

Steel 141

Chapter 141: Lothar's Demise

Weeks passed, and while Berengar was acclimating to the peaceful environment of Kufstein after having been at war for so long. Count Lothar and his rebel supporters were being dragged to Munich, which had recently been captured by Duke Wilmar, where they waited for Count Otto's return before marching on Landshut.

Inside a carriage designed to hold prisoners, Lothar sat in the corner, his back resting against the cold iron bars as he struggled for warmth. The ice-cold air of winter permeated between the gaps of the iron bars and sucked the heat from his body. Beside him were his vassals who had supported him in his rebellion, or at least the few who survived the disastrous siege of Vienna. Lothar's face had not changed since his capture; he had been scowling ever since, thinking over what he could have done to achieve victory.

As he stared into space, he overheard the knight's tasked with escorting his prison carriage, mocking him.

"The mighty Count Lothar, look at him now. Defeated at Vienna, having his lands usurped by an upstart Viscount, even his own Son and heir denounced him and his actions. Pathetic..."

These words stirred Lothar from his stupor; he had not been aware of what happened outside of Vienna as he and his forces were trapped inside the city walls during the majority of Berengar's conquest of Tyrol. He quickly rose from his seated and climbed over to the area where the guards were talking, peering at them. However, the flat of a sword quickly smacked upon his hands as he grasped ahold of the iron bars, forcing him back into the cage.

This action instantly provoked the laughter of the Knights as they mocked the pitiful position the once-mighty Count Lothar had fallen to. However, Lothar did not care about that; he needed to know what happened to his home. As such, he quickly asked the Knights about the information.

"What you said... Is it true?"

The Knights nodded and grinned as they chastised Lothar for his failure; they were all too happy to provide him with the information about what happened to his home while he was trapped in Vienna.

"Some people are calling Berengar a War-Saint. The man led a small army of 5,000 men and conquered all of Tyrol and the nearby Prince-Bishopric of Trent in a little over two months. Innsbruck was the second place to fall to him. After capturing your family and dragging them back to Kufstein, your son Liutbert denounced you and your treachery; he even pledged his loyalty to Berengar, going so far as to proclaim him a man worthy of your title! Your own family thinks of you as nothing more than a backstabbing scoundrel!"

Naturally, the rumors had inflated Berengar's victory; if not for the conscripts which added 5,000 men to his armies and the thousands of levies who fought beside him, he would not have so rapidly seized the territory. However, it was still quite the feat, one which was mostly achieved through superior firepower.

Lothar was shocked by this news and struggled to come to terms with it. The incessant mocking which followed completely went unnoticed by the traitorous Count. Instead, he sunk back into the corner of his cell and began to piece together what had led to his downfall. In a masterful move by Berengar, his own daughter turned against him, luring a quarter of his army to their certain deaths. Where Berengar then waged a lightning war in Tyrol, cutting off all support from arriving in Vienna which was practically on the other side of the Duchy. By being over-eager, and over-ambitious Lothar had left himself completely shut off from his allies back in his own territory and left them to fend for themselves against a powerful foe. With no support, and a large chunk of his forces missing, Otto was able to trap him and defeat his forces with ease.

Count Lothar sighed heavily; he fully realized the faults he had made in this war. They stemmed from a combination of being a poor father, underestimating his enemies, and immediately going for the enemy capital without establishing a supply line. Only now he realized why Berengar had sold him such high-quality equipment for such a fair price. Because Berengar had already outfitted his own soldiers with some form of armor and weaponry far superior to what he was selling. Berengar had outmaneuvered him at every turn. The worst part of it all was that Count Lothar was not even mad;

what he felt was overwhelming respect for how Berengar had played him since the beginning.

After reflecting on his life choices in silence for some time, the Carriage finally pulled into the city square of Munich, where a platform was constructed in the middle of the area, soldiers and civilians alike had gathered to witness the event, and upon seeing the platform, Lothar instantly realized what awaited him. He and his allies would be beheaded publically for all to witness. The moment the carriage stopped, the other Lords within the cell began to panic and struggle, yet they were all pulled out one at a time by the Knights and brought up to the platform. Though they were not able to see the results, everyone knew what was happening, and as such, they did everything they could to escape. All except for Lothar, who sat in his corner with cold, dead eyes. He had already accepted what was to come.

Over an hour passed, and finally, he was all that remained within the carriage; when the guards came to escort him, he did not even resist in the slightest. He wobbled onto the platform with a defeated expression and gazed upon the crowd who jeered him and threw produce and cow pies at him. By the time he reached the chopping block, he was already covered in filth, not that he was in pristine condition before.

Standing in the crowd was Duke Wilmar, who was fully armored and surrounded by his House Guard; a chilling smile was on his face as he stared into Count Lothar's lifeless eyes as the man was placed headfirst onto the chopping block.

Finally, Count Otto began reading his charges, who announced his crimes to the realm and his sentence.

"Count Lothar, For the crimes of rebelling against your Liege and laying siege to his lands in an attempt to usurp his position, you are hereby found guilty and sentenced to death! You and your family's lands and titles are hereby forfeit, where they shall be henceforth be granted to Viscount Berengar von Kufstein and his family for perpetuity. May God have mercy on your soul!"

Hearing that last part, a bitter smile formed on Lothar's face as he stared into Duke Wilmar's eyes. In the end, Lothar had lost everything, and the young Viscount, who started as a Baron's son, who Lothar once believed to be a

sickly fool, had inherited his position. It was truly a fitting end. The last thing Lothar saw as the executioner's blade came swinging down upon his neck was the sight of a violent crowd cursing him to damnation and the shocked expression on Wilmar's face when he realized that Lothar was smiling.

Afterward, everything faded black for Count Lothar, and his head was separated from his shoulders; his blood pooled out from the gaping hole in his neck where his head once belonged. The rebellion was over, Berengar had won, and was now officially declared a Count. Lothar would forever be remembered as a stepping stone on Berengar's rise to power.

Chapter 142: Consolidation of Power

News quickly spread of County Lothar's execution and the forfeiture of his lands in favor of Berengar and his Dynasty. In the year since Berengar had been reincarnated into this world, he had gone from a lowly Baron's son to the Count of Tyrol. The young man was quite satisfied with his accomplishments, and despite his grand ambitions to unify the German-speaking regions, he knew these plans could not be rushed. As such, while the rest of Germany was at war, Berengar was tasked by Duke Wilmar to protect Tyrol from potential enemy advances through the Bavarian alps, which he was more than happy to do.

Now was the time for expansion, not just in military matters but industrial, agricultural, and educational sectors as well. Thus Berengar was hard at work putting through a series of executive orders, which allowed him to bypass the rudimentary parliament he had constructed. As per usual, the parliamentary system was more symbolic than it was practical. Their practical purpose was to decrease the workload on Berengar's shoulders, while symbolically, they represented the people's interests.

The first matter of business was to change the capital of Tyrol to Kufstein; with a stroke of a quill, the city that had been the political and economic center of the region for centuries had been shifted to Berengar's homeland. As for Industrial expansion, it was time to create a second Industrial city. Innsbruck was perfect for the role; it was nearby and maintained by a loyal member of what he considered to be his family; after all, Liutbert was his lover's brother. Thus he was practically an in-law.

