

## Steel 171

### *Chapter 171: We Could Just Surrender...*

While Linde was setting her plans into motion, Berengar had begun another round of conscription. With the time it took to train recruits, he could have another division when Austria finally fell to the Bavarians. The Army of Tyrol was a well-oiled machine at this point, with a large batch of veterans acting as Non-Commissioned and Commissioned Officers; their experience from Berengar's previous campaigns allowed them to maintain control of the many new conscripts who formed the majority of the new units which were appearing. Infantry and Artillery had been prioritized in recruitment, as for the Cuirassiers and other forms of Cavalry such as the Lancers in which Berengar was fostering, they were costly to train and maintain, and as such had taken a backseat.

By now, 3/4s of all of Berengar's forces were equipped with the 1417/18 Rifled Musket, allowing a massive range advantage on the battlefield and during sieges alike. Because of this Berengar had decreed the 1417 Land Pattern Musket, which was smoothbore to be halted in production, and the existing Muskets were to be converted into Rifled Muskets. When Berengar finally marched to war in an attempt to reclaim Austria, all his troops would be equipped with Rifled Muskets.

Aside from Line Infantry, units of Grenadiers were fostered by the more talented conscripts and were utilized as shock troops. Berengar had also begun forming Jaeger Companies comprised of lightly armored soldiers with special rifles designed for long-distance shooting. These rifles were based on the Whitworth rifle from the American Civil War during Berengar's past life. The primary difference is that they utilized a flintlock system instead of a percussion cap system. These precision rifles employed specials hexagonal bullets in a .451 caliber and were capable of an effective range from 800 - 1,000 yards. The Jaeger Companies would be used as marksmen on the battlefield and would precisely execute high-profile targets, such as enemy commanders.

These Jaeger units were dressed in Green and Black Landsknecht clothing and wore very little in terms of armor; after all, they were engaging targets at such a distance they seldom needed the protection afforded by armor. The Jaeger recruits were handpicked from the most capable shooters and trained

explicitly in marksmanship. They would indeed have a fearsome reputation on the battlefield when they were finally deployed.

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While Berengar's forces improved in size and strength, the battle at the borders of Tyrol was still ongoing. Reinforcements had arrived to Count Siegmund's forces, and he was now forced once more to march on the walls of the Star fortress. His medieval soldiers boldly held onto their weapons as they charged at the walls of the mighty fort in front of them. Trepidation filled every step, as those who had been present to witness the bloody spectacle of the last charge were all too aware of what awaited them.

Nevertheless, the men were pushed forward towards the steel-reinforced concrete walls in which the Tyrolean forces were garrisoned. After advancing towards their objective, the thunder of the cannons mounted on the walls began to echo in the air, and the explosive shells rained down upon the invaders who prayed for their survival. However, if God truly existed, he was far from merciful; after the first barrage of cannon shells landed into the enemy's formation, they exploded upon impact and sent shrapnel in all directions. The blast itself was deadly. However, the shrapnel caused absolute carnage, which tore its way through the gaps in the Bavarian soldiers' armor and wreaked havoc across the battlefield.

This was only the first volley, as such the cannons were rapidly reloaded before being fired once more. Meanwhile, the defenders of the garrison began firing their rifled muskets at the enemy when they appeared within range. The large .58 caliber lead bullets tore through the brigandine and plate armor of the attackers, rendering their defensive equipment practically useless. Blood spilled with every successful hit, and bodies fell to the floor.

Despite this, the Bavarians continued to advance, hoping to get to the fortress and raise their ladders. Yet such a thing never occurred as they were quickly torn to shreds by the defender's mighty weapons. It did not take long before the survivors began to route back to their siege camp once more. Despite the reinforcements received from the Duke, Count Siegmund's army had once more failed to reach the sturdy walls of the star fortress. Filled with fury from the recent defeat the? Count began to curse to himself as he witnessed the bloody spectacle unfold.

"I can't even build a God damn trebuchet without it being blasted to shreds by those wretched cannons! How the hell am I supposed to take this fortress!?!"

The commanders of his army were circled around him, and every one of them could feel the Count's pain. Duke Dietger of Bavaria had ordered the man to invade Tyrol from the Northwest, and despite his best efforts, he could not even get close to the fortress which blocked his path. Every time he attempted to do so, his men would be torn asunder by the powerful weapons in which the defenders possessed. It was not simply a matter of explosive power but the exceptional range in which the defenders held. Archers and Crossbowmen did not stand a chance to get a shot off before getting gunned down by the rifled muskets.

