

Steel 131

Chapter 131: Trapped within Vienna

While Berengar and his armies were at war in Southern Tyrol, Count Lothar was surrounded by his enemies. At the moment Lothar and his armies were sandwiched in between Count Otto's forces who besieged the city, and the Castle's garrison who valiantly continued to defend the Castle's walls against Lothar's onslaught.

Worse yet, right before he was trapped within the confines of the city, he was informed that his army that was sent to Kufstein had been completely obliterated. Though, he did not know the extent to which Berengar had put down his rebellion within his home territory, for if he did, the man would truly lose all hope of survival.

As such, Count Lothar was currently surrounded by his vassals who had traveled with him to Vienna, where they were engaged in a discussion about how to move forward. They were not in a good position; Count Otto's armies though depleted by attrition, still greatly outnumbered his own forces now that they had lost a quarter of their army in Kufstein and had been fighting a siege for over a month.

As the Noblemen spoke about their situation, blood-curdling screams erupted from the walls, as the defenders continued to die by the dozens defending

their position within the city, thus adding a great degree of intimidation to the hearts of the noblemen who had followed their liege seemingly into the gates of hell itself. One such nobleman was addressing the gathering of Lords as he voiced his opinions about their options.

"It has become increasingly clear that there are only two options, stay within the city and continue to lay siege to the Castle while simultaneously protecting the city walls! If we can succeed, we can use the Duke's family as hostages to negotiate Otto's surrender! The only other option is to sally forth in a desperate attempt to break through the besieging forces and make our way back to Tyrol, where we can hold our ground against the Duke's forces when he returns from his conquest of Bavaria!"

After saying this, the gathering erupted into chaos as two factions were formed those who supported staying in Vienna and fighting for what they had worked so hard to achieve, and those who wanted to return to Tyrol and resist Wilmar's rule as they conserved their strength. Of course, those who wanted to return to Tyrol had no way of knowing that by the time they arrived, it would be in Berengar's hands, and key cities would be staffed with large garrisons of men, with their walls armed with cannons.

Count Lothar was entirely unwilling to give up on Vienna; he knew in his heart that if they fought their way out of this mess and returned to Innsbruck to lick their wounds, they will have lost the war, they might be able to survive for a few years in a desperate struggle against the Duke's forces, but in the end, they would be brought to ruin. Their families would pay the price for their defiance.

Eventually, the Count raised his hand to silence his Lords, and only after their arguments had completely ceased did he voice his decision.

"I will not concede defeat! I will not retire to Tyrol and live out the rest of my days fighting a defensive war against the Duke and his Armies! We will take Vienna, or we will die trying! If we abandon our siege, only death and destruction await our households. Tell the men at the city wall to defend it with their lives, as for the siege of the Castle, double our efforts. We must not fail!"

When Lothar announced his decision, a variety of expressions appeared on the faces of the Vassals loyal to him; some of them were beginning to regret their decision to back his efforts to claim the Duchy of Austria for himself. Many of them wondered how Berengar was faring in his reconquest of Tyrol; if he had managed to take Innsbruck during this time, then there was no point to continue this war any further.

Ultimately every Lord who was present for the siege agreed with Lothar; they would remain trapped in the city until a point where the enemy forces were exhausted, or until they had taken the Castle, where they would then use the Duke's family as hostages to enforce their demands. It was a risky option, but Lothar was right; if they returned to Tyrol and ended their campaign, ultimately, only death would await them and their families.

As such, the siege of Vienna continued, with Lothar's armies trapped between enemy forces, fighting a two-front battle. With the arrival of Otto's forces, the Castle's defenders became emboldened, and their collapsing morale had been restored to its peak. If they could hold out just a little longer, Lothar's army would collapse, and they would be saved. For now, it was a battle of will to see who's lines would break first.

As such, Gautbeht, the son and heir of Duke Wilmar, gazed from the ramparts above down onto the city below with a smile on his face. Soon enough, this battle would come to an end, and at the moment, it was heavily in his favor. The young Regent wished he could see the look on Lothar's face when he realized he was trapped within the city, with no way out.

Just now, he noticed the increase in the intensity of the siege of his family's castle and therefore began sliding his visor down to protect his face from the

oncoming missile fire. The young man shook his head as he voiced his thoughts aloud.

"It appears that Count Lothar has realized he is running out of time!"

As such, Gautbehrts unsheathed his sword and raised it in the air as he shouted to the defenders with a heroic speech of defense.

"Men, you have all worked hard this past month to ensure the Castle of your liege, the rightful Duke of Austria, and his family remain unharmed. Over the course of the next few days, Lothar will throw everything he has at us, but we can not allow this Castle to fall! For if the Castle falls, the suffering of the citizens of this city will be in vain! Hold the line! Hold the line as if your very soul depended upon it!"

With these words spoken, the defenders rallied behind the Commander of their forces. They screamed into the air, allowing all of the anxiety and misery they had endured over the last month to escape from the confines of their hearts. With this speech, a new sense of zealotry was formed among the defenders, which would hopefully allow them to endure through the hardship that would follow and successfully defend their position until Count Lothar's forces were broken by Otto's. With these events, the Siege of Vienna had reached its climax and would soon be coming to an end; who won the battle

was solely determined by the Castle's garrison and their will to continue defending its mighty stone walls.

Chapter 132: The Count's Heir Submits

While Berengar was engaging in Operation Trident, and Otto was laying siege to Vienna to liberate its population from Lothar's tyranny. Linde was resting in Kufstein presiding over Berengar's reforms. Through the conquest of Schwaz and Innsbruck, she had begun incorporating it into Kufstein's jurisdiction, and though she did not allow for conscription of the people in the region yet. Infrastructure projects and agricultural overhauls were underway; the sooner she got them under construction, the sooner the profits would show themselves.

The people of Kufstein enjoyed their lives during this time of chaos as they were well insulated from the violence and the bloodshed that was appearing across the German world at this time. However, many young men decided to fulfill their patriotic duty and volunteered for military service. Of course, the volunteers were only a small percentage of the troops being raised to not only aid in Berengar's campaign but ensure the defense and stability of the entirety of Tyrol, which Berengar would soon conquer. As such, thousands of young men were currently undergoing basic training, where they would then enter specialized training in the field they were most suited for.

After receiving the first batch of conscripts in Innsbruck, Berengar instructed Linde to continue specialized training. With infantry being the main focus, followed by artillery, and then the Cavalry. Berengar currently had an entire Cavalry Battalion under his command and because the unit had suffered limited casualties during the war; it was more than enough to deter the cavalry forces of any potential army that he would come across for the time being.

At the moment, the newest batch of recruits had begun their basic training and were going through basic PT to get them into fighting shape quickly. Pushups, Sit-ups, Pull-ups, runs, etc., became a daily exercise for the men who had been forced into service. Basic marches and formations were also drilled into their heads. They also practiced how to operate their weapons efficiently, as a set of drills were created to quickly instill the loading procedure of the muskets into the muscle memory of the men who wielded them.

As such, the Military bases used to house and train recruits were overflowing with thousands of young men who had just entered the armed forces. Some of them had been here for weeks and would soon ship out to their stations across Tyrol, whether that was in the form of a field army or acting as a garrison.

As for the Officers, the surviving knights and noblemen of the captured regions were incorporated into Berengar's army and were effectively trained to fulfill the position of his Officer Class. Seeing as how they went from being Lords and Knights to Officers, there was an initial degree of defiance by the Cadets. Still, when they came to realize how effectively organized Berengar's semi-modern army was, they quickly changed their tune.

There was a degree of civility and respect afforded to Officers much like that of a Knight or Noblemen, and as such, they quickly found themselves at home within the Officer Class. Granted, it was a meritocratic force, and they would not be afforded the position due to their birth; they would still have to graduate from the so-called "Military Academy" and climbed through the ranks through a display of competency. Yet, at the moment, there were few if any commoners among the Officer class, so for the time being it had essentially been turned into a position held by the nobility within Berengar's military hierarchy. After all, few commoners were educated enough to lead soldiers into battle properly.

While the conscripts continued their training, Linde was reading the news she had received from Adela about their fathers' battle in Vienna. The likelihood of her father surviving the siege was slim, but there was a chance the weasel could escape and return to Innsbruck. While she was reading the letter in Berengar's office, the door opened to reveal her brother Liutbert who she had not seen since the awkward family reunion they had a few days prior. After appearing in her office, Liutbert noticed the look on his little Sister's face and began to question what she was reading.

"Is the letter important?"

After realizing that she had been smiling wickedly, Linde placed down the letter for Liutbert to read.

"Father is trapped in Vienna, and Berengar has begun to lay siege to the key centers of resistance within Southern Tyrol. It is only a matter of time before Father loses the war; I suggest you find out where your loyalties lie before it is over. After all, Berengar is ruthless when it comes to dealing with his enemies..."

Seeing the letters Linde had provided Liutbert, which contained great intelligence about the ongoing war efforts, Liutbert could not comprehend why Linde would allow him to see such valuable information and voiced his concerns aloud.

"Why did you allow me to read this?"

Linde merely laughed lightly at his question and rested her beautiful face onto the palm of her hand while stared at Liutbert with a gaze filled with familial affection.

"Because you are my brother Liutbert, and I do not want to see you end up like father. So I am giving you the option to make an informed choice. Either bend the knee to Berengar and recognize him as the Count of Tyrol by Right of Conquest. Or support Father, and side with his failing rebellion, though if you publically voice your support for father, when he finally loses, you will be sure to suffer as a traitor. "

Thus an important decision was thrust upon Liutbert; he could either show his loyalty to his father, condemn Berengar as a heretic and traitor, and reject his claims to the County of Tyrol, which by the looks of it will not end well for him. Or he could submit to Berengar's authority and throw away his family's position as Counts. Before he made his choice, Liutbert had one final question to ask Linde about her lover's plans for the future.

"If I do as you ask, what becomes the position of our family?"

Linde stretched her back into the soft leather chair and grinned with a comfortable smile as she informed Liutbert of Berengar's decision.

"We will obviously lose status as Counts for a while, but Berengar's ambitions don't lie at simply being a count, nor does he wish to be a Duke as our father desires. When Berengar finally unites the German Speaking regions into a

single cohesive Empire, he will need talented and loyal men to fill the positions in his government. At the moment, his political reforms are in a stage of infancy, but I will let you in on a little secret. It will not matter which noble title you have in the coming years, at least not as much as it does now. By gaining the favor of the future Emperor and proving yourself as a competent and loyal subject, that is how you will gain political and economic power in the future."

When Liutbert heard the height of Berengar's ambitions from his sister's mouth, he could hardly believe it. Still, he could hardly consider himself a skeptic when thinking about how quickly Tyrol has fallen into Berengar's hands. If the man could seize Tyrol with an army in the thousands, what could he do with an army in the tens of thousands, or even hundreds of thousands? So long as Berengar managed to keep himself alive and in power, he could accomplish his vision.

Thinking about the position he stood and that of his family, excluding their rebellious father, Liutbert sighed heavily and nodded his head as he decided the important crossroads he had found himself in.

"Alright, I will support Berengar in any way you need me to. From the intelligence you have shown to me, Father is doomed to fail in his war, and Tyrol will soon fall into Berengar's hands. It will be doubtful for the Duke to trust the governance of Tyrol to our family after Father's actions, so I hereby submit to Berengar's authority..."

Linde smiled devilishly as she heard her brother relent, and she rose from her seat to pat the young man on his back.

"You have chosen well, brother."

with this, Berengar's ascension to Count of Tyrol could no longer be argued if the heir to Lothar was willing to relinquish his claim in favor of Berengar. Unknowingly Berengar had gained a valuable ally in his future wars; after all, Liutbert was a wise and intelligent young man. One who would prove instrumental to Berengar's future gains.

Chapter 133: Storming the Gap

It was late into the fourth morning of the siege of Sterzing when the wall finally came crumbling down to the ground, yet unlike previous sieges where the musketeers would rush into the fray and open fire on the enemy before running them down with their bayonets in a great melee. The rifled musketeers fired their shots from the safety of the trenches, continuing to engage the defending archers who stood on the ramparts. As for the force that rushed the now giant gap in the wall, it was the levies. Poorly trained and equipped but fearful of the musketeers behind their ranks, the levies boldly charged the enemy garrison under the protective fire of the rifled musketeers from afar. As for the many more smoothbore musketeers, they continued to hold their position until it was time for them to advance.

Bodies fell from the ramparts as the archers revealed themselves to fire upon those who penetrated the now giant hole within the wall. Spears were thrust into the torsos of the levies from both sides. It was a levy vs. levy fight at the moment, as very few men at arms were left behind in Tyrol. Blood spilled across the floor, and bodies soon filled up the gap. Without using firearms to break the line of defense, it quickly turned into a stalemate as the enemy defenders plugged the hole funneling the levies in a few at a time.

When Berengar saw the stalemate begin to transpire, he raised a small flag and waved it, signaling the levies to pull back and the smoothbore musketeers to advance. The rifled musketeers fired from their defensive positions while the cannons bombarded the ramparts allowing the smoothbore musketeers to advance with sufficient covering fire. Eventually, the allied levies that supported Berengar's forces had withdrawn, allowing the musketeers to form a firing squad in the gap and rain a volley down upon the forces defending the hole. After the volley gunned down the front row of defenders, The grenadiers advanced and lobbed their grenades into the gap between the walls.

The explosion of several dozen grenades filled the gap where the explosive blast and the shrapnel tore the defenders to pieces. Afterward, the Grenadiers and Line infantry pulled back, allowing the levies to once more charge the now concussed and injured defenders. This time Berengar sat back in the camp and enjoyed the show; while the battle continued to wage on, Berengar spoke to the Lords next to him who had brought the levies.

"Your levies have provided more support than you realize; they are dealing quite a degree of damage to the enemy forces."

The Lords merely scoffed at Berengar's remark; he was obviously using the levies to wear the enemy down and save the lives of his own men. Of course, any general worth their salt would use such a tactic; after all, it cost a great sum to arm, train, and supply Berengar's forces. He would preserve their lives as best as possible, and until now, Berengar still considered the levies as allied forces, not belonging to his own authority; as such, he did not care for their lives like he did that of his own men.

The course of the battle continued in such a manner for quite some time. Every time the battle reached a stalemate, the grenadiers and line infantry would break it, allowing the allied levies to continue their advance. Unlike previous sieges where he had three entrances to divert the enemies attention to, allowing him to advance into the city rapidly, he now had to fight several thousand defenders in one single gap as such; the battle waged well into the night before Berengar pulled back his forces to the siege camp.

Under the continuous bombardment of Berengar's artillery, the battle for the city had reached a stalemate. In total, over a thousand men had perished this day, but for Berengar, even his allied levies suffered significantly fewer casualties than the enemy; after all, they were protected by covering fire and gained significant ground against the enemy forces who filled the gap between the walls. Berengar's goal was to repeat this tactic the following day; if the city's defenders still had the will to fight, that was.

Berengar, of course, was suspecting the city's garrison to surrender; the levies who were raised to fight against Berengar had suffered significant casualties both in the field battle before and throughout the duration of the siege. Unless they all wished to die fighting, there would be some form of defection that would transpire this night.

As Berengar had guessed, several hundred defenders opened the gates to the city and raised the white flag after a couple of hours. Under cover of darkness, Berengar's troops were ordered to march into the city and restrain the defenders. Though this action had been done without the knowledge of the local lord, ultimately, the defenders felt the price to pay to secure their Lord's power was too great. Thus Berengar was welcomed in by the

defenders who threw their weapons away and saluted him and his army with respect reserved for Conquering Heroes. While the Lord slept in ignorance throughout the night in his Castle, the city was swiftly secured by Berengar and his army.

The surrendered levies were treated as prisoners of war and were afforded proper lodgings and humane treatment by Berengar's army, which thoroughly surprised the Lords beneath his command. One of them decided to inquire about Berengar's behavior as they rode upon their horse's backs throughout the city, which was being secured by their troops.

"Why are you treating the defenders with such dignity?"

Berengar looked ahead into the darkness of the city and saw that the enemy forces were being tied up and lead to containment; now that they had surrendered, he would make sure no harm befell them. With a smile on his face, he replied to the Lord's inquiry.

"They have surrendered and voluntarily disarmed themselves; they pose no threat and clearly no hostile intentions. As long as they do not pose a danger to myself or my troops, I will treat them with the dignity that soldiers should be afforded. After all, their bravery in the face of overwhelming odds should be commended, for they lasted far longer against my forces than I had initially estimated. Only a savage would cut down a defenseless man!"

Berengar may be willing to give no quarter to enemies who had begun to flee in the face of his overwhelming might. Still, to a force who had properly surrendered and thrown themselves at his mercy, only their leaders would pay the price for rising against him. The average soldier who was following orders could not be blamed for the actions of his superiors. This was how a civilized man conducted himself in the art of war.

After saying his piece the Lords who allied themselves with Berengar began to see him in a new light, he was not as ruthless of a conqueror as they had initially thought. Instead, he had some insights into warfare that could change the way in which such a thing was conducted within the civilized world. To the feudal Lords of a barbaric era, this idea of treating the disarmed combatants of the enemy with dignity was a new and bold concept, one which Berengar

and his forces would become renowned for as he waged his many wars of conquest.

Chapter 134: Victory in Meran

Eckhard stood in the middle of the siege camp in which he had prepared outside the city of Meran. He was currently wearing his blackened munition's half-plate armor with brass trim, over his winter clothing. A German-style burgonet was adorned atop his head, protecting his skull from potential harm. The three ridges that formed at the top of the helmet were trimmed with brass, as were the edges of the helmet.

The veteran Knight, who now acted as Berengar's Field Marshal scowled as he watched the ongoing siege of Meran. Due to an increase in distance when compared to Sterzing it took him an extra day to arrive at his target with his army. Unlike Berengar, he did not engage in a field battle before setting up the siege, as such his army was well rested for the campaign to take the South.

While Berengar had developed a taste for the gruesome nature of warfare, Eckhard was quite honestly tired of it. He had seen too much death in his life, and the fertile fields of a hundred battlefields being turned into a barren wasteland scorched by the fires of war, and the blood of battle were etched into his permanent memory. However, as a Knight whose only skills were in the art of war, he had no other option in life but to fight until the day of his death.

Hearing the blood-curdling screams of the enemy defenders who were gunned down by the rifled musketeers in his army, many of which had become talented marksmen by this point in the campaign, he could not help but sigh and shake his head as he mumbled his inner thoughts under his breath.

"So much unnecessary death. They should just surrender, their defeat is inevitable..."

Despite the grizzled veteran's views of the conflict, the enemy persisted with all of their being in defending against the technologically advanced forces of Eckhard's army. Much Like Berengar, the army in which he had been tasked with commanding was filled with a mix of veterans, conscripts, and levies. Many of the surviving veterans in this conflict would go on to become NCOs,

and even Officers within Berengar's future Imperial Army, but for now they merely hunkered down in the trenches and fired upon the enemy from a distance which was out of reach from the longbows, and crossbows of the feudal garrison in which they were facing off against.

It was after making this observation that the wall finally came crumbling down, after a few days of laying siege to Meran, victory was within his grasp, Eckhard began to wonder if Berengar and Arnolf had already conquered their cities. Nevertheless, now was not the time for that, as such Eckhard grabbed ahold of his loaded musket and ordered his troops to prepare to storm the gap. Eckhard took a different approach to the battle than Berengar did, he bombarded the gaps within the wall with explosive shells, making sure to deal massive damage to whatever men were foolish enough to stay near the gap.

After bombarding the location for some time, the enemy was afraid to protect it, as such, they had managed to stay quite a distance away from the area, when Eckhard finally called for the bombardment to stop, the gap was rushed by the nearby musketeers and levies who ran into the city and began their slaughter. No matter how mighty of defense was initially planned, under the fire of muskets, whose flanks were covered by the levies the city quickly fell into the hands of Eckhard.

As one of Berengar's Generals, Eckhard had made sure to enforce Berengar's rules about the treatment of civilians and POWs, any man who willingly surrendered to Eckhard and his army was treated with a degree of dignity, and under the watchful gaze of Eckhard's forces who had Berengar's rules of war drilled into their heads, the levies were prevented from acting out and causing a scene. After all of the enemies were rounded up as prisoners of war, and the civilians were accounted for Eckhard gave the order to begin the bombardment of the Castle.

Unfortunately for Eckhard the enemy Regent was stubborn and refused to surrender, as such the bombardment continued for several days more before the walls came crumbling down. Wanting to end the battle as quickly as possible Eckhard ordered his grenadiers into position to open fire on the enemy forces before lobbing their grenades into the gap. A common tactic utilized by grenadiers, after causing significant death and destruction to the enemy defense, a great melee had broken out as levies, conscripts and veterans clashed with the enemy garrison. The castle was protected by the

elites left behind in Meran and comprised of heavily armored troops resembling men at arms.

Eckhard stayed in the back of the army and watched as his forces slowly captured the courtyard before bashing down the Castle's doors with a battering ram, where they marched inside with their muskets loaded, bayonets affixed, and spears in hand. What followed was a slaughter of every man who resisted until finally, they entered the Grand Hall where the regent was standing firmly in defiance of Eckhard's army.

When Eckhard forced his way to the front and saw the proud Regent he could not help but sigh in his heart. This man was clearly willing to die rather than admit defeat. The Regent noticing the respect given to Eckhard realized the possibility that he was the commander of this army, as such he asked in confusion as to the location of Berengar.

"You are much too old to be Berengar the Accursed, who are you? and where is the Heretic who lays siege to my lands?"

Eckhard noticed the usage of the phrase "my lands" despite being a mere Regent which suggested the man undoubtedly had an overinflated sense of pride. As such he sighed and introduced his rank and name to the Regent who acted in power as the Lord of this region was off in Vienna fighting Lothar's war.

"I am Field Marshal Eckhard von Hallstatt, Berengar's leading General, he has tasked me with laying siege to this city and as such, I have full authority to accept your surrender!"

With the massive growth of Berengar's armies, he had begun to implement a proper rank system in his army, which was equivalent to a modern military's, unlike America in Berengar's past life, he used the rank Field Marshal to give to Eckhard as the highest-ranking General of all of his armies.

The stubborn Lord looked at Eckhard as if he was joking, and once more inquired about Berengar's whereabouts.

"Where exactly is Berengar if he is not laying siege to my grand city?"

Eckhard once more noticed the usage of the term "my" when referring to the city, and if it was not obvious before, it became apparent now to everyone in the room that this Regent was not only stubborn but incredibly arrogant, thinking that the leader of the Loyalist forces in Tyrol would come to Meran himself, as such Eckhard grinned and informed the man of his true value.

"Berengar is currently laying siege to Sterzing and has asked me to take Meran in his absence. Now that the City belongs to us, and the Castle has been secured I highly suggest you surrender, if not I will imprison you by force."

At this point it did not matter if the regent surrendered or not, the city was Eckhard's and by extension Berengar's, the Regent's willingness to accept defeat was irrelevant. Yet shockingly without an army to protect him, or the will of the people to stand up for him, the Regent still refused to admit that he had lost, and instead chastised Eckhard.

"I will never surrender this City so long as I draw breath, when Lothar and my liege return they will drive you into the depths of hell, and I will be greatly rewarded for my loyalty!"

Seeing the stubbornness of this Regent had turned into stupidity at this point Eckhard merely sighed and gave his troops an order.

"Arrest this man, and put him in solitary confinement. I do not want him influencing the prisoners to rebel against our rule here!"

With that said the soldiers pounded their chests in a salute and obeyed his commands.

"Yes sir!"

After saying that they quickly locked up the man in chains, despite his best attempts to struggle, and dragged him off to the dungeon kicking and screaming.

"I can not wait to see how Duke Lothar slaughters you traitors like pigs! You will all be damned to the afterlife for following that heretic into hell!"

With those words said the troops did not react in the slightest, as far as they were concerned Berengar was a man who had proven himself time and again worth following, no matter what the Church might say, he was a righteous man, who had practically become a Warrior Saint in their eyes. Of course, they had no way of knowing that in the distant future after Berengar's passing there would be an enormous debate among the leaders of the Church of Germany as to whether or not Berengar should be canonized as a Warrior Saint.

With the Regent locked away, and the city's defenders defeated the battle for Meran had resulted in a victory for Eckhard, the first of many that would come from the first Field Marshal of Berengar's armies.

Chapter 135: Successful Operation and a New Invasion

At the moment, Berengar was standing in the middle of the Grand Hall of Sterzing; after a well-fought siege, the enemy had conceded and was kneeling before him. With the collapse in the defenses of the city the night prior, it did not take long for the cowardly Regent within to surrender the Castle and the City to Berengar, a few bombardments on the castle's walls, and he quickly flew the white flag, scurrying for Berengar's favor.

With Sterzing and Meran won, all that remained in operation Trident was the fall of Schlanders, and news of victory in that area would soon follow. As such Berengar was smiling at the defeated Regent, which happened to be one of the Brothers of the Baron who ruled over this area. Though the man was trusted with the region's defense by his elder brother, he had utterly failed in that regard.

The resistance in the South had come crashing down around the might of Berengar's army, and few places still harbored ill sentiments towards Berengar's campaign, at least openly that is. At the moment, Berengar was speaking with the Regent, who was kneeling before him like a loyal subject.

"I will not punish you for your brother's defiance. Since you have surrendered willingly, you will be afforded the same respect I treat all of my prisoners of war. However, Sterzing is under my authority until the rule of law is restored within Tyrol. "

The Regent was sweating buckets as he kneeled before Berengar, not willing to look into the young man's ferocious gaze. He had never seen a siege ended so quickly before, nor had he witnessed such destruction. The rapid speed in which Berengar seized control of Sterzing was unprecedented, well, unless you count his other conquests. Truly the tactics of European warfare would change when the feudal lords of the continent eventually came to know the effectiveness of his weapons.

As such, the man kept his head bent low as he thanked Berengar for his mercy

"My Lord, I thank you on behalf of myself and my family for sparing my life!"

The church had taken advantage of Berengar's conquest to spread rumors about alleged wicked acts of his army and himself. Despite conducting themselves with a degree of civility not commonly found in this medieval age, his army was branded as demon worshiping murderers, rapists, and cannibals by the Church. As such, the fear in the Regent's eyes was understandable, he was clearly a fool who believed everything the Church told him, and Berengar had no use for such fools in his County.

That's right, his County, as far as Berengar was concerned, there was only one way for this war to end up, with him being rewarded with the title of County of Tyrol. Though at the moment he was unaware of Liutbert's decision to aid him in this regard, Berengar was still confident he would get what he wanted. Thus he looked at the Regent in front of him with disgust as the man was led away to his imprisonment.

Afterward, Berengar sat down on the seat of power in Sterzing and gave his orders.

"Prepare to rest here, and leave a garrison of 500 men, we will prepare our forces for a push into the Prince-Bishopric of Trent when we have mustered our strength. For now, enjoy yourselves, but make sure to follow the rules I have set forth; if I find anyone who dares to ****, raid, murder, cause unnecessary harm to the civilians, and prisoners I will have them placed before a firing squad do I make myself clear?"

With that said the voices of the soldiers under Berengar's command who had gathered in the Great Hall of Sterzing voiced their support in unison.

"Yes, my Lord!"

Afterward, his forces departed, and Berengar was given a reprieve from the endless violence and bloodshed that had been going on since the beginning of his war. He initially planned to march on the Prince-Bishopric of Trent in another month; this would give him time to gather troops, and solidify his position. With many armed garrisons stationed throughout Tyrol enforcing his will upon the local Lords.

After all, for the many changes he had planned to the structure of society, the rebellion was inevitable, and he wanted his troops in place to counteract any revolution that might arise from the noblemen who were disgruntled by his changes to their feudal powers. Thus he intended to begin the constructions of small star forts in the conquered regions and house them with garrisons of local men until the day where he incorporated the entirety of Tyrol into his political, economic, industrial, and agricultural reforms.

After a few days of rest, a messenger came to Berengar and handed him a series of letters, which different people wrote, but each contained important information for his war efforts. The first came from Linde which claimed to have convinced her older brother Liutpert to support him in his bid for the title of Count of Tyrol; in fact, the man openly denounced his father and his actions during Berengar's siege of Sterzing.

The next two letters were from Arnulf and Eckhard, informing Berengar that they had seized control of their targets and that Operation Trident had become an enormous success. Berengar now held the key centers of resistance to his authority in Southern Tyrol; with it, the remaining Rebel regions would fall into Berengar's hands in weeks.

The next letter was the most important report he had received, and it was written by Adela, informing him that Lothar was surrounded in Vienna, with no way out, and the siege her father was engaging in to remove the traitor Lothar was going quite well. It would not be long until Lothar was captured by Duke Wilmar's forces and was executed. When Berengar read this news, he realized he would have to push forward his timetables. If he could not capture

Trent by the time Lothar's rebellion ended, then the Duke would surely not allow him to invade Trent without a proper justification openly.

At the moment, that justification was the fact that the Prince-Bishop of Trent had openly declared support for Lothar's rebellion and had even supplied them. Realizing that Berengar no longer had the luxury to wait for reinforcements, he quickly wrote a pair of letters and sent them with a messenger off to Arnulf and Eckhard. The letters contained their further orders; Arnulf and Eckhard would leave garrisons behind and march on the regions that would later become known as Riva and Pergine Valsugana. As for Berengar and his forces, they would march on the city of Trent. They simply did not have the time to wait for reinforcements.

After sending the letters, Berengar quickly gathered his officers, where they were confused by the unscheduled meeting but were eager to listen to Berengar's command. As such, Berengar cut to the chase and informed his troops of his monumental decision.

"The traitor Lothar is about to fall to Count Otto's forces. It is a matter of weeks at this point..."

With this said, the room resounded in applause, this meant that soon enough, the war would be over, and they could return home. However, Berengar shocked them by raising his hand and having them hold their applause; he pointed in the direction of the map in front of them, which landed directly on the Prince-Bishopric of Trent. Berengar had a fierce and determined gaze in his eyes as he gave his decree.

"Because of this, we will have to act quickly if we wish to end the Rebellion in its entirety; as you all know, the Prince-Bishop of Trent has been supplying our enemies. If we do not invade them now, we will allow the authorities in Trent to get away with the blood on their hands. As such, I hereby declare that tomorrow morning, our forces aside from a small garrison of 250 men, designed to maintain order in the region, will march upon Trent, where we will capture the region within the next few weeks and incorporate it into the County of Tyrol!"

The Officers were shocked at first by this news; however, when thinking of the potential rewards they could gain by seizing Trent, their eyes glistened with

greed. With the new territory under his control, Berengar would need to appoint noblemen of higher regard to run it for him. Since positions in his political and military structure were based largely upon merit, the more capable one proved themselves as a leader in the upcoming conflict, the better their chances to become a Baron or a Viscount.

Thus the passion for this invasion was far greater than that of the conquest of Tyrol, and every man desired to do their part to gain a prestigious position and untold wealth from the annexation of Trent. As for Berengar, he was excited by the fact that he could finally deal a great blow to the Church, who he had already made his enemies. If they think the Teutonic Order will be enough to wipe him out in a few months, they were sadly mistaken. With his orders being given, the Officers quickly relayed them to their troops, and Berengar took a sip of wine as he gazed at the map of this world. Further strengthening the resolve he had to become an unrivaled Emperor, the conquest of Tyrol and Trent was only the beginning!

Chapter 136: You Really Know how to Force my Hand

While Berengar had begun to march his armies into the Prince-Bishopric of Trent, Duke Wilmar was engaged with the enemy Bavarians at Munich, his siege was lasting longer than he had anticipated, but it was going smooth enough. The main Bavarian armies were up in the north fighting against the regions under von Luxembourg's influence. For Eastern Germany, they were fighting among themselves for petty reasons. There was not a single region of Germany that was not embroiled in some form of warfare at the moment; only small towns could escape the wrath of passing armies if they were lucky; most weren't.

Duke Wilmar was reading a report about Berengar's recent activities. In under two months, he had subjugated the Northern and Southern regions of Tyrol and had marched on Trent with the intent of annexing the territory through the right of conquest. Berengar's actions greatly enraged the Church, who had demanded Duke Wilmar do something about his lowly vassal. The truth was, at the moment, Berengar was not directly a Vassal of Duke Wilmar but Count Lothar. By supporting Duke Wilmar in his war against Lothar, Berengar was technically breaking his responsibilities as a vassal to Lothar and was actually acting in treason against his direct liege.

At the moment, Duke Wilmar was very pleased with Berengar's actions; despite being a lowly Viscount, the young man had somehow gathered enough forces to rapidly retake Tyrol from the defending Garrisons and the Lords and Regents who ruled over the area. However, what shocked him the most was that Lothar's son and heir, Liutbert, openly denounced his father and sided in support of Berengar, swearing loyalty to the man that was his family's vassal. By swearing his loyalty to Berengar, Liutbert had essentially given up on his claim for Tyrol, which put Duke Wilmar in a difficult position.

The Duke of Austria grinned as he chuckled and commented to himself

"You really know how to force my hand, do you not, Berengar?"

Honestly, Duke Wilmar was impressed by Berengar's capabilities and wanted the man on his side, especially with the efficiency in which he engaged in warfare; Despite the fact that he did not know Berengar's secret to swift victory; he still desired the man to be his Marshal. However, since Berengar was someone else's vassal, he could not do so; as such, Duke Wilmar was convinced that making Berengar Count of Tyrol was in his best interest at the moment and had thus come to a conclusion.

He would even allow Berengar to keep Trent and incorporate it into his domain. Surely that would be enough to satisfy the ambitions of a man who was born a lowly Baron's son. Of course, if Wilmar knew what Berengar intended to do over the upcoming years, he would have refused to give Berengar any greater authority. However, there was no magic in this world; if the gods of mankind existed, they surely did not show their presence. As such, there was no way to accurately predict the future or understand the exact thoughts in someone's head.

Beside Wilmar was one of his Commanders, the Count of Salzburg; his name was Walfried von Salzburg, who was shocked by the statement the Duke had made, as such, he quickly questioned his liege on what he meant.

"Apologizes for my liege, but how exactly has Berengar forced your hand?"

Normally a Count like Walfried would not be familiar with some lowly Viscount from another County. Still, he had heard many things about Berengar, the young man who was quite famous in Austria and several nearby German

regions like Bavaria. When Walfried received the Duke's reply the Count could not help but look at Berengar with even higher praise.

"Berengar has seized nearly all of Tyrol and has currently marched on the Prince-Bishopric of Trent in an attempt to annex it from the Church."

This was shocking news; after all, it had been less than two months since Berengar first took up arms against Count Lothar, and during that entire time the Duke's army had been stuck laying siege to Munich, he began to wonder just how did the young Viscount manage to capture such a vast swath of territory so rapidly? Count Walfried could hardly believe his ears and, as such, had to verify the information.

"What did you say?"

Duke Wilmar glared at Walfried in response to his questioning tone and made what he had previously said clear.

"You heard me..."

Walfried did not know how to react to such information; immediately, his mind thought the Duke was reading misinformation, and as such, he asked about its authenticity.

"Has this intelligence been verified?"

To Walfried's surprise, Duke Wilmar smiled and nodded; neither of them knew how exactly Berengar had managed to seize Tyrol so quickly, but they knew that it was an extraordinary feat; as such, they could not help but praise the young Viscount in their hearts. The only question that remained in Walfried's mind was what they should do with such a talented commander.

"What will you do with him if he is victorious in Trent?"

Duke Wilmar continued to smile as he announced his plans to his trusted friend.

"I intend to make him Count of Tyrol and allow his annexation to take place."

At first, this news greatly shocked Walfried. However, he understood Wilmar's intentions; Berengar was talented in not just military matters but economic and industrial ones as well. If they could gain his favor and put him to work for the good of the realm, Austria would soar to new heights never before seen in this world. Unfortunately, the two scheming noblemen had made one minor miscalculation, and that was the fact that Berengar's ambitions did not stop at being a Count. Thus he would never be content putting his innovations to use for another sovereign.

However, these men had no way of knowing the depth of Berengar's goals nor the height of his pride. When the time finally came, Berengar would refuse to serve on Wilmar's council and instead develop Tyrol into a booming industry and agricultural district. While the war for Germany waged on, Berengar would elect to protect his new lands and cultivate them, allowing the chaos that the conflict caused to spread to every corner of Germany, every corner but his own. Only when things were at their worst would he have the ability to rise from the ashes of the old world and present a new alternative.

As such, they continued to scheme as to how they would get into Berengar's good graces, and by doing so, they played directly into the young Viscount's hands. For Berengar would never accept the yoke of servitude beneath another being, his pride as a man would never allow it.

Chapter 137: Invasion of Trent

The Invasion of Trent was swift and sudden; the three-prong assault on Trent, Riva, and Pergine Valsugana caught the Prince-Bishop completely off guard. Berengar gave no warning when he invaded Trent; as far as he was concerned, he was already at war with the region when they decided to supply his enemies. Due to the lack of notice, the Prince Bishop did not have time to raise an army in defense, not even the ability to form levies.

As such, he was currently surrounded in the City of Trent by Berengar's armies; as for the other key areas of assault, they could hardly even be considered cities; if anything, they were towns with a single castle. Both Eckhard and Arnulf would be able to take their regions and march on the final area with a significant population before Berengar had even completed his siege of Trent.

This was a lightning war fought with limited time. Berengar had to capture the key regions before Lothar was defeated in Vienna. As such, he had ordered a constant bombardment of the enemy fortifications. While a siege camp was constructed, it was rushed into production, as Berengar did not fear the Bishops armies, who were all hiding cowardly behind the large city walls. It was not as if it mattered though, Berengar concentrated the artillery bombardments on a specific section of the wall and felt he could bring it down very quickly.

As usual, Berengar's forces had fired their muskets upon the defenders on the ramparts; those who survived the initial attack began to realize that by looking over the merlons, they were asking for death. As such, the entirety of the bombardment was rather peaceful, with only a few shots being taken every so often whenever a defender was foolish enough to stick his head out from under the protective cover.

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The Prince-Bishop of Trent was livid, his territory was under siege from Berengar the Accursed and his demonic hordes; he was completely and utterly trapped within the confines of his territory. The Bishop's name was Ludger, and he could not think of a worse fate than being trapped inside his city walls waiting for Berengar to bring the wrath of Satan upon him. Obviously, he was not one of the Bishops within the Catholic Church who supported Berengar's ideals and had used much of his power and authority to demonize the young Viscount publically.

Ludger was in the middle of screaming at his Garrison's commander, who was heavily armored in the equipment a proper man at arms would have from the era.

"What do you mean the men on the ramparts do not have the ability to return fire? Just what kind of weapons is the enemy using?"

The commander of the garrison was utterly frightened; he had seen too many of his men gunned down by the thunderous weapons in which the enemy forces wielded. Though he recognized the possibility of the arms being used as hand cannons, he could not believe the range they were capable of. It was

beyond imagination to suggest such a weapon was capable of engaging targets at over 400 yards.

"I believe they are hand cannons, but your Lordship, I do not understand how these weapons are capable of such range; they have a greater range of effect than even our steel crossbows!"

The Prince-Bishop of Trent could only gnash his teeth in rage as he continued to hear the echoing thunder of the 12 lb cannons wreaking havoc upon his walls. Fearing the worst, he asked the question on his mind.

"What about the walls? Will they withstand the fire of the cannons?"

The garrison commander shook his head with a worrisome expression on his face when he told the truth.

"They will at most last another day, your Lordship please, let me get you out of the city, you can take refuge in the Vatican until a force can be mustered to take back your land!"

Ludger was outraged at the idea of fleeing his lands and leaving it in control of Berengar the Accursed, but his garrison commander was right; if he stayed here, the Heretic might have him executed as a display of force against the Church. Ludger completely refused to die at the command of Berengar, and he also needed to supply the Vatican with intel he had gathered about Berengar's weapons. Whether they believed him or not, the hand cannons in Berengar's hands were far more effective than anything else seen at the time and were a great threat to any army of the era.

As such, Ludger sighed heavily before accepting the Commander's suggestion

"Fine... We will do it your way; make sure you and your men buy me some time!"

With those words spoken, the Garrison commander nodded his head and saluted to the Prince-Bishop.

"We will die defending this holy land from the heathens at our gates!"

With that said, a plan was put into place for the Pince Bishop of Trent to abscond into the night and flee towards the Vatican. Hopefully, Berengar's forces would be unable to capture him.

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Night fell, and Berengar's bombardment continued into the night; to provide a distraction for the Prince-Bishop's escape, the enemy defenders sallied out of the sally port and rushed into Berengar's trench line. Ultimately the enemy was spotted before they were even 250 yards away from the camp; as such, Berengar and his men awoke from the sound of the watchtower's bell and rushed into their equipment. This time they would not be foolish enough to leave their armor behind; as such, it took them a few minutes to get fully equipped.

During this time, the muskets from the sentries within the trenches had been going off echoing into the night as the minie ball and musket ball projectiles shredded the oncoming attackers. Though the trenches had been rushed, there was still barbed wire in place and earthen fortifications designed to protect the soldiers within the trenches.

By the time Berengar arrived at the scene, a pile of corpses stacked atop the trenches adding a secondary barrier for the defenders to get through, the zealotry in which they had attacked the defensive trench line was something Berengar had not witnessed in quite some time. Truly religion was a powerful force that could compel men to disregard their lives, but Berengar did not know why they decided to act this way. Berengar disregarded the thought as he rushed into the trenches with a musket that had its bayonet affixed in hand and aimed the weapon at the oncoming attackers.

After getting a target in sight, he squeezed the trigger of the firearm, causing the hammer which contained the flint to fall onto the pan below and spark, thus igniting the black powder contained within the pan, which propelled the minie ball down range and into the chest of a man at arms no more than 10 feet in front of him. The bullet-like projectile easily pierced through the man's coat of plates creating a massive hole in his chest where his heart used to lie intact. Not allowing time for the soldiers to rush forward, Berengar quickly reloaded his musket alongside his soldiers as fast as he could.

The enemy soldiers rushed into the Trench line but were caught in barbed wire, which tangled around their armor and caught them in place long enough for the defenders to reload and fire into the ensnared enemy forces. Blood splattered across the trench line as limbs were torn apart by the impact, and gaping holes filled the enemy's abdomens and chests. Eventually, enough bodies piled up over the barbed wire allowing the enemy to get into the trench line where Berengar and his forces began to fight within the trenches with swords, bayonets, spears, and clubs.

The trench warfare became a chaotic field as soldiers from Berengar's army clashed with the men at arms, using every method they could think of to defeat their enemy. However, as time went on, it became increasingly apparent that the enemy forces were outnumbered and out-armed. The enemy forces suffered heavy casualties, as the bayonets of Berengar's army were the perfect size and length to pierce through the gaps in the enemy armor. Seeing as how most of them wore mail aventails as a form of throat defense, Berengar's soldiers quickly made that the target of their bayonet thrusts which easily pierced through the interlocked iron rings and into the throats of their opponents, ending their lives.

As for Berengar's forces, aside from the levies, each was equipped with sufficient steel plate protection for their torso, thighs, neck, and head. Aside from the face or the armpits, it would prove virtually impossible to deal a lethal blow to his forces with a piercing or slashing weapon. Thus, most of Berengar's fatalities resulted from blunt trauma to the head, but this was a minimal number.

By dawn, the Sun had risen, and Berengar was victorious. However, it would only be after Berengar had seized the city that he would realize that the Prince-Bishop had fled his lands, leaving them ripe for the taking. Despite defeating the sallying forces, a few hundred men were still defending behind the walls who refused to surrender the city. As such, the Siege would go on for several more days while Berengar's allies fought their own battles for the Prince-Bishopric of Trent.

Chapter 138: Are There any Questions?

A couple of days had passed since the battle in the trenches, and Berengar was growing anxious; he did not yet know when Lothar would fall, and he was trying to rush his campaign as quickly as possible. Eventually, the wall came

crumbling down, and when it did, he ordered a full storming of the city. Covered by artillery fire and continuous volleys of the rifled muskets. Line infantry and levies alike rushed into the gap into the wall, using whatever methods available to them to take the city.

Despite the fierce assault, the defenders of the city of Trent were undeterred; though the Prince-Bishop had successfully fled, it was their duty to defend the city with their lives; hopefully, if they did so, they could enter the gates of heaven. After all, in the eyes of the city's defenders, they were fighting against a horde of heathens who sought to bring down Christendom. Religion was a powerful tool, and the weak-minded were easily compelled to die by the propaganda of the Church.

Yet despite the zealotry of the forces who gave up their lives to defend against the besiegers, they quickly realized that they were vastly outnumbered. Levies crashed with man at arms, and line infantry fired their muskets in concentrated volleys onto the enemy positions. Blood and guts spilled across the snowy streets as the defending garrison was pushed further and further back into the city.

Those more cowardly hostiles would hide in the homes of civilians, which Berengar would immediately order their clearing. Not willing to risk the lives of his soldiers, a grenade or two were lobbed into the room before busting down the door, usually resulting in not only the death of the defender but also the civilians who cowered in their homes.

As the battle raged on, the Lords who had submitted to Berengar's authority saw the tactics Berengar was using and were quite confused; they knew Berengar had an order not to kill unarmed civilians needlessly. Yet, here, his troops were lobbing explosives into the rooms which clearly contained such people. As such, they inquired to Berengar why he was breaking his own rules of war.

Berengar's stared stoically onto the battlefield, alongside the Lords of the levies who entered the city alongside him. Violence, blood, and despair quickly spread to every corner of the city, enemies' lives were taken, and many civilians were caught in the crossfire. As Berengar gazed upon the sight, he continued his lecture on the art of war for all the nearby noblemen to hear.

"My rules of war can be summed up in a single phrase. Victory at any cost! If civilians are caught in the crossfire between two combatants, then so be it. If civilians were to take up arms and rise against me in the act of rebellion, I would take 10 heads for every rebel to prove a point. Kneel before me, or die those are your two choices."

With those words spoken, the Lords who had submitted to Berengar felt chills down their spines. However, before they could protest, Berengar began to continue his speech.

"For example, say there is a village, and within this village, there is a garrison of enemy soldiers or a group of rebels who have taken up arms against me, but also in the village, there are dozens, maybe hundreds of unarmed civilians who may or may not express support for the hostile forces. I have no qualms ordering a bombardment of the town and razing it to the ground to ensure the destruction of my enemies, especially if it will spare the lives of my soldiers."

Berengar's concept of warfare stemmed from the fact that he was well educated on the history of warfare and tactics, as well as the fact that in his previous life, he had witnessed many young men in the service of the American Armed Forces losing their lives in Afghanistan where they might have been spared if the Pentagon was not so concerned about civilian casualties. As long as a region resisted the rule of the occupying nation, in Berengar's eyes, it was considered an active warzone, and whatever cruelty was needed to bring the war to an end was completely justified.

The battle continued to wage on, but this time Berengar was not at the front lines. Instead, he lectured the nobles about his vision of warfare and which extents were justifiable and unjustifiable in the pursuit of victory. As such, Berengar decided to move onto the actions he had restricted.

"As long as there is resistance in a region, it is a war zone, and any measure necessary to achieve a swift victory is justifiable. However, if the enemy surrenders, they should be afforded proper dignity unless, of course, they are rebels, rebellions can not be tolerated, and a brutal show of force is necessary to crush the spirit of those who believe in their cause. As for the civilians in the region, once the fighting has ended, no harm should be brought to them, for at that point, you have successfully conquered the region, and they are now your subjects. There are exceptions to this, but that revolves around a series of

political actions, mainly regarding colonialism, and I will not get into the complexity of that topic at this moment."

As Berengar brought his rant to a close, the Lords gazed upon the city, which was lit ablaze by explosives. When combined with the corpses of the enemy soldiers, and the civilians caught in the crossfire whose blood flowed into the snow-covered streets, created an image of armageddon. When witnessing such destruction, and death Berengar turned around to face the Lords with a chilling smile on his otherwise immaculate visage before asking them the question on his mind.

"Are there any questions?"

The several Lords who had submitted to Berengar's authority and allied with him to crush the Southern Rebellion shook their heads in silence, with a look of horror spread across their faces. For a man to be smiling in the face of such a chaotic scene, only a monster would be able to do such a thing. Or so they thought, though Berengar was happy that his plans were progressing, internally, he could not help but sigh to himself at the needless loss of life. If his enemies were not so stubborn and surrendered the city to him the moment the walls came down, the region's citizens would not have suffered to such a degree.

Of course, the Lords had no way of knowing what Berengar was thinking inside the labyrinth that was his mind, and as such, they felt an overwhelming sense of dread, inspiring them to never take up arms against the man in front of them, for in their minds Berengar was a demon in the flesh of a man.

Chapter 139: Lothar's Defeat

It had been over a week since the Siege of Trent, and the entire region fell into Berengar's hands, but to Count Lothar, who was trapped in Vienna with no way out, he had no way of knowing that he had completely lost the home front. At this point, he was desperate to escape the city and flee towards his home, where he planned to rally the local forces and defend Innsbruck until every man, woman, and child had expended their lives in its defense. He

would do whatever was necessary to ensure his own survival for as long as possible.

Count Otto's forces had broken through the gates, and the City was once more thrust into chaos as Otto and his men began fighting their way through the battle-worn soldiers of Lothar's army or what remained of it. Count Lothar, at the moment, was battling with a knight under Otto's command who was clad in full steel plate armor; the two men were both similarly equipped.

However, Lothar was at a disadvantage. At the moment, he only had a longsword in his hands which was not the most effective weapon against a Knight encased in full plate. As for the Knight held a halberd in his hands and had a sword sheathed on his waist.

Lothar wielded his sword with excellent skill, deflecting the oncoming blows of the polearm and rushing forward, trying to get into the gaps between the enemy armor. However, the Knight was equally adept and had a significant advantage in reach. Before Lothar knew it, he found himself being pushed back by the Knights advance; luckily for him, some of his nearby men rushed forward to aid him. However, when they arrived to help their Lord, they soon realized that he had disappeared; The moment the men had come to his aid and began to distract the Knight, Lothar ran off in the opposite direction in a desperate attempt to flee from the city.

Lothar did not have time to disguise himself, war was waging around him, and enemy forces could capture him at any moment. Thankfully the Chaos provided some anonymity in the crowd, though he wore a tabard over his breastplate which signified his house, there were many other Lords and Knights each bearing their own Coat of Arms. As such, the man took advantage of the Chaos and fled to the Eastern Gate, which, as far he knew, was still under his force's control. However, the man did not get far, as he was sprinting in the direction of the Gate Cavalry began to ride into the City. These Knights and lancers on horseback belonged to Count Otto; riding at the front of the group was the loyal Count himself. They noticed a heavily armed man bearing Lothar's coat of arms running away.

Though it could not be seen beneath his great bascinet's visor, Otto was grinning with excitement he had finally found the traitor, and if he could be captured alive, the battle would end sooner. Thus Otto and his Knights quickly rode down any resistance in the way and rapidly caught up to Lothar. Before the traitorous Count could regroup with his forces at the Eastern Gate, he was surrounded by Otto and his heavily armored Knights.

Otto did not allow for a single gap for the traitor to escape and confirm the man's identity; he called out to him.

"Running away, are you? In the face of defeat, you do not have the courage to face your own death in glorious battle! For a traitor, you are quite pathetic!"

Lothar was resigned to his fate; steel-clad horses and knights surrounded him.

There was no path to victory nor escape. He could merely sigh and face captivity; if lady luck were on his side, he would be able to escape from his predicament, though he feared this was not the case. As such, he did not respond to Otto's insults. Instead, he admitted his defeat.

"I know when I am beaten, well played, Otto. I did not expect you to overcome my defenses so quickly. You can rest assured knowing that I was never capable of penetrating the Castle's defenses. As far as I am aware, the Duke's family is safe and sound."

Beneath the visor of his great bascinet, Count Otto sneered in disgust at the man before him, a man he once considered his own hubris now brought down his rival as such; Otto expressed his contempt for Lothar he ordered his arrest.

"You should have been content with your lot in life! Men arrest this traitor!"

With his weapon no longer in his hands, and the heavily armored knights cautiously approaching Lothar, he quickly restrained the man and cuffed him

into iron shackles. They then removed his helmet to stare at the man so bold as to revolt against his liege during a time of crisis. However, what revealed itself was a haggard man, driven to exhaustion by the war he started. Lothar was merely a shadow of his former self at this point, and his appearance showed it.

Otto then brought him before the fighting armies and blew a horn which gathered everyone's attention. Lothar's forces quickly saw that their liege had been captured and knew they were defeated; there was no longer a purpose in fighting. Lothar's Rebellion and the War in Tyrol were over! As such, Count Otto boldly declared for all the men to hear.

"I have captured your Liege, surrender now, and hand over the other traitorous Lords, and you will be allowed to return to your homes peacefully!"

The various noblemen who had followed Lothar into battle were frightened at this news and looked around anxiously; through the open face bascinets and the kettle helmets of the man at arms, they could see in their eyes the desire to betray their masters. As such, a skirmish quickly ensued, and Lothar's forces turned on their masters in an attempt to save their own hides. Very quickly, the ringleaders of Lothar's rebellion were either killed in the last stand

against their own forces or brought forward to Count Otto, where the remainder of Lothar's forces surrendered their arms willingly.

Count Otto fully intended to bring these captives to Duke Wilmar at Munich, where they would be punished accordingly by their rightful Liege. He did not want to take the credit for ending the rebellion, because after all, it was his future son-in-law who had done the majority of the work. By rapidly conquering Tyrol, Berengar cut off any form of support or reinforcements in which Lothar might receive on his quest to become Duke of Austria. This was not Berengar's only noteworthy feat, for the young Viscount had also managed to send significant material aid to Otto's forces as he laid siege to Lothar's defenses. If not for this aid, he would not have been able to so swiftly retake the city, which was the Duke's seat of power. The impression of his future son-in-law grew exponentially in Otto's heart, and he had at this point practically forgiven Berengar's infidelity.

As the Siege of Vienna ended and the traitors captured, so too did the War in Austria. For now, Austria would find some semblance of peace in the upcoming months. With the entire German world at war and the conflict spreading to the rest of the Empire, it would only be a matter of time before violence found its way back into the Duchy of Austria. When that happened,

Berengar's position would be in a far better position to confront any army which entered the lands of Austria.

Chapter 140: A Hero's Welcome

Berengar's army or what remained of it had been marching since he successfully annexed the Prince-Bishopric of Trent into the County of Tyrol. It had been weeks at this point, and he could finally see the City of Kufstein and its impregnable defenses on the horizon. It had been over two months since he first began his campaign, and he had achieved an overwhelming victory against the rebellious forces.

A warm smile appeared on the handsome youth's face as he gazed upon his homeland with delight, muttering the words on his mind beneath his breath as he sat atop his war steed, which had proven to be an excellent companion during the last two months of his life.

"We are finally home..."

Berengar's losses in the war were quite low; less than 1,000 men on his side had perished in the conflict; as for the levies that were allied with him, their number was a bit higher. Still, he did not count them among his own casualties, as they were technically not his forces at the moment. As for the Army behind his back, it was less than half of what he had invaded Trent with; the region was given command by Arnulf temporarily until a time in which the rebellion had officially ended. As for Eckhard, he was in charge of South Tyrol and its garrisons.

The spirit of resistance was still within the hearts of many citizens who Berengar had conquered in this time, but at the moment, they did not act upon it. Once the war was officially over, Eckhard, Arnulf, and the forces left behind in the region would remain there until a more permanent garrison comprised of locals who had properly been indoctrinated into his army was established.

It had been two months since he felt his lover's warm embrace, or since he saw the dazzling sapphire eyes of his baby boy, and Berengar had missed them greatly as such when he rode into the City, which was currently covered in snow, he had a large smile on his face. When Berengar and his forces

entered the city of Kufstein, the citizens of the city lined up across the streets, welcoming the return of their Liege as a conquering Hero. Cheers echoed across the city as Berengar rode at the front of his army, dressed in his garishly decorated blackened steel plate armor.

Berengar had thought to himself as he smiled and waved at his subjects

'So this is a hero's welcome? It is truly fitting...'

To the citizens of Kufstein, Berengar had accomplished the unthinkable; he spread the glory of their territory and captured the entirety of the County Tyrol and its neighbor, the Prince-Bishopric of Trent, from their enemies in a span of two months. Though many of his men had died in the conflict, Berengar would keep his promise and exempt their families from taxes for a duration of time. However, the people of Kufstein did not know about this promise yet.

After riding through the streets of Kufstein, Berengar dismissed his armies; they could return home to their loved ones for the time being; after all, they had more than earned it. It was only after his army fully gathered into ranks and fully Saluted Berengar at Kufstein Castle's steps that he understood the extent of their loyalty. Such a performance was not asked of them, yet they took it upon themselves to salute their Lord and Commander, who had to lead them against unthinkable odds and into an overwhelming victory.

Berengar returned their salute before marching into the Castle's gates. The moment Berengar stepped through the gates of his castle, he was practically mowed over by Linde, who rushed into his arms like a charging bull. Luckily for him, he was capable of standing his ground and accepted her embrace. Her family, as well as Henrietta, had gathered nearby and witnessed the loving reunion. Berengar began to greet Linde

"Did you miss..."

Before he could even finish his sentence, Berengar's lover had pressed her lips against his own and parted them with her tongue in a passionate display of affection. Her siblings were quite shocked by her boldness and watched in embarrassment for some time as the two continued to fondle one another openly; it was only when Berengar reached for Linde's substantial breasts did that someone decided to spoke up.

Liutbert grunted to signal to the couple that they had company, and we were quickly getting out of hand. Realizing that her siblings were watching, Linde quickly retracted herself from Berengar's embrace and looked down with embarrassment, her cheeks were completely flushed at this point, and she could not help but be ashamed of her actions.

Berengar, on the other hand, smiled and licked his lips before greeting Linde and the others.

"So I guess that's a yes?"

Afterward, he quickly grabbed ahold of Linde's waist and dragged her over to the others. Linde's siblings each had a different expression on their faces, Adelheid considered Berengar to be a womanizer taking advantage of her big sister, but she knew he was capable of achieving great things and had helped topple her father's dastardly plans; as such, she was conflicted with how to treat the man in front of her.

Liutbert had already chosen to submit to Berengar and gracefully welcomed the man that would become the next Count of Tyrol. He had already received news of Lothar's defeat at Vienna. After becoming aware of his father's defeat, Liutbert finally realized that he had made the right choice in supporting Berengar. As for Herman, he was acting like a stubborn little brat, greatly scowling at the man who had rebelled against his father. the little misfit could not help but blame Berengar for the defeat and captivity of his father.

Linde also had one other sibling, a little sister, roughly Henrietta's age, and this girl was named Minna, and she was rather welcoming to Berengar. Minna had grown close to Henrietta throughout the past month of "captivity" in Kufstein, and Henrietta had filled her ears with stories of Berengar and his gallant acts. Berengar did not even need to sway the little girl to his side, as she had already developed the image of Berengar being a knight in shining armor; from how Henrietta talked about his past, he seemed like some form of Prince-Charming. As such, she was happy to finally see the man she admired, and his good looks did not disappoint.

Henrietta, of course, was beaming with a smile on her face as her elder brother returned home alive. With her parents retiring to the countryside and Lambert exiled, Berengar was her only family left, and she greatly dreaded

some misfortune that might befall him. In her hands was the baby Hans, which she spent a great deal of time looking after, considering in his absence Linde was forced to deal with the civil affairs of Kufstein.

Seeing his infant son in Henrietta's hands, Berengar walked over to her and grabbed ahold of his child.

"Hans... Your father has returned!"

With that, Berengar held onto his child, surrounded by loved ones and allies. He felt completely safe for the first time in what appeared to him like a lifetime of war. As such, a grand feast was thrown that night to celebrate his return, and he had begun to invite his friends throughout Kufstein to partake in it.

During the extravagant meal, which tasted like ambrosia straight from the mouth of God after having eaten nothing but bread and salted pork for two months, Berengar forced himself to stop stuffing his face and made a victory toast. Everyone expected him to say something valiant, something bold, or a declaration of future prospects. Instead, Berengar merely lifted his glass and said the somber words that had plagued his mind since the combat began.

"To our fallen warriors! May they forever rest in peace!"

The serious toast brought the excited audience out of their celebratory mood and forced them back to reality; every victory was paved with the blood of the dead and those brave men who fought on the front lines. The fact that Berengar had used that as a toast undoubtedly killed the mood, but it also achieved the effect he was hoping for; it reminded everyone around him of the price of victory.