I swear I have not approached Hans since our last encounter. Please forgive me for whatever transgression I may have committed against your family! Eep!"

Noemi was caught by surprise when Linde latched her arms around her and took the girl into her embrace. A soothing tone erupted from the young Empress's voice as she stroked her newest daughter-in-law's silky red hair.

"Shhh... That's all in the past, my dear Noemi. Things have changed, and naturally I must evolve with the times. Your brother Viktor has been named King of Hungary and, as a sign of submission to the Kaiser, he has offered you up to be Hans' fourth bride.

You are now my daughter-in-law, just like Veronika and Natalia. As of this moment, you are a ward of the von Kufstein dynasty, and shall live here in the Palace. As for your caretaker, she has been given appropriate compensation in order to ensure that she lives a fine life here in Kufstein. Come, let's get you settled in."

This news dumbfounded Noemi. How was her brother the King of Hungary? What about her father? He would never agree to her even being within the Reich, let alone marrying one of its princes. She had so many questions on her mind as the older woman dragged her into the Palace.

While Linde may have seemed like she was being sincere and kind in her actions, in reality, she had designed a special kind of hell for Noemi during her initial stay in the Palace. Linde purposefully did not reveal that the girl's father had died in battle. After all, she wanted Noemi's life to be difficult for the time being, but she didn't want to break the girl's heart. She would reveal that bombshell once the Hungarian beauty had settled into her life in the palace.

After turning the corner into the living area of the Palace, Linde opened the door to the room that Noemi would be staying in. She had a wide smile on her face as she revealed her marvellous plan to make Noemi uncomfortable. However before she could get a word out she heard the shrieking cries of two women enraged with each other.

"What is she doing here!?!"

"Why is this thieving bitch in my room!?!"

Linde forced a pretty smile as she observed the situation in great detail. Veronika was lying on her bed while reading a book. However, the moment the door opened, she witnessed the sight of her bitter rival. The sly cat who tried to steal her precious Hans away from her. Miraculously, Linde was by her side, leading her into the room.

Likewise, Noemi was equally astonished. She never expected to barge into the room of Hans's number one girl. However, after being called a thieving bitch by the heterochromia beauty, Noemi was equally outraged and demanded answers.

"What is the meaning of this?"

Linde continued to wear a pretty smile as she explained the situation to the two girls who were practically at each other's throats.

"For the time being, you two will be sharing a room! Since Noemi doesn't know how things work around here at the palace, I thought it would be great if she had a mentor to teach her how to properly behave herself. Immediately, I thought of little Veronika, after all, you are both at a similar age, and are both engaged to my precious baby boy. Who would be better suited to the task?"

Veronika was livid. Not only was she forced to share a room with this busty bitch, but she also found out that the girl was now engaged to her fiance. It was one thing for Natalia to be Hans's bride. After all, Veronika had lived with the girl long enough to consider her a little sister. However, Noemi was a scheming bitch, and she had no intention of sharing her man with such a harlot.

However, when she saw Linde's frightening gaze cast over her, she immediately felt as if she had been buried in a coffin made of ice. Linde had the ability to wear a pretty smile while concealing terrifying eyes. When she stared at you in such a way, you felt as if a guillotine was hovering over your neck. Thus, Veronika was quick to bow her head and submit to the will of the Empress.

"Yes, Kaiserin, I understand..."

It shocked Noemi when she saw Veronika behave so submissively towards Linde. She had not witnessed the intense stare that the woman concealed behind her pretty smile, and thus did not understand the fear that Veronika felt.

Nor was Noemi aware of the massive number of deaths that the redheaded beauty's keen mind had orchestrated. Linde was by far the most frightening woman in the reich, and possibly the world. However, very few people knew this truth. Thus, most people treated her as nothing more than a pretty face. That grave mistake had been the undoing of many men.

After seeing Veronika behave herself, Linde smiled once more before departing. However, she left behind one last bit of advice before she disappeared around the corner.