Due to the range of the cannons, Count Siegmund could not advance siege weapons into a position without them getting torn apart by the guns above. Trying to invade Tyrol was a nightmare for Count Siegmund, especially since he was morally against the idea, to begin with. Was this God's punishment for daring to march on the center of the Reformation? This was a question Count Siegmund had asked himself many times since he first arrived at the Tyrolean border.

Nevertheless, Duke Dietger would not accept failure; the rest of Austria had been invaded, so why were he and the other Commander who took a position in the Northeast having such a hard time advancing into Tyrol. No matter how Siegmund tried to inform Dietgar of Berengar's weapons, it was of no use; one would have to personally witness their destructive power to believe their effects, for they were something that had never been seen before in this feudal world.? Eventually one of Siegmund's commanders voiced a suggestion on how to proceed.

"Why don't we just wait for Duke Dietger to conquer the rest of Austria before we attempt to attack again. Morale is shaking, and there is no point sending more men to the slaughter. Before long, we will have a mutiny on our hands. It is simply impossible to enter through Tyrol through the borders of Bavaria..."

What the man said was the most reasonable course of action for the Bavarians at the Tyrolean border. Any further attacks would be a waste of lives. Since they could not enter through the border with Bavaria, they would

have to wait for Dietger to march on Tyrol from Salzburg, which could only happen after the eastern portion of Austria was taken.

Of course, Siegmund was fearful that if he took this approach, his liege would punish him severely for his "cowardice" as such, he was hesitant to adopt such a strategy. Thus he tried to encourage possible alternatives from his commanders.

"Is there any other ideas on how to break through this fortress that has blocked our path?"

After a few moments of silence, one of the other commanders decided to voice his idea, despite knowing it would probably be rejected.

"We could just surrender..."

The moment he said this, all eyes stared at him as if he were an imbecile; as such, he quickly coughed before explaining himself further.

"There are probably less than 500 men in that garrison, and Berengar has these forts all over the border, assuming his entire army is equipped with such terrifying weapons. Do we really believe Duke Dietger can win this war? Is it not better to surrender to Berengar's armies now and be treated with dignity? I hear he is quite merciful to those who surrender willingly."

After explaining himself thoroughly, the other commanders present began to take his idea as a realistic suggestion. They had already lost thousands of men in their multiple attempts at the wall without injuring any of the defenders; even in a field battle, the weapons the Tyroleans used would be disastrous to fight against. Maybe the man had a point?

After a heated debate, Siegmund had finally come to a decision. He would no longer waste the lives of his men trying to invade Tyrol, it was a pointless endeavor, but he also would not surrender to Berengar until he knew who would win the war as such he gave his commands.

"We will sit back and do nothing until we can see who a clear winner of this war is. If Dietger's armies begin to pressure Berengar's, we will launch

another offensive; if they are soundly defeated, we will surrender to Berengar. Does anyone disagree with this approach?"

After having a vote, the result was unanimous; the army at the Northwest Border of Tyrol would no longer actively engage in this conflict, giving Berengar and his forces some reprieve.

### *Chapter 172: Fields of Steiermark*

In the fields of Steiermark, near the border of Salzburg, two armies had met. On the side of the Austrians, Count Otto was facing off against the Bavarians who had the gall to enter his lands. Though the nearby regions were set ablaze from the ongoing invasion, Steiermark had been one of the few Counties capable of defending itself for the time being. The reason for this was simple, Count Otto and his armies escaped from the fields of Passau primarily intact, and as such, he had the most significant remaining professional force within the entirety of Austria. Outside of Berengar's army, that is. As such, the man was able to competently defend his territory, though that did not stop the Bavarians from trying to force him into submission.

While the battle waged, Count Otto found himself dismounted and engaging with the enemy forces in melee combat. While he did so, a few bolts flew past the Count's face which was covered in a great bascinet, one of these bolts even directly collided with his throat plate. However, it was effortlessly deflected by the sturdy steel helmet. Like most of his army's equipment, the armor Count Otto was equipped had been provided by the man's nephew. Berengar had not cut corners when creating Count Otto's plate armor, and though it was not as advanced as the designs of full plate armor in which Berengar had access, it was made with the finest materials and by the greatest craftsmen of his realm. As such, Count Otto was adequately protected against the enemy's missile fire.

After his armor deflected the oncoming bolts with ease, Count Otto found himself engaging in a swordfight with a relatively well-equipped man at arms. Wielding his longsword with excellent skill, Otto quickly disarmed the enemy opponent before gripping the blade of his sword in a technique that is referred to as half swording, where he drove the tip of the blade into the gaps in the enemy's armor. The opponent grunted in pain as his shoulder was pierced, and Otto followed up with a murder stroke, smashing the pommel of his sword against the opponent's helmet, acting as a makeshift mace. After a

few mighty swings, the enemy collapsed, his skull thoroughly crushed by Otto's onslaught.

After ending his opponent's miserable existence, Otto gazed upon the battlefield and noticed that the tide had begun to turn in his favor. Though the Bavarians were more significant in number, Otto was an experienced commander and easily outmaneuvered the hostile army. While he was engaging the enemy forces as the commander of the vanguard, His cavalry which was led by one of his vassals had passed beyond the enemy's flanks and smashed into them with their lances like an unstoppable tidal wave; in doing so, the cavalry broke the enemy formation and forced them to regroup. This was the strategy Duke Wilmar had attempted to use at Passau. However, this time, it worked as intended. Mainly because the Bavarians were not prepared for another feigned retreat, with their flanks smashed and the survivors beginning to route, the enemy lines quickly began to crumble.

Noticing that the battle had begun to shift in his favor, Otto continued his onslaught of the men in front of him with fierce determination. Surrounded by a group of disarmed knights, the courageous Count charged towards the enemy like an enraged tiger. Not all men at arms of the Bavarian army were equipped head to toe in brigandine and plate, and as such, the sword was still quite the effective weapon. With great finesse, Otto swiftly dodged an oncoming strike before lunging with his blade into the enemy's thigh, piercing through the femoral artery and causing the man to bleed out on the spot in rapid fashion. However, the Count did not have time to breathe as he was quickly rushed by another enemy, who immediately bound Otto's sword with his own. As the two were caught in a struggle, an oncoming lancer pierced through the backplate of the enemy, aiding Otto in his conflict.

Sweat began to pool on Otto's forehead as he continued to exert his energy in the heat of battle; the Bavarian forces started to retreat after a while. Even though the enemy was routing, Otto did not pursue them. He feared he would fall into a trap similar to the late Duke Wilmar; as such, the surviving Bavarians fled back into Salzburg, which was primarily occupied by the Bavarians. By winning this battle, Otto had secured the County of Steiermark for a bit longer; however, if the Bavarians kept persisting in their attempts to invade his territory, sooner or later, his armies would falter.

Gazing at the losses on both sides, Otto began to lament the deaths of those brave soldiers who fought for their homeland. What he needed now was the aid of an ally. Unfortunately, most of his supporters were significantly weakened by the horrific loss at Passau and were themselves struggling to maintain their territory. The only one who was able to help the man was Berengar, and Otto did not fully trust his nephew. While Berengar had supplied Otto's forces with a great deal of equipment and resources, it became increasingly apparent that the young Count of Tyrol had no intentions to intervene in the war and merely sit it out in his well-defended territory.

What was even more suspicious was that the Bavarians were all equipped with a similar level of equipment that the Austrians were using. This led Otto to believe that Berengar was supplying both sides of the conflict as a war profiteer. The fact that the only action Berengar had taken during this conflict was defending his borders and that of his western neighbor further filled Otto's doubts of his nephew's loyalty. Though Berengar seemed to care for Otto's youngest daughter Adela unless the Bavarians threatened her life, Berengar was unlikely to aid Otto, and the man knew it.

However, Otto also knew that Berengar was a man driven by self-interest. If that were the case, if he wanted to acquire his Nephew's help, precisely that of his armies, he would need to develop some incentive for him to do so. These were the issues Count Otto thought about as his soldiers began to clean up the battlefield. Eventually, one of the Count's commander's approached him and handed him a letter.

"My liege, there is a letter for you which contains the seal of the von Habsburg dynasty."

Count Otto sighed heavily as he grabbed ahold of the letter and began to read its contents; he could already guess what information the letter contained. After reading the letter, Otto tore it up and cast the shredded remains into the wind. The action, of course, shocked his commander, and the man could not help but voice his concerns.

"Your excellency... What is it?"

Count Otto stared into the distance towards the direction of Vienna with a solemn expression before answering the man's question.

"Vienna is under siege once more, and Wilmar's heir requests our aid."

After receiving such news, the Count's actions further confused the commander, and as such, he asked the question on his mind.

"And we are not providing it?"

Count Otto then stared grimly into the commander's eyes before making his stance clear.

"With what army? The survivors of this battle need to defend Steiermark from further incursion; we do not have the men to spare if we wish to break the Siege of Vienna. I have already done enough for the Habsburgs; I need to think of my own family's safety."

Though the commander was initially shocked, he also understood Otto's thoughts on the matter. This was a war Austria was now fated to lose, and the Count of Steiermark had to think about his family's future. To prevent the most losses to his territory, he would have to abandon the Habsburgs to their fate. Of course, neither of the men had any idea that by doing this, they were playing into Berengar's plot to topple the Habsburg dynasty and place himself as Duke in the upcoming years.

After cleaning up the battlefield and scavenging the equipment from the corpses that were buried in mass graves, the armies of Count Otto began to return to Graz, where they would rest, until a time where they were needed to defend their borders once more. Unfortunately for the von Graz family, they were not located in the mountainous region of Tyrol. As such, they were not afforded the natural barrier in which the Alps provided Berengar. Thus they would have to meet the enemy in the field every time they presented themselves.

Thus with the Battle being completed and the von Graz family rejection of the Habsburg's request for aid, the war in Austria began to advance towards Berengar's interests. For now, Steiermark would remain free from Bavarian influence, but whether they could endure the tides of war long enough to be a part of Berengar's resistance to Bavarian authority was yet to be determined.



### *Chapter 173: War Council I*

Berengar was currently standing in the middle of his Great Hall; he was posing for a painter who had shown exceptional talent over the last few months, so much so that Berengar had commissioned this painter to paint a portrait of himself. The first of many to come. It was no secret that Berengar was an incredibly vain man; he cared greatly for his appearance and those around him. There was a reason he outfitted his forces in the flashy attire of the Landschnecks from his previous life. He secretly wondered if he had inherited this from his father in this life or if he had developed it over time.

After all, in his previous life, Berengar was an exceptionally average-looking man; his great attracting feature was the body he had put a lot of effort into developing into that of a warrior's. His face, however, was nothing special, and though it was not ugly, it was certainly not attractive either. However, after reincarnating into this life, he found himself in the body of an exceptionally handsome young man. If one went from average to a 10/10, it made sense for them to become slightly obsessed with their appearance.

At the moment, the young Count stood dressed in his armor. The three-quarter's plate armor was made out of blackened steel, with exquisite gold embellishments. The pauldrons were perfectly sloped over the gaps in the armor to the point where rondels were unneeded. His gauntlets allowed access to the individual fingers, and he currently held onto the grip of his heavy cavalry sword, which was slung across his waist and sitting within its sheath.

His free hand rested on his equally embellished open face burgonet, which sat on a nearby end table. Berengar's facial expression was cold, and indifferent which went perfectly with his gilded black velvet eyepatch, creating an oppressive atmosphere. The portrait itself was from the waist up, and as such, the armor which protected his thighs and groin were not visible.

In the audience watching the painter display, Berengar's majestic appearance with excellent skill was Linde, who greatly admired the process. Berengar had promised that if it turned out as well as he thought it would, then he would commission one of Linde as well. As such, she was pretty excited as she saw the portrait slowly take shape. The painting was of far more excellent quality than the average medieval period painting. Berengar was far from an artist, but he knew how to explain how to use basic principles from his past life. After

all, he had taken a few painting classes in high school as an elective. So he was able to help the artists in Kufstein advance their skills so that their paintings would be more lifelike.

As the painting neared completion, it significantly resembled other portraits from the renaissance period from Berengar's past life. It was quite the magnificent work, and the painter would never have acquired such skills without Berengar's instruction and the funds that the young count provided artists in Kufstein to pursue their passions. After the work was completed, the young painter showed Berengar the end product; as Berengar witnessed the creation with his own eyes, a large smile spread across his face as he handed the man a pouch filled with gold coins before complimenting the artist.

"As always, your paintings never cease to amaze me! Well done, lad!"

It was pretty awkward for Berengar to refer to the young man as a lad; after all, he was only twenty-one, and the artist was of a similar age to him. Nevertheless, one does not question what the Count calls you, and the man merely smiled at the compliments he was given, and more importantly, the pouch he received, which was filled with gold coins.

Berengar then placed his steel-clad arm around the man's back and instructed him on his next task.

"Go and rest; you have earned it! Whenever you feel the tingle of creativity in the back of your mind once more, return to my Castle and paint a portrait of my beautiful lover."

The young man merely nodded at Berengar's request and left the room, where Linde was waiting in the background for the two men to complete their transaction. She had a lovely grin on her face as she looked at the portrait before expressing her opinion.

"It looks phenomenal; who knew art could be so beautiful!"

Berengar merely chuckled as he began to strip his armor off of himself, which Linde immediately took notice of and assisted in the process. While they were in the process of taking off his equipment, Berengar voiced his opinion on the piece.

"The artist was lucky that I am so handsome; if I were an average man, the piece would not be as inspiring!"

Linde merely rolled her eyes at the sight of Berengar complimenting himself yet again; she was well aware of his sense of vanity, still, that honestly did not make her think any less of him. After all, she was first attracted to him because of his appearance; she chuckled as she thought how foolish she was for trying to drug and enslave Berengar when they first met. Though things did not turn out as she had intended to that night, she was far happier with the actual result.

Thinking about their first night together made Linde incredibly aroused, and after she finished stripping off Berengar's armor, she pressed her ample breasts into her lover's chest in an attempt to seduce him. Noticing Linde's longing gaze, Berengar chuckled; he had no idea what she was thinking about to bring on this sudden change, but she was seriously too tempting; it was no wonder he fell for her charms when they first met. Nevertheless, he was much too busy to satisfy her at the moment. The portrait was just one of his many responsibilities on his daily list. Before he could fool around with his lover, he had to take care of the realm; as such, he flicked the girl on the nose as she tried to seduce him with her beautiful figure.

"Be patient; I am swamped with work at the moment. However, I promise I will satisfy you later tonight!"

Linde began to pout when Berengar rejected her, but she knew that he always kept his word, and as such, she put on a sultry smile as she kissed him passionately; it was only after she released herself did she say the comments on her mind.

"I will hold you to that promise!"

Afterward, Linde fled from Berengar's sight, leaving him behind in the room by himself. Berengar merely licked his lips as he said to himself aloud.

"I am going to make her pay for that..."

Now that his portrait was finished, Berengar had plenty of other matters to attend to. So did Linde; as the master of Berengar's spy network, she quickly

got to work compiling information on Berengar's enemies, expanding the web that covered Southern Germany. Soon enough, Berengar's agents would be in every corner of the Holy Roman Empire, collecting information and waiting for an opportunity to strike.

As for Berengar, he had a meeting to attend to, where he would be consulting with several officers in his army about the ongoing war in Austria. Though now was not the time to strike, preparations were in progress for the critical moment when Vienna fell, and Conrad was extracted to Kufstein where he could set up an Austrian government in exile. If even one cog in the machine that was his army failed to fulfill its duty, Berengar could lose everything in this upcoming ploy.

With this in mind, Berengar got changed into his civilian clothing and visited the building constructed to act as the headquarters of his department of defense. When he arrived in the war room, Berengar noticed that several officers were waiting for him inside it, and they quickly jumped into Salutes as Berengar made his presence known. Berengar, of course, returned the salutes before giving the command.

"At ease"

Where the officers slightly relaxed their position. Afterward, Berengar and the officers in the war room sat down in the chairs that were provided for them, where Berengar began to start the meeting.

"First and foremost, how are the 2,500 troops I sent to Vorarlberg doing?"

One of the officers who bore the rank of General quickly announced the status of the operation to defend the Western borders of Austria.

"Your Excellency, the Count of Vorarlberg, is grateful for the troops we have sent, and under the command of the officer in charge, they have done an excellent job in repelling the advance of the Bavarians. By now, the Bavarian army which attacked the region has been completely pushed out, largely in part to our forces. However, the Count of Vorarlberg and his armies should also be commended for their success."

Berengar nodded in approval at this news before addressing his next concern.

"So the region has been secured for our trade caravans to pass through?"

The General quickly responded in the affirmative

"That is correct, your Excellency!"

Berengar smiled when he heard those words; now that the western front was secure, Berengar did not have to worry about fighting on two sides when he finally got involved in the war for Austria. As such, he began to address the border crisis.

"How about the border forts? How are they holding up?"

Another man bearing the rank of Colonel quickly informed Berengar about the ongoing conflict at the border as he spread a map across the table and placed a few mini-figures that represented the forces involved in the battle.

"The Northwest garrison has completely halted the advance of the Bavarians; after trying to attack numerous forts, they have given up completely and are simply maintaining their presence at the border. As for the Northeast Border, the Bavarians are still concentrating their efforts to break through the defense. However, they are making no progress due to the construction of the star forts in the area and how well defended they are; the enemy army usually routes after a few artillery barrages. We have yet to suffer a single casualty, well aside from some minor wounds."

Berengar smiled and nodded at this news, ultimately. For the time being, Tyrol was secure; as such, Berengar decided to inform his officers of his upcoming plans, for they could not adequately prepare themselves if they were unaware. As such, Berengar deeply thought about the words he would use next, as they were of critical importance to his future plans. Thus the officers in