Berengar had made Liutbert the Viscount of Innsbruck and his Chancellor, at least until a time where he could expand his power and make the man a proper Count like he was born to be. As such, he tasked the man with leading the charge to reform Innsbruck's, defenses, industry, and agriculture. As for military concerns, Berengar had begun to spread his military reforms across the entire region; due to the number of men who had died in the civil war, there were not many men-at-arms left to oppose him, and those that remained would not have the guts to do so.

Though the Lords of Tyrol were greatly outraged by the military reforms which stripped their feudal powers to raise their own forces, there was not much they could do as their armies were exhausted, and they knew the power Berengar had in his hands. As such young men of military age began being conscripted across the region and sent to Berengar's training facilities to be indoctrinated into his military, they would undergo political indoctrination as a part of their training. It was a system designed to break down the old identity of the feudal regions among his forces, enforce the idea of a German Nation, and ensure loyalty to Berengar and his Dynasty.

Once the lords had time to lick their wounds, they would undoubtedly prepare for rebellion; after all, the stripping of certain parts of their feudal powers was not a popular reform, even among the nobility of his own region. Though the local nobles of Kufstein had come to accept these reforms, the rest of the Tyrolean noblemen would not be so easily persuaded. Not only did Berengar have to prepare to put down a future rebellion, but he also had to prepare for the Teutonic invasion that is currently marching towards his borders.

Speaking of which, Linde had a report in her hands, which she placed on Berengar's desk. With Berengar's return, she had resumed her position as his spymaster, but in reality, she spent most of her time looking after their child. However, at the moment, the child was with Henrietta while she informed Berengar of the latest news regarding the Teutonic Army marching on their borders.

"They have doubled their numbers through their marches. The moment they entered German territories, they began forcefully conscripted levies from the regions they passed by. Considering the majority of the Holy Roman Empire was in chaos at the moment, nobody has been able to stop them from doing so. Though the levies are not well equipped, they can be used as cannon

fodder to overrun our numbers. At the rate we are currently going, we will be able to field a small division of between 10,000 - 15,000 men when they reach our borders. However, that will be less than half of the Teutonic Army's numbers by the time they enter Tyrol. Unless we resort to drafting men from the garrisons, it will be a tough battle."

Berengar contemplated Linde's words carefully; the Teutonic Army started with 10,000 men. Still, now they were at roughly 20,000 men with several more months of marching before they reached Tyrol; at the rate of their expansion, they will easily have 30,000 men by the time they arrived at his borders. However, if he transferred men from the garrisons he stationed across Tyrol, he would be inviting the Lords of Tyrol to take advantage of the crisis against him and start a rebellion, forcing him into a two-war front. He could never allow this to happen.

There were two options on Berengar's hands, lure the enemy into Kufstein, where he could use the near-impenetrable city walls to his advantage, or confront them in a field battle while being heavily outnumbered. Such a battle would be massive and would undoubtedly result in melee combat. Berengar's greatest advantage would be to field rifled muskets in large numbers and wear down the enemy forces at a distance with gunfire and artillery shells before they finally clashed. As such, he came to a decision and announced his plan to Linde.

"If we withdraw forces from our garrisons to increase our field army, the result would be an unmitigated disaster. Therefore I will confront the Teutonic Army in the field with as many men as we can muster."

Though Linde feared this would be the option Berengar would take, deep down, she knew he would never hide behind Kufstein's walls while the Teutonic Order ravaged his land. She merely sighed as she listened to Berengar as he explained his plans.

"I will increase the conversion and production of 1417/18 Rifled Muskets and will seek to draw the enemy forces to an area whose terrain gives me an advantage. With this, we have a much higher chance of defeating the enemy. Inform the spies to continue monitoring the Teutonic forces; I want to know about any potential growth as quickly as possible."

Linde nodded her head in response and smiled

"Of course, master, anything for you!"

With that said, Linde was dismissed, and Berengar returned to the pile of work on his hands. After returning to a mountain of paperwork, he greatly missed the days of battle where he was free to act as he pleased. Nevertheless, a Count's work was never finished, and Tyrol greatly needed agricultural industrial, and economic reforms. As such, he quickly got back to signing executive orders that would one day transform Tyrol into the seat of power of the future German Empire.

Chapter 143: It is Only Natural for Siblings to Share

In Graz, Adela currently sat at her desk reading a letter in her hands which Berengar wrote. As usual, it expressed his desire to meet up with his young fiancée, and of course, he boasted about his achievements in battle. The fact that Berengar had become a Count greatly pleased the teenage youth. It meant that she would become a Countess, much like her mother once she married Berengar. Though she knew Berengar was destined for great things, she had no idea that she would be Empress of a unified German Empire one day. As such, she was content with Berengar's gains and knew he was most likely dreadfully busy consolidating his power.

Adela was not aware that the Teutonic Order was marching on Tyrol and had no worries about Berengar's immediate future. He was home, and he was safe, and that was all that mattered to the young girl. She had greatly desired to visit Kufstein, but in a time such as this that was filled with chaos and uncertainty, the roads to her fiancée's home would not be safe. Thus despite her protests, she was locked away in the Castle of Graz under her family's orders.

As far as she was aware, her father, Count Otto, had marched with Duke Wilmar's forces onto Landshut after capturing Munich, which was the seat of the Duke of Bavaria's power. The war in Bavaria had entered a new stage of intensity as the Duke of Bavaria was outraged by the fact that his home had been seized. Luckily for him, his family had fled the city before it was fully captured and were staying with a loyal Lord in a safer region of his territory. However, despite this, the Duke of Bavaria marched half of his forces from the

North back into Bavaria to halt the advance of the Austrian host which had invaded his lands.

To Adela, the war was inconsequential as, aside from some fighting in Tyrol, and Vienna it had not yet spread to the borders of Austria. Even if it had, Berengar's mighty army was essentially the home defenders while the Duke was off fighting with his main army in Bavaria. If Graz were to ever come under siege, Berengar would surely come to her rescue.

After thinking about her situation, Adela wrote a letter back to Berengar congratulating him on his gains and impressive victory. She also expressed her desire to see him again but explained her current circumstances that prevented such a reunion. By the time she had finished writing it, the message was nothing more than a love letter that resembled that which was written by a young girl to her crush.

However, shortly after finishing writing her love letter to her fiance, Adela heard a knock on her door, which startled her, spilling her ink container all over the letter and thoroughly ruining it. She was greatly displeased by this event but had no way of controlling it; as such, she rapidly cleaned up the mess before storming over to the door with a pouting expression on her face.

After opening the door, Adela noticed her eldest sister standing in the doorway. She was roughly the age of Berengar and had long since been married to the son of another Count within Austria; in fact, the young woman known as Ava von Salzburg had not been to her family's home in quite some time and was quite excited to see her youngest sister and how much she had grown. After all, she lived with her husband and three children in Salzburg, Austria, where she was married to the Count's eldest son.

Seeing how much Adela had grown over the years, the beautiful and busty woman that was Adela's older sister quickly grabbed ahold over the little girl and squeezed her tightly with a wide grin on her face.

"Little Adela, you have grown so much!"

Adela struggled to get out of her eldest sister's grasp, but unfortunately, she could not break free from the tight grip that encompassed her and nearly

suffocated as her tiny heart-shaped face was stuffed into Ava's massive cleavage.

It was only after Adela ended her resistance to the hug that the tall and curvy woman finally released her grasp. Afterward, Adela backed away from her overly affectionate big sister and pouted, which quickly led to Ava noticing that something was going on in the background. She quickly deduced that there was an ink-stained sheet of paper, and when Ava noticed the look on Adela's face, she quickly smiled sinisterly and began to tease her little sister.

"Adela, were you perhaps writing a love letter? I heard that you have gotten yourself quite the capable fiance!"

Adela's face cute face quickly flushed with embarrassment as she immediately denied the allegations in the most obvious attempt to cover up her actions.

"Of course not! Why would I write such a thing?!"

Seeing her little sister acting so sheepishly, Ava licked her lips like a wolf gazing at its prey and advanced closer to Adela before whispering in her ear

"I heard he is really handsome. Do you mind if I have a taste?"

Ava was not genuinely interested in Berengar as she was happily married. Her husband was decent-looking enough and came from a high noble family, whereas Berengar was merely an upstart. Despite this, Ava could not resist the urge to tease Adela and make her angry. Adela, of course, instantly fell into Ava's trap and behaved exactly as the sly woman had expected; she pushed Ava away and began yelling at her while throwing a little tantrum.

"Absolutely not! You are disgusting! Why would you even suggest something like that!?!"

Seeing that Adela had reacted so adorably to her joke, Ava went in for the kill; she just loved the cute expression on Adela's face when she was angry.

"Why not? We are siblings; after all, it is only natural for us to share! After all, I heard that fiance of yours already has a mistress, so clearly, you are not against the idea of sharing your man..."

This touched on Adela's reverse scale, she was fine sharing Berengar with Linde since the two young women had come to some degree of an arrangement, but she absolutely would never allow her big sister to lay claim to her man. Of course, if Adela knew that Ava was teasing her, and in reality, looked down on her for marrying a man from a family of such low nobility, she would only be more infuriated as such her response to Ava's provocation was far more civil than it could have been.

"Get out of my room Ava; I have no interest in having this conversation with you and your filthy mind!"

Thus Adela struggled to push her eldest sister out of her room which continued to tease Adela on her way out.

"Oh, come on!"

"You are being unfair!"

"Just one bite!"

and with that last remark, Ava was forced out of her room, and the door was slammed behind her. While Adela was fuming inside her quarters, sitting with her back to the door and her face resting on her knees. Ava was smiling in excitement on the opposite side of the thick wooden door; after all, her little sister was just too cute when provoked in such a manner!

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Chapter 144: Construction of Monuments

With a relatively stable peace encapsulating the mountainous region of Tyrol following Berengar's conquest, the young Count took the time to establish the construction of several monuments since his return. Each monument was crafted for different aspects of propaganda. The first of these monuments to be constructed was intended to represent the personal glory and authority of Berengar von Kufstein. The monument was constructed on a similar scale and

design to that of the Hermannsdenkmal statue from Germany in Berengar's previous life.

The monument was placed on a hill above the city of Kufstein, which overlooked its region as an eternal guardian. The large statue was meticulously crafted out of bronze to represent Berengar's figure perfectly. The statue itself was designed with Berengar mounted upon his trusty steed Erwin, though the horse itself lacked his barding, and Berengar was dressed in his exquisite three quarter's plate armor. With a pair of cavalry boots that went up to the knees of his Landschneckt like attire, the statue was designed without Berengar's waffenrock, his iron skull cap, and feathered cap. In one hand, Berengar held his 1417 Heavy Cavalry saber and pointed it in the direction of the city of Rome.

The position of the statue, and especially that of its sword, was a twofold statement. First and foremost, brandishing his sword towards Rome represented the ancient Germanic people's struggle against the Roman Empire. The second meaning behind it was a sign of resistance towards the Papacy and its corruption. As well as a provocation towards Berengar's personal enemy, being Pope Simeon II

Nearly a month had passed since Berengar returned from Tyrol, and during that time, the construction of this grand monument was finished; when it was finally complete, Berengar stood before the symbol and smiled. It was truly a magnificent piece of art and showed that the level of craftsmanship of his people was beginning to advance to the era of the renaissance. After all, Berengar had inspired his people to take up the arts; however, he himself could never teach art as he was woefully inept at the subject; he could at least create a society that allowed artisans and craftsmen to explore the depths of their talent. The fact that the statue was so grand proved that he had made the right decision to spend a small portion of the treasury to subsidize artists and craftsmen with great potential.

Standing next to Berengar gazing upon the magnificent display was Linde, who was holding her child in her hands; she gazed between the immaculate facial features of her lover, and that of his statue and praised the work.

"It looks exactly like you!"

Berengar's grin could not get any wider, for so long this medieval world was devoid of any form of advanced art, since the collapse of the Roman Empire, the art of the European world had suffered greatly, regressing to a laughable point, and yet for the first time in centuries a grand creation had taken place in Europe that was on par with the major works of classical antiquity!? He could not contain the excitement he had for the other monuments being constructed; if his personal statue turned out this well, then the others should be even more grandiose!

After staring at his own statue, Berengar finally responded to Linde's claim with a nod.

"It is marvelous; I did not expect it to turn out so well. Truly the talent I have fostered over the past few months has been worth it!"

Berengar was not exaggerating about taking some degree of credit for the project; after all, it was his vision that had come into reality, and without his economic support, the artists of his territory would not be able to afford to improve their skills full time. Though Berengar lacked the ability to create art itself, his mind was filled with creative ideas that could be expanded upon and turned into masterpieces when explained to a proper artisan.

Berengar would never take full credit for the masterpiece; in his eyes, he supplied a basic outline of the project, and the funding needed to achieve it, which he believed to be a minimal contribution, the credit of such a magnificent monument and the glory that came with it was left entirely in the hands of the artisans and craftsmen who brought it into this world.

The lead designer of the statue walked over to Berengar and noticed the Count's wide grin; as such, he was greatly pleased to see that Berengar enjoyed the piece. However, he still felt like asking if it turned out as Berengar had wished as such, he voiced his thoughts.

"I hope it is to your liking, your excellency!"

Berengar immediately snapped back to reality after being entranced by the monument, went up to the project lead, and happily shook his hand.

"Gerlach, you and your team have really outdone yourselves. It is truly inspiring; this monument will stand as a testament to the power of our people for centuries to come!"

Though the man named Gerlach knew that the statue was more related to Berengar's personal prestige and the authority of his Dynasty, it was still great to hear such praise. In truth, this was not the only project Gerlach was working on; he was also overseeing the construction of the monument dedicated to those who had fallen in Schwaz, which was being constructed on the site of the Ambush in which Berengar and his forces had suffered on that cold winter's night. As such, the man discussed the progress with the other monument with which he was tasked.

"I am glad to hear that your excellency is pleased! I want to inform you that the Monument to the fallen soldiers at Schwaz is fully under construction and will be finished in a few months."

Due to the much larger scale of the monument in Schwaz, Berengar was pleased with the timeframe. However, he did not have the time to enjoy the statue any longer. He was needed back in Kufstein. As such, the young Count addressed the artisan before departing.

"Excellent! keep up the good work. I expect great things from you. However, I am needed elsewhere, so I am afraid we must save the rest of this conversation for another time. I wish you the best of luck in your endeavors."

With that said, Berengar and Linde left the monument and enjoyed their stroll back to the Castle in Kufstein. He had a lot of work to do when he returned, and as such, he enjoyed the brief time he had with his lover before he threw himself back into an endless pile of paperwork. The Teutonic Order was rapidly advancing onto Kufstein, and it would be within the borders of Tyrol shortly. At this point, Berengar had at most two months before they arrived, and preparations needed to be made as such Berengar would be extremely busy in the coming months.

Chapter 145: God Wills It!

An army bearing the legendary white field with the black cross upon it marched through the town of Suhl; the Teutonic Order was close to the region of Bavaria. After making their stop in Suhl, and resupplying the army would

advanced forwards through the Bavarian Alps and into Tyrol, where they would raze Berengar's lands to the ground. Or at least that was the plan. Currently, the Teutonic Order was conscripting as many men from the town as possible into their army. Young or old, as long as they were capable of bearing arms, they were stripped from the towns the Teutonic Army visited and placed into their ranks as levies.

In the middle of the town, a scene displayed itself as a thirteen-year-old boy was dragged away from his mother's arms and lined up into the ranks of the new levies. The mother begged with tears to knights who had snatched her child, yet for all her effort, the woman was only rewarded with a swift kick to the stomach, dropping her to her knees as she bawled in misery. Across this town and every village, the Teutonic Order had come across similar scenes such as this had become the norm. The ruthlessness of the Teutonic Army under Lambert's command knew no bounds, and they were even willing to slaughter the families of those who refused to join the service of their great crusade.

Though this village was different than the others in which they previously passed. As the cruelty of the Teutonic Order was displayed for the villagers to see, some of them began to gather. The townsfolk quickly formed a mob that began to berate the Teutonic soldiers who had forcefully taken their sons and fathers away from them. What started as a peaceful protest quickly resulted in a full-scale riot. The townsfolk began to push and shove the soldiers of the Teutonic Order and throw produce and filth in their directions.

Things were beginning to spiral out of control when Lambert arrived on horseback; seeing the lowly peasants dare to defy his orders, Lambert got off of his horse and took off his great bascinet revealing his charming face for all to see. The solution to this problem was simple; he would preach how it was the will of God for the men of this village to embark on a holy crusade to put down the Heretics in Tyrol. Berengar's reformation had already begun to spread rapidly; words of Berengar's rapid conquest of Tyrol had spread quickly and had been taken as a sign of divine retribution against the traitor Lothar. However, Lambert was more concerned with bringing down his brother and ending his rise to power than he was with fulfilling the duties of his task to end the Berengar Heresy in its entirety.

As such, he took a diplomatic approach and approached the angry mob, attempting to placate them with a sermon.

"Citizens of Suhl, I understand your complaints, but our Order is on a mission from the Pope himself! We require the assistance of every man and youth capable of bearing arms to bring down the wretched Berengar Heresy which has begun to fester in these lands. Only by cutting off the head of the serpent known as Berengar the Accursed can the will of God be restored to these lands."

Lambert did not know that many of the townsfolk were what would later become known as German Reformists, and they held Berengar in high regard. As such, a courageous young man who appeared to be a wealthy merchant or the son of one stood before the crowd and began to defend Berengar in front of the Teutonic Order, who had been tasked with his elimination.

"Who are you to declare Berengar a Heretic? I have read the bible, which he has translated into our language, and given the ability for all men, regardless of their birth, the ability to comprehend the word of God! Not a single one of his views and that of the Priest Ludolf goes against the teachings of Christ as is written in the scripture. If anything, it is the Pope who is the heretic, as many of the claims of the Catholic Church are not written in the word of the apostles or Christ himself! Berengar is a pious and enlightened man who acts against the corruption of the ecclesiarchy, and for that, you all wish to silence him! Have you no guilt?"

As the man spoke, the entirety of the mob began to agree with him and further chastised the Teutonic Order for their actions; if anything, they were even more outraged now that they knew the intentions of this army and were unwilling to stand by and do nothing when such a large army was tasked with hunting down the head of their reformation! Quickly things got out of hand, and Lambert was not handling it well. Hearing the villagers take Berengar's side enraged him to his very core. How could Berengar's influence reach so far that these filthy peasants were willing to defy the authority of the Teutonic Order and, by extension, the papacy! This was outrageous!? As Lambert was fuming with anger, a small child threw a cow pie in his face and shouted at him.

"Go away, you evil men!"

With this action, something snapped in Lambert's mind, and he instinctively gripped the hilt of his sword where he quickly unsheathed the blade sword in a smooth chopping motion; he cut off the head of the child who was no older than eight. The head of the child slowly rolled on the floor as blood sprayed onto Lambert's white tabard. A loud shriek filled the air, which belonged to the child's mother, who just witnessed her own son get decapitated before her eyes.

Horrified and enraged by Lambert's actions, the mob quickly clashed with the soldiers of the Teutonic Order; they were no longer thinking rationally and had decided in the heat of the moment to enact justice on these heavily armed and well-trained soldiers. Seeing that the mob had taken up arms against him, Lambert sneered in disdain and gave the order above the crowd's shouts to the men under his command.

"This village is filled with heretics, kill them all and burn the town to ashes! God wills it!"

Despite witnessing their commanding officer murder a child in cold blood, not a single one of the fanatic soldiers of the Teutonic Order cared, for, in their minds, the little boy was a heretic and deserved his fate. Instead, they all raised their weapons and began to massacre the townsfolk. Their victims could see the fierce zealotry contained within their eyes as the crusaders screamed their war chant over and over again.

"God wills it!"

With that, the entire population of Suhl was massacred, their town was burned to the ground, and the perpetrators confiscated their grain and livestock. By morning there would not be a single soul left alive within the confines of the once proud town; only blood and ash would remain.

Chapter 146: Grand Ambitions

The snow on the ground began to melt as spring had begun to arrive; throughout Berengar's winter campaign, he had dealt with many difficulties, but as the breath of life filled the air around him, he felt as if he was embarking upon a new world. In front of him was a small village within the borders of the Viscounty of Kufstein. It was one of the many small villages throughout his homeland. Around this village, which housed a few hundred people, were the

steel-reinforced concrete brick walls in the formation of a star fortress similar to those surrounding Kufstein.

Throughout his war for Tyrol, Linde did not disappoint Berengar. As the person responsible for maintaining Berengar's plans while he was away; she had overseen the construction of Star fortresses around the Viscounty of Kufstein, and after many months nearly all of them were complete. The value of these mighty bastions and the cannons mounted upon them could not be underestimated. After all, they had played a critical role in the defense of Kufstein against Lothar's forces.

Beside Berengar was one of the men in charge of these construction efforts, and he gazed at the structure with a proud gleam in his eyes. As such, he could not prevent himself from commenting on the powerful defenses of such a small and seemingly insignificant agricultural village.

"Magnificent, is it not?"

Berengar nodded with approval as he took in the sight of the structure. While the village itself was protected by the mighty star fortress, which a company of soldiers garrisoned, the agricultural fields were outside the walls, creating a beautiful scene of planted fields and fortification. Berengar's ambitions did not end with Kufstein; he intended to construct these mighty fortresses around every major inhabited region within Tyrol, forming the mountainous County into the heartland of his future German Empire.

The expense would be great, but with the increase in territory he had gained and the plethora of natural resources, he could afford to build it. Berengar rode into the town on horseback surrounded by a group of Cuirassiers who acted as his personal guard for the moment. It was a small agricultural town, yet its walls made it seem like an important fortress. The locals peacefully coexisted with the garrison tasked with defending them, oftentimes offering them food and water as they stood guard among the ramparts of the mighty concrete walls.

When the local villagers noticed that the man riding through their village was the Count of Tyrol himself, they instantly cleared a path for him out of respect. Many young women began to gossip among themselves as they were able to witness the majestic appearance of the infamous Berengar first-hand. Among

the population of the Viscounty of Kufstein, Berengar had become quite the legend. His rise to power and defiance of the corruption of the Church had begun being spread by wandering minstrels. Though these bardic epics greatly exaggerated his achievements, they quickly captured the imagination of the common populace, acting as a source of inspiration in their daily lives.

However, despite the good light in which he was depicted in these songs, few were bold enough to approach Berengar as he was a man of great importance and power, and to offend him would surely mean one's demise, or so they believed. Berengar noticed this trend, and for the first time, began to realize that a sense of respect for his character had been fostered among his people. Still, it existed alongside an intense feeling of fear toward's his power and prestige. The two emotions co-existed perfectly to create a harmonious balance within the minds of his citizens.

To be both feared and respected was a balance few had ever achieved in life, and yet that was what Berengar had begun to cultivate in the wake of his overwhelming victories. After reaching the town center, Berengar dismounted from his horse and looked around at the environment. Despite having a garrison of 120 infantry, and an artillery battery, the walls were designed so that such a small force could easily defend the village long enough for reinforcements to arrive. Though it may take years, or possibly even decades to achieve, one day Tyrol would be filled with such fortifications, making it virtually impossible for the armies of this world to dethrone Berengar in his seat of power.

Berengar knew that the more territory he conquered, the more he would have to spend time and effort introducing his reforms; in his lifetime, he would be lucky to industrialize the entirety of his future Empire; in fact, the likelihood was that he would leave behind a legacy of industrialization for his successors to accomplish. Nevertheless, Berengar would make sure that in this life, he would unite the German-speaking regions into a single Empire and conquer enough colonies overseas to secure German hegemony for centuries to come.

As Berengar gazed upon this beautiful agricultural town, which was just one of many throughout Tyrol. It may not have seemed like it would play a key component in his plans, but the fortifications that surrounded this village and one day the majority of Tyrol would give him the internal stability needed to

focus his efforts on conquest for years to come. After looking at the degree of security that allowed the people of this town to live in a happy and carefree environment, despite a massive war going on, Berengar realized that the expense of expanding this project to encompass all of the inhabited regions of Tyrol was well worth it.

Without such a powerful defense network, these villagers who went about their daily tasks with a friendly smile might be subjected to the horrors of war. A reality in which Berengar thought was far too cruel for the good people of his realm. As such, Berengar looked over at the architect who had lead the construction project for this town, and instructed him to do the inconceivable.

"I want more villages like this, as many as you and the other architects can build! I want Tyrol to become a symbol of my power! I do not care the degree of funding and manpower you will need to accomplish this, just make sure that you do not cut any corners in the process."

The architect looked at Berengar as if he was a mad man; the expense to build a star fortress like this was no minor sum; to build these across all of Tyrol would easily cost a fortune. Nevertheless, Berengar was adamant, and despite the expense, he knew he could pay for it. This war across Germany was bound to last for years, and where there is war, there is profit to be made. With the new industrial sector of Innsbruck nearing completion Berengar would have double the industrial power and could supply all the factions of this war with arms and armor necessary to maintain their armies.

After seeing the daring expression in Berengar's eyes that appeared as if he was challenging the heavens with his ambitions, the architect gulped the saliva which had accumulated in his mouth and bowed his head respectfully to the young Count.

"Your Excellency, I will do as you command!"

With this, Berengar's plans to transform the entirety of the County of Tyrol into an impenetrable mountainous enclave had begun. Though it would take years, possibly even decades to complete, by the end of this ambitious initiative, one day in the distant future, the people of Tyrol would live in the most secure region of the world.

Chapter 147: Contact with the Byzantines

A man with short dark hair in the form of a caesar cut and emerald green eyes sat within the confines of his luxurious carriage. He was in his late twenties and quite handsome, so much so that he could give Berengar a run for his money. He had the regal features of a Roman patrician, and he wore lavish silk robes in the style that was common among the upper echelon of the aristocracy of the Byzantine Empire. Even though the German realm was currently in a state of total war, he had traveled across Europe for many months in an attempt to gain an audience with the man known as Berengar von Kufstein.

Berengar had long since made use of the trade networks throughout Europe and the Mediterranean to acquire silk from the Byzantine Empire to fulfill the demands for his textile industry. However, his name did not carry much weight in the eastern world. After all, even now as a Count, he was not a significant figure in the world's affairs.

His most well-known quality was being declared as a heretic by the Catholic Church. Though the Orthodox Church was a separate branch of Christianity from the Catholics, they were still quite amicable with their western brothers in this timeline. As such, being declared a heretic by the Catholic church practically carried over to the Eastern Orthodox Church. Yet, the man in the carriage did not care about such details. Instead, he had a business proposal for Berengar in which he believed the young Count could not refuse.

The man arriving in Kufstein shortly was a powerful nobleman who held the equivalent position of a Duke in the Byzantine aristocracy. Supposedly, Arethas Maniakes could trace his lineage to one of the greatest Roman Emperors of all time, Aurelian. A man who was so profound, he quite possibly could have prevented the collapse of the Roman Empire if the treacherous Praetorian Guard had not assassinated him before his work was finished.

Arethas was in his own right an exemplary statesman and General, having personally led the charge into Egypt in years prior. He secured a foothold in the war against the Mamluke Sultanate, which currently held control over the region. However, despite his impressive victories that had allowed the Byzantines to acquire their advantage in Egypt, he could not believe the rumors he had heard about Berengar.

If Berengar knew a powerful Strategos of the Byzantine Empire was coming to meet him, he would have prepared a feast; after all, such a position was far higher than he currently held. Yet, the man decided to show up unannounced to test Berengar and his character. A nobleman from another region coming into your territory unannounced was a sign of disrespect, and this was not unknown to Arethas.

However, when the man laid his eyes on the intricate defenses of the City of Kufstein, he could not help but be impressed. Such mighty walls were comparable to the Theodosian walls of Constantinople, no... they might even be superior in defensive capabilities. After arriving at the checkpoint of the city's gates. Arethas noticed that the garrison was all wearing a degree of plate armor and carrying strange weapons slung across their backs.

Though he did not know how these weapons functioned and were less impressed with them, his attention was drawn to the impressive armor the troops wore, just how wealthy was Berengar to equip all of his troops in plate armor! Even if it only covered their torso, back, neck, thighs, and head. It was enough to protect the vital points of their bodies without limiting mobility. The garrison allowed him to pass after hearing the man was a powerful representative from the Byzantine Empire. As such, his carriage and escort quickly rode into the city of Kufstein, which was filled with tenements, homes, shops, and all kinds of wonders. It was no longer a small agricultural town but a full-fledged city, though much of it was still undergoing construction.

Despite being attracted by the nature of the City, which was much smaller than Constantinople, yet still was grand in its own right. The Strategos made his way towards the Castle, where the Castle's guards abruptly stopped him. Arethas stepped out of the carriage and explained his reasoning for visiting. He spoke in German with a thick Greek accent, which did not go unnoticed by the sentries.

"I am Strategos Arethas Maniakes from the Byzantine Empire; I have come to discuss a business transition with the Count of this region."

Confused with the man's identity, the guards did not react at first. However, the man seemed to be dressed in luxurious clothing and possibly have a high standing in the Byzantine Empire. As such, they decided to let him pass, but only after confiscating the weapons from him and his guard. Berengar had

become quite cautious ever since he took hold of Tyrol; he would not allow armed visitors in his presence in fear that they might try to assassinate him after all his reforms were becoming quite unpopular among the nobility within Tyrol.

Arethas quickly agreed to these demands and had his guards disarm themselves before entering the Castle's gates. When Arethas entered the Castle, he was not overly impressed; after all, his palace was far more luxurious; of course, he did not know that the Castle was only temporary living for Berengar at this point, while his grand palace, which was loosely based on the Sch?nbrunn Palace from his previous life was being constructed.

After entering the Great Hall, Arethas witnessed Berengar sitting upon his seat of power, with his head resting on his fist. The young Count was currently dressed in luxurious velvet attire in his house's black and gold color scheme. The clothing was, of course, based on Tudor fashion, and he even had a fur-lined sleeveless cloak over his exquisite doublet. A pair of jewels hung from his neck where were made of gold and black garnet.

While sitting upon his seat of power, Berengar exuded a sense of natural authority, so much so that even Arethas, who held a far more prestigious position, could tell that Berengar was not a man to be trifled with. Before Arethas could introduce himself to the fearsome Count, Berengar noticed the man's approach into his Great Hall and gazed upon the man with a stoic expression while expressing his thoughts.

"Who are you, and why should I care?"

Berengar was quite perturbed that his rest had been interrupted by an unknown man from the East. Berengar had been hard at work all day long, and his seat of power was one of the few places he could just sit back and allow his mind a proper recovery. Despite his minor irritation, he could immediately tell by the fashion in which the man wore that he was someone of great importance, yet he had arrived within Berengar's territory, in his home without announcing himself. The level of disrespect shown could not be understated.

Seeing how Berengar reacted, Arethas was quite shocked; the young Count gazed upon him as if he was nothing of worth, and this was quite entertaining

to the mighty Strategos. As such, he boldly proclaimed his position within his own society and his intention for arriving.

"I am Strategos Arethas Maniakes; I have traveled far from the borders of the Byzantine Emperor to seek an audience with your Excellency. I have a business proposal that you may be interested in."

Despite the rudeness in which the man had shown, Berengar was quite interested in two things. The man was essentially a Duke within the mighty Byzantine Empire, and he had a business proposal for him. However, despite his interest, Berengar decided to return this man's kindness with an equally rude gesture.

"I am intrigued. However, I am currently busy and will need some time to prepare; come back in three days..."

Ultimately Berengar decided to snub the man; for the time being, the level of disrespect he was shown had to be paid in kind before he could move forward. It was petty, but if he accepted this disrespect, it meant that any nobleman of higher birth could walk over him. As such, he decided to show his authority and sent the man back to the City Below. In the meantime, Berengar had intended to verify this man's identity by inquiring about the so-called Strategos Arethas Maniakes through his trade connections.

Though Arethas wanted to protest, the glaring sapphire eyes which belonged to the young Count sent shivers down his spine. After all, he was disarmed and standing in his great hall which was surrounded by a group of armed men. As such Arethas played it safe and decided to return to the City and rest for a few days before returning. On his way out of the Castle a wide grin appeared across the man's face as he expressed his thoughts aloud.

"Well played..."

Chapter 148: Entertaining the Byzantines I

Throughout the next couple of days, Arethas spent his time going throughout the City of Kufstein and learning about its rapid progress. To think that less than a year ago, Kufstein could at most be considered an agricultural town. Though many regions of the City were still undergoing construction, the fact

that the walls had been constructed and decent housing was provided for the area's citizens was astonishing to a man like Arethas.

The city's overall layout was constructed in a way that not only took security status in mind but also made certain districts in place that allowed for organized living. By far, the Industrial District was the largest of these districts, and yet the Trade district was a close second. The greatest part of Kufstein's design is that the walls extended far beyond the currently inhabited regions of the city, allowing for the potential of tens of thousands of more inhabitants to dwell within the city in the future. Of course, another series of walls could always be constructed, if the City grew beyond its current limits.

Though the Industrial district was largely closed off to visitors, seeing such a vast quantity of smoke in the air led Arethas to believe that there was most definitely a massive industrial output created in this city. Though, of course, he would not believe the amount of steel produced every month in Kufstein if he were to hear the exact amount.

Arethas had initially come to Kufstein to secure an exclusive trade agreement with silk; after all, his personal territory grew vast quantities of the material, and he knew Berengar was expending a great sum to acquire it. However, seeing how well equipped Berengar's garrison was, Arethas believed he might be able to import a great deal of iron into the Empire from Tyrol, which would greatly aid the forces of the empire. He had no way of knowing that the blackened half-plate armor in which Berengar's forces wore was actually made out of quenched and tempered steel. After three days, the Byzantine nobleman returned to Berengar's castle and once more stood before him in the Great Hall. Berengar was the first to make conversation.

"I am Count Berengar von Kufstein; you are here in my territory and have arrived unannounced, be grateful for my benevolence, for I have granted you an audience despite the disrespect you have shown me."

Just because Arethas was a man with a position similar to that of a Duke did not mean that Berengar would back down; as such, he decided to emphasize that this meeting was solely due to his good nature and forgiveness. However, Arethas did not seem phased by Berengar's posturing and reintroduced himself with a great deal of confidence.

"I am Strategos Arethas Maniakes. I have traveled a great distance to establish trade with your region. I know that you have a great desire for silk, and I have a large supply of such a material that I am willing to trade. I promise you that if you make me your exclusive trading partner in this regard, I will give you a decent discount on the materials and will be able to fulfill your demand. I have even brought a large quantity of raw silk for you to browse and see if its quality is up to your standards."

Berengar smiled upon hearing the news that the other party had a large amount of silk to sell; acquiring silk for his ever-increasing textile industry's demands was becoming more difficult, incurring a rising expense and a lower profit margin. As such, he was more than happy to negotiate on a price with the man. Thus Berengar got up from his seat and walked down the steps from the platform where his seat of power was placed upon before standing in front of the man face to face.

Berengar was quite a deal taller than Arethas, and as such, he was able to look down upon the man with a smug expression on his face. After arriving before the man, Berengar began to negotiate as he paced around Arethas.

"Assuming you can fulfill your words and satisfy the ever-growing demand for silk, I will be willing to deal exclusively with you under the conditions that I receive a fifteen percent discount. However, I would very much like to see your product before I come to any agreement."

To Berengar, this was a reasonable request; after all, he would be buying in vast quantities and wanted a bulk discount, and such a discount was more than reasonable from the standards of his previous life. Of course, he was willing to negotiate a minimum of ten percent off. However, what surprised him was that Arethas immediately agreed to his terms.

"Such terms are acceptable to me; if you would like to browse my wares, we can go to the trade district in your city where I have left my supplies under the protection of my house guard."

Thus Berengar motioned for a group of his guards standing by to follow him and Arethas into the City below, where they walked around for a bit, capturing the attention of the citizens who began to gossip about the scene. There were

many rumors to be made about a lavishly dressed eastern man conversing with Berengar, the Count of Tyrol.

Berengar was well accustomed to such chatter, it was a common occurrence for the locals to gossip about him whenever he would take a stroll through the city, and as such, paid it no mind. Eventually, Arethas and Berengar reached his carts, which contained a massive supply of raw silk cloth. Berengar carefully inspected the material to see any obvious flaws; after a lengthy period of time, he finally smiled and nodded his hand.

"If you can supply this quantity and quality of silk at regular intervals, I believe we can agree."

Arethas returned Berengar's smile and stated with confidence that he would be able to meet his demands.

"I can supply all of this and more every month. My merchant fleet can travel from Ionia to the Adriatic Sea, where they will then travel by caravan into Kufstein. As long as proper protection is provided for them when they enter through Austria, they will certainly arrive in Kufstein within that period of time."

Berengar was instantly happy with this news. Finally, he could expand the trade of the more luxurious textiles and for a decent markup. His profit margins would increase with this deal, and he was pleased with it. After shaking the man's hand, Berengar invited Arethas to share a meal with him in his Castle.

"How about you stay in my Castle for dinner tonight, I promise you, that you will not regret the fine Cuisine of Tyrol!"

After hearing the young Count's offer, Arethas nodded his head in agreement. After all, the more friendly he became with Berengar, the more likely he could get his hands on some of his iron. As such, the shipment of silk was brought to Berengar's textile factories, where it would be converted into velvet and designed into fashionable clothing. Gold exchanged hands between the Strategos and the young Count. Eventually, they returned to the Castle to share a meal to celebrate the new lucrative trade between their two territories. Unknowingly this trade agreement would have important effects on the future

of this world and the relationship between the Rising German Empire and the Byzantines to the East.

Chapter 149: Entertaining the Byzantines II

A small feast was thrown within the confines of the Castel of Kufstein. Sitting at the head of the Table was Berengar, and by his side was Linde. At the table near Linde's position was Henrietta. The only other people present at the table were Arethas and a variety of Byzantine merchants and noblemen who traveled with his Caravan, these men were allowed to dine at the table this night as a show of friendship to the Byzantines. Berengar was quite pleased that the Byzantine Empire maintained significant control over the Mediterranean in this timeline. In contrast, during his past life, they were on the brink of destruction at this point in history. This made establishing trade with the east much easier than dealing with a powerful Muslim Empire.

Even though the Byzantines were Orthodox, they were much more amicable in this world to the Catholics in the west than they were in their previous life, and as such, the two men were able to get along quite well. Especially because Berengar was secretly an atheist and had no plans to discriminate based upon what religion someone might adhere to. For the rest of the medieval world, this open-mindedness was uncommon, to say the least.

Arethas and the Merchants were dining on a variety of German cuisine, which Berengar had long since introduced into Kufstein and by now had spread across Austria and into Bavaria. The Byzantines were far more culturally advanced than their western counterparts due to them being the surviving remnant of the ancient Roman Empire. Because of this, They were quite shocked that such a high level of culinary talent was available in a remote region like Tyrol.? Seeing the satisfied expression on Arethas' face as he dug into the veal schnitzel, Berengar could not prevent himself from asking about the man's opinion.

"So, what do you think about Tyrolean cuisine?"

After being asked such a question, Arethas slowly chewed on the food and savored its taste before washing it down with a doppelbock beer. Since Berengar first established his breweries, the first batch of doppelbock beer had recently been released. As a beer connoisseur, Berengar was quite pleased with the result. It was apparent by the look on the Byzantine

nobleman's face that he was not the only one who enjoyed the hearty taste of the strong German beer.? It was only after several moments had passed and Arethas had time to enjoy the serving he had just devoured that he was able to answer Berengar's question.

"Truly, it is sublime. I have not had such a fantastic foreign meal in years. The last time I had such an exquisite dish from a foreign country was when I visited India!"

Growing up in a globalized world from his previous life, Berengar was quite accustomed to eastern-style foods. He was a big fan of curry from various countries, including India; as such, his mouth salivated thinking about having a curried rice dish. Berengar had once experimented with eating curried rice with tortilla chips in his previous life, acting as if the rice dish was a dip. It turned out to be quite tasty; at least in his opinion, of course, everyone else thought he was a weirdo for doing such a thing.

Thinking about such memories, Berengar could not wait for the point where he acquired some coastal territory to build a great fleet that could sail across Asia and acquire the spices necessary to recreate some of his favorite dishes from the continent. However, he was stuck in a landlocked region for now, and unless he expanded through force or coercion, he would not be able to acquire such valuable territory. Both of those options took time to prepare for.

Arethas had his eyes on Linde for quite some time now; after all, she was an exceptional beauty, and as such, he could not stop himself from praising her.

"Berengar, your wife is among the gorgeous women I have ever seen. You are a lucky man."

Hearing herself be referred to as Berengar's wife, Linde began to blush as she shifted her attention to the food on the table. Berengar chuckled at Arethas' comment. However, he did not intend to spoil Linde's fun, and as such, did not clarify that she was, in fact, his lover, not his wife.

"Linde is the mother of my child and the companion of my heart; as you say, I am truly a lucky man to have her by my side."

Seeing as how Berengar did not correct Arethas, Linde decided to play the part of a dutiful wife and made her stance clear.

"Berengar is the only man I will ever love; it is I who am grateful to be afforded the privilege to live by his side."

Seeing the genuine expression on the exquisite young woman's face, Arethas mistook them for a happy newlywed couple and decided to shift the topic to something more important.

"Berengar, I do not intend to be rude, so forgive me if I am out of place, but I noticed a great deal of smoke rising from your industrial sector. I have also noticed your men are all equipped in plate armor. If you could humor my curiosity, just how much iron is produced in this city?"

With this question being raised, Berengar chuckled once more, though this time it was a bit more noticeable, and as such, Arethas frowned before asking Berengar.

"What is so funny?"

A proud smile appeared on Berengar's face as he began to correct the man.

"It is not iron in which my army is equipped with, but steel! My industrial sector produces a massive output of steel every month; the exact amount would shock you. Let's just say that I have more steel than I know what to do with at the moment."

This was not an exaggeration in the slightest with the new territory gained in his conquests and the city of Innsbruck being industrialized, Berengar was producing thousands of tonnes of steel every month, and despite using the steel in his many construction projects, which ranged from building fortifications, sewage treatment centers, roads, etc. as well as its extensive use in his arms industry, which supplied not only his own forces with the advanced equipment they wielded but also the medieval arms and armor of his allies. Berengar still had quite the surplus, albeit the more ambitious his plans became, the more the surplus dwindled.

Hearing this information, Arethas instantly became excited by the news. Though he could not fathom how, if Berengar truly possessed the ability to create such a terrifying amount of steel, then clearly he could buy some of the raw materials for his own armies. As such, he began to ponder about the feasibility of such a deal.

"Is it possible for me to purchase some of your surplus?"

A smirk spread across Berengar's lips as he heard those words. Not only could he produce arms and armor for the factions fighting for Germany, but with this opportunity, he could partially supply the Byzantine armies who were fighting in Egypt. If negotiated properly, he could increase the business of his arms trade without putting his own position in danger. After all, no matter what type of armor he produced for the Byzantines, it would never stop his muskets, especially not the rifled muskets that utilized mini balls. Thus Berengar had no fear of trading arms and armor to the east.

Seeing that Berengar was talking about business at the dinner table, the other Merchants instantly became enlightened by the idea of purchasing some steel to be brought back to the Empire for resale. As such, Berengar found himself bombarded with offers; however, before it could get too chaotic, he raised his hand, signaling the men to behave themselves.

"We are enjoying a meal right now; there will be plenty of time to discuss business opportunities in the upcoming days. Take this time to savor the dishes on the table, and think about what offers you wish to present me."

What Berengar said was true; they had gotten ahead of themselves after the excitement they felt upon hearing that Berengar had a vast surplus of steel. After all, it was a tough material to make in this era, and only ever in small quantities. If Berengar truly possessed such a stockpile of the valuable material, they would be willing to go to great lengths to secure a trade agreement with the young Count.

As such, the remainder of the dinner was spent discussing less important matters and the ongoing events of the world. For a region embroiled in warfare, Tyrol was remarkably secure for the moment. Thus while the rest of Germany suffered through the hardships of war, Berengar entertained a host of Byzantine Merchants and noblemen from the East.

Chapter 150: Marvels of Industry I

After the feast was over, Berengar saw his guests off to the quarters they were staying in his city. He had made quite an impression on these Byzantine noblemen and merchants, and in the following days, would make sure to negotiate proper trade agreements with every one of them. The more contacts he made in the East, the better his business would become. After reclaiming much of their lost territories since the Crusades had begun, The Byzantine Empire was wealthy, far more than a region like Germany; after all, they were in the center of trade between the West and the East.

Though the Byzantines had to repel Saracen invasions a couple of times a decade, for the most part, their power was stable, and Berengar saw an opportunity in building relations with them. As such, he made sure to take care of his guests during this feast. After sending the men off, he returned to his Castle, where he sat down and had a glass of wine alongside his beautiful young lover. The wine was a gift from the Byzantine Empire and was of significant quality, thus Berengar wanted to have a taste of it.

After swirling the wine around in his chalice and inhaling the thick aroma, Berengar sipped upon the fine alcohol before nodding his head in approval.

"The Byzantines sure know how to make a good wine..."

On the other hand, Linde had some questions on her mind and was not afraid to speak of them; as such, she quickly asked Berengar about his intentions.

"You sure seem to be treating these men from the east quite well. Do you intend to establish an arms trade with the Byzantines?"

Berengar smiled and nodded his head before explaining his plans.

"The Eastern half of the Roman Empire was always its wealthiest region, with much of their lands reclaimed the Byzantines have amassed quite a fortune over the previous centuries. Due to being near the Saracens, they are constantly under threat of invasion and spend a large amount of wealth on their military. Now that they know I have a substantial supply of steel, when they return to the East and spread the news of this, the Generals of the Byzantine armies will be begging me to supply their forces with high-quality equipment."

Berengar estimated that the Byzantines would most likely be victorious in their ongoing war with Egypt and reap great spoils from the region, further increasing their wealth. As such, he intended to get on their good side and make as much money from their wars as possible. Wars were a profitable business to those who had the means to take advantage of them. Linde carefully observed Berengar's estimation before nodding her head in agreement; what Berengar said was most likely true, and getting in the good graces of the Byzantine Empire provided substantial benefits. As such, she complimented him on his schemes.

"You really think everything through, don't you?"

Berengar chuckled as he took a swig from his glass of wine before responding.

"Not everything, but I try to be a few steps ahead of my potential rivals. Make no mistake, in the future, when I have united my German Empire, the Byzantines will be a rival for global hegemony, at the rate they are expanding, they could become a threat if relations are not properly maintained."

Luckily for Berengar, he knew about the new world and the resource-rich regions of Africa, most of which were sparsely populated and posed no major threat to an advanced army like his own. After unifying his Empire, he would take advantage of his knowledge and lay claim to the best regions in the world for colonization. By the time the Byzantine Empire and the other powers realized the value of these regions, the critical areas would already be under German sovereignty.

Linde saw the proud expression on Berengar's face but could not read his mind, and as such, did not know what he was smirking about. However, she knew when it came to Berengar and his ambitions that it was best not to overstep her bounds, and as such, she decided to switch the topic.

"So, will you be showing the merchants your steel stockpile?"

Snapping back to reality from Linde's words, Berengar quickly nodded his head in response and smiled once more.

"Of course! They need to know just how much I can produce so that they can brag to the Empire about my steel surplus. The greater the surplus, the larger the interest the Empire will have for my steel. I will show them the extent of my people's labor tomorrow; it will be sure to leave a lasting impression on these merchants and noblemen from the East."

With that said, the two lovers quickly finished their wine before returning to their bed chambers, where they embraced each other passionately for many hours into the long night. After the sun rose in the morning, Berengar got up and began his daily routine. It was well past noon when he finally met with Arethas and the others in the city below.

After meeting up with Arethas, Berengar patted the man on the back with a wide grin on his face.

"Come! Let me show you the extent of my industry!"

Hearing these words, a flash of greed filled the eyes of the merchants from the east who surrounded Berengar like a flock of hungry buzzards. Berengar knew what they were thinking about from the gleam in their pupils; unfortunately for them, he would not allow them to see the machinery used to create such a massive stockpile of steel, only the results of production.

As such, Berengar led the men through the industrial district of Kufstein, whose secrets were heavily guarded by the garrison; only properly authorized personnel was allowed through the gates, but since these men traveled with Berengar, they were easily able to pass by the strict security. After all, Berengar owned this entire city.

Berengar made sure to give the men a tour of the industrial district outside of the critical areas of development; as such, the armories and arms factories were the first he showed. Of course, he showed the factories which explicitly produced equipment for export, not the manufacture of his own supplies. Seeing such a large warehouse filled with hundreds of employees working in well-organized assembly lines to create sets of brigandine and plate armor, the Byzantine merchants were shocked by the size of the operation. Berengar smiled smugly at the expressions on their faces before introducing the area.

"This is the armory, where we manufacture brigandine and plate armor for export to our customers. Of course, if you desire a different armor style, we could also manufacture that for you. From my understanding, the Byzantine army uses a mixture of mail and mirror-pattern armor, and I would be more than happy to craft such equipment if an agreement can be reached."

Mirror-pattern armor was a style of armor used by eastern forces; it consisted of a group of interlocking iron plates, usually in the form of circles and squares which protected the torso; these plates were grouped together by rivetted mail rings. Generally speaking, the mirror pattern armor was worn over a mail hauberk. Berengar produced very little mail armor because it was a time-consuming practice, far more so than brigandine and plate. He would honestly prefer to introduce this western style of equipment to the Byzantine forces, but that was not his decision to make.

Seeing the grand scale of equipment production, Arethas felt the need to ask about where such supplies would be sold off to.

"Just who is your customer for such a large supply of equipment?"

Berengar smiled and did not hide that this equipment was custom ordered and paid for by the Duke of Austria and his vassals.

"My largest customer at the moment is Count Otto of Steiermark. However, Duke Wilmar has recently begun placing orders for his personal armies as well. Luckily for him, he came into a large supply of weapons and armor from the late Count Lothar and his armies; due to the size and speed of my Industry, he has given me the task of repairing and outfitting the equipment for his purposes. However, a lot of this is also new production; as the war goes on, the demand for more equipment expands."

The sight of the armory left a lasting impression on Arethas, and he could hardly believe his eyes. Of course, when the Byzantine noblemen and merchants arrived at their next destination, they would be equally shocked by the scale of industry in which Berengar had fostered in Kufstein. If the mighty Strategos knew that Kufstein was just one of Berengar's industrial cities and that Innsbruck had been developing its own industrial sector, he would truly lose his mind in astonishment.