"Veronika, since you are Noemi's mentor of imperial etiquette, I will hold you responsible if anything were to happen. I trust that you will teach her thoroughly. That's all for now. Have fun, you two!"

After saying this, Linde disappeared. It was only after she was out of earshot that Veronika sighed heavily before revealing her true thoughts of the woman.

"Scheming bitch!"

Veronika's sudden change of character astounded Noemi. She instantly questioned the heterochromia beauty about her two faced nature.

"If you think about her in such a manner, why don't you express it to her face?"

Veronika stared at Noemi in disbelief. There was no way this girl was so stupid, to actively pursue the cub of such a fearsome lioness without even realizing the terror behind that pretty smile. She sighed heavily before revealing her thoughts on the matter.

"That's a good way to get yourself killed. Linde may not look like it, but she is the most frightening entity in this entire palace. Berengar may be a bloodthirsty warlord who has commanded the deaths of

millions, but Linde is the mastermind behind his entire intelligence network, and an incredibly petty one at that. It's honestly a goddamn miracle that you haven't vanished yet. However, keep up that mentality, and it is only a matter of time.

Hell, she probably orchestrated this mess so that I can keep you from getting too close to Hans. Linde is incredibly possessive of her loved ones, and anyone who gets in the way of her relationship with them seems to disappear.

If I had to guess, I'd say that Linde is hostile to you, and not me, because she probably sees you as a threat to her maternal role in Hans's life. The only reason you aren't buried in an unmarked grave is because of Berengar's influence. You should remember that before you go do something stupid like talk back to the woman, or insult her to her face."

It astonished Noemi to learn such a wicked truth about Linde. The most beautiful woman she had ever laid eyes on was truly terrifying. Linde looked like an Angel, but was really a devil in disguise, one that would claim her soul should she step out of line. It was at this moment, Noemi decided to maintain a respectful distance from Hans, and follow Veronika's every word now that they were roommates.

Chapter 799 Swift Conquest of Burgundy

Months had passed since the Reich's war with the Catholic world began. The result was a complete and total victory. Germany had defeated the armies of its enemies, and now its own forces swarmed across Christendom to remove the old nobility from power and install their puppets on the thrones of the European Kingdoms.

The Duchy of Burgundy was no exception. During their initial invasion of the low countries, the people greeted the German soldiers as liberators. However, the foolish nobles clung to their ancient ways, and in their hubris had beheaded a German messenger. The result was a complete and total purging of the Burgundian nobility throughout the lowlands.

Castle after castle, city after city, the Germans marched through the lowlands and obliterated the noble families who had once held absolute authority over the entire region. By the time they made their way into the heartland of the Burgundian State, the enemy had willingly surrendered, in fear that they might suffer the same treatment as those in their northern territories.

The German General who was tasked with leading his army into Burgundy sat at a table in the Castle that once belonged to the Duke of Burgundy. After Marcel's death in Naples, his young nephew had ascended to the ducal throne. Naturally, as a man who had a penchant for cross-dressing boys, Marcel had left behind no heirs to succeed him.

As a result, a child of nine years of age was the current acting Duke of Burgundy, though his reign had not lasted long before the German army forced their way into his home and demanded his abdication. This boy's name was Bernard, and he was currently in a discussion with the German General to quietly abandon his birthright.

Lieutenant General Willehelm Krieger sat across from the boy and his regent with a stern expression on his face. It had been many years since he led a small company of men to put down brigands within the borders of the Duchy of Austria.

As Austria rose in prominence to a mighty Kingdom which now dominated a vast Empire, so too did this officer. He was now the commanding officer of the First Corps of the Imperial German Army and was the man tasked with negotiating the Burgundian surrender.

"Bernard de Burgundy, it is in your best interest to willingly abdicate your throne. The war is over, your army is defeated, and now the Duchy of Burgundy acts as a natural border between the Reich and the Kingdom of France. Naturally, we can't have a small child such as yourself to fulfill such an important role. No, someone who the Kaiser trusts will be appointed in charge of this realm.

I will not state my demands again, abdicate your throne, and profess whoever the Kaiser chooses to be your successor as the legitimate Duke of Burgundy. If you do so, we will allow you to retire to the countryside to live out the rest of your days in peace and prosperity."

The young boy looked up at his regent, which was his mother, with a pleading gaze. In truth, he wanted nothing to do with the throne. Though the previous Duke had never outright abused the boy, Marcel had been grooming his nephew to take Aubry's place as his future lover, going so far as to dress the young child up in girl's clothing. Naturally Bernard felt deeply uncomfortable even associating with the title Duke of Burgundy.

Though his mother was aware of the previous duke's proclivities. She had ignored Marcel's scandalous actions in return for appropriate compensation. It took one look at the woman and her unyielding expression for the German General to understand her wicked character. The woman was quick to reject Willehelm's kindness, as she desired the power and authority that came with her son being Duke.

"We have no intentions of abdicating the throne-"

Before she could continue her defiant speech, Willehelm raised one finger and smacked the woman. She was about to scream at him when she felt the butt of a rifle smack against the back of her head. It wasn't a heavy enough strike to knock her out, but it stung like hell. Upon seeing his mother being treated so roughly, the boy remained silent. The German General noticed this and began to speak with Bernard directly.

"Bernard, I'm not talking to your mother. I don't give a damn about her opinion. I need YOUR answer. Will you abdicate your throne and retire to the countryside? If your mother is a problem, I can even arrange for you to be adopted by a loving German couple who are looking to have a family. You can live a happy and prosperous life in the Reich if you so choose. You just have to say the word."

The boy was about to accept the offer when his mother recovered from the attack and screamed at him.

"Bernard, if you dare to abdicate your throne, I will never forgive you!"

The woman lashed out at her son when she saw the hesitation in his eyes. However, she was quickly restrained by the German soldiers. Willehelm felt a bit of pity for the boy before pointing out his mother's actions were far from nurturing.

"Boy, you may be too young to understand, but that is not how your mother is supposed to act. She doesn't care about you, she only cares about the power and authority that comes with the position you have inherited. If you want to grow up in a healthy environment, I suggest you take some time to consider my offer. Ask yourself this: what is it that you want in life?"

Willehelm did not enjoy putting such an important decision on the shoulders of a young boy, but he had no choice. This child was the current Duke of Burgundy, and his bitch of a mother was willing to risk his life just to cling onto some tiny semblance of power and authority.

Bernard gazed upon his mother's hateful expression as she was bound and gagged by the German soldiers, before shaking his head. In truth, he had always known that his mother did not have his best interests at heart. He even feared her. However, he just never wanted to admit it. Now that he was given a choice for a better life, he would be a fool not to take it. With tears in his eyes, the boy gritted his teeth before nodding his head in acceptance of the General's plan.

"I, Bernard de Burgundy, first of my name hereby abdicate my ducal throne, and grant dominion over my family's lands to Kaiser Berengar von Kufstein."

Willehelm wished he could smile upon hearing such words, but it was too pitiful of a situation for him to find any enjoyment in it. He sighed heavily, before pulling out a treaty, where the boy hastily signed away the rights to the Duchy of Burgundy. After doing so, he gazed at his mother's hate-filled expression one last time before asking Willehelm the question on his mind.

"Can you promise me a good family? Far away from the likes of my uncle, or my mother?"

Willehelm looked at the hopeful expression in the boy's eyes before nodding his head. He had a bitter smile on his face as he reflected on the whole situation.

"My cousin is incapable of having children due to an accident, but he and his wife desire a son of their own. They are good people, from an honest background. I am sure they would be happy to adopt you as their son..."

Bernard's tears dried up as he heard this and quickly accepted the German General's offer with a kind smile on his face.

"Thank you!"

After signing over the Duchy of Burgundy to the German Empire, Bernard was led out of his family's castle, and united with a loving family within the boundaries of the Reich. The boy had no siblings to speak of, and his mother was thrown into a labor camp after being convicted of child abuse.

As a result of this conflict, the Duchy of Burgundy was split into two. The Reich officially annexed the regions with a German Majority, and what little remained became a small client state acting as a border realm between the Kingdom of France and the German Empire.

Chapter 800 The Ming Prince's Tour of the CityPart I

Linde was sitting across from her young son, Hans, who had a pouting expression on his face. His mother had just given him an order that he did not want to fulfill. Thus, he could not help but repeat her words as if they were simply unbelievable.

"You want me to take the Ming Prince and the Anangpur Emperor on a tour of the city? Give me one reason why I should?"

Linde glared at her son with a look of fury in her sky-blue eyes before speaking in a stern tone. Hans was smart enough to know that he should fear his mother and her womanly wrath. Thus, as she spoke to him, he bowed his head in submission.

"Because, Hans, I am your mother, and I told you to do so. That should be reason enough, however if you must know the intent behind my request, it is because you share the same position as Zhu Zhi, and it would be best for his equal to take him around the city.

I'm not asking you to take the two men on a boring tour to the industrial sector, or to the graveyard. I'm asking you to show off the wealth and prosperity of the reich. Be a good boy, and do this for mommy, won't you, Hans?"

It was amazing how the woman could so effortlessly shift her expression from a scolding mother to a loving one. When Linde spoke to her son in such a way, he could only avert his gaze and accept her request. Even if he did not want to do so.

"Fine..."

In response to this, Linde wore a radiant smile as she hugged her boy and kissed him on the forehead multiple times. The very act of which caused Hans great embarrassment.

"That's my good boy! Thank you so much Hans, you are really helping mommy out!"

While Linde was showering her firstborn son with unwanted affection, the two esteemed guests arrived in the room and witnessed the scene with the same sense of embarrassment that Hans himself was feeling. Even though Linde noticed their entry immediately, she continued to hug and kiss her son until the boy had enough and shoved her away. After which she pouted for a brief second before shifting her attention to Dharya and Zhu Zi.

"Emperor Dharya, Prince Zhi, thank you for coming on such short notice. Today is such a wonderful day that I figured I would allow Hans here to take you on a tour of the city. You're not busy, are you?"

Zhu Zhi gazed upon the angelic, redheaded beauty and her pleading expression, and immediately nodded his head in acceptance. For whatever reason, this woman had some form of sway over him. Though he had desired to go on a tour of the city ever since he first arrived in Kufstein, he had concerns about a young child being his tour guide. However, Linde's natural charm was enough to compel him to accept her offer. Which he did so in the most respectful way possible.

"I have nothing planned for the day. It would be my honor for the young Prince Hans to guide me around the city. I look forward to it very much."

Since the moment the two young men stepped foot in the room, Hans had put on the facade of an average nine-year-old boy. Though Dharya was aware to some extent of Hans's hyper intellect and true personality, Zhu Zhi was not so well informed. Hans rarely revealed his true self around others. In fact, the only people who were aware of his true mindset were his parents, his fiancées, and his younger sister Helga. Thus, he quickly stood up from his seat and approached the two guests with an innocent smile on his face.

"If mommy says so, then I would be happy to lead you both through the city!"

Linde smiled and patted Hans's red hair as he stood by her side. The loving expression on her pretty face as she dealt with her son made both Dharya's and Zhu Zhi's hearts race. As much as the Anangpur emperor was thankful to Berengar for saving his sister, and allowing the two exiled siblings to enjoy a life of peace and prosperity in the reich, he deeply envied the man for having such a wonderful woman as his wife. While the two men were busy controlling their heightened emotions, Linde bent down in front of her son and hugged him one more time before whispering in his ear.

"Be on your best behavior, or mommy will give you a spanking!"

Hans's face paled as he heard these words, but his innocent facade did not crack in the slightest. His parents had never disciplined him so severely before, thus if his mother was threatening him with a spanking for misbehaving, this little request of hers must be something critical to diplomacy. Immediately after threatening her son, Linde broke away from the boy and pinched his cheeks before sending him off.

"Alright Hans, be a good boy for mommy, and have fun!"

Just when Hans was about to leave with the Ming Prince and the Anangpur Emperor in tow, a peculiar sight occurred. Linde's pet cat named Midnight sprinted through the room and up onto the windowsill. His tail was puffed to its fullest extent, and he began to hiss at the creature which chased after it. Genseric the leopard cub was in a playful mood as it chased after Linde's pet cat. The sight of which caused Linde to scold the cub.

"Bad Genseric! You need to stop harassing my poor midnight!"

The leopard cub had a sullen expression on its face as it hid its tail between its legs. It was intelligent enough to understand Linde's words and quickly became depressed. It just wanted to play a little with its closest kin. The distressed state of the cub caused Linde's heart to bleed as she bent down and picked up the Genseric before stroking its silky fur.

"Oh, I'm sorry baby, I didn't mean to be so harsh. You need to know that midnight is not the same type of cat as you, and you will scare him with your strength!"

Midnight stared at his master, who was pampering his greatest rival with disbelief. He immediately pawed out to her, which caused the redheaded beauty to place the leopard cub on the floor and give some love to her favorite pet.

"Don't be jealous, midnight. Genseric is your little brother, and you need to get along with him! One day, he will be big and strong and can protect you against anything! It will be good for you to foster a sibling relationship with him when you can!"

The way Linde treated the two cats as her children caused Hans to facepalm in embarrassment. He seriously did not understand why the woman had such a soft spot for the felidae family. While Hans hid his head with shame, Zhu Zhi was more surprised that an actual leopard cub was being treated as a house pet by everyone in the room. Even the Anangpur Empire seemed to accept it as if it were something normal. However, before he could speak up about this peculiarity, Hans grabbed hold of his hand and led him towards the courtyard.

"Let's go... It's best to leave mommy alone when she's fawning over her cats..."

Hans led his two guests out the door and into the courtyard, where an automobile lay in wait for them. The cab was closed, and the vehicle was armored to protect against potential threats. Despite this, it looked like a normal car. Both Zhu Zhi and Dharya stared in awe at the vehicle. This was the Ming Prince's second time seeing such a thing and the Anangpur Emperor's first, and they were quick to ask about the device.

"Prince Hans, do you mind explaining to us what this device is? It doesn't appear to have any animals pulling it, and yet it is capable of motion. I don't believe I am the only one who is deeply confused about this?"

A member of the Reichsgarde, who was dressed in his ceremonial uniform, opened the door to the car and allowed the group entry into the vehicle. Hans quickly informed his guests of what he knew about the car as he relaxed in the fine leather interior with a cup of milk in his hands that was provided to him by the driver.

"Father calls it an automobile. It is one of his newest inventions. It is designed as a means to transport people and cargo around town. I don't know much about how it functions, but such vehicles are becoming more common across the Reich with each passing day. Though generally you will see busses on the streets instead of individual cars such as this."

In truth, Hans had enough knowledge of basic engineering concepts to understand the principle behind the car's power train. However, such information was far too advanced for someone who came from a pre-industrial era country to properly comprehend. Thus, he chose to feign ignorance.

The driver inserted the keys into the ignition and started the vehicle. Within a few seconds, the automobile was propelling out of the Palace's driveway and towards Kufstein's Trade district. Hans had no interest in explaining how the German government worked for the Ming Prince and instead wanted to his two guests to see the economic progress of the Empire's capital.

Thus, the trio began their journey around the City of Kufstein, one that would leave a favorable impression on the Ming Prince. Many changes had taken place in the months since Dharya and his sister were given a tour around Kufstein. The city had rapidly developed, and today would be another shocking day for the Anangpur Emperor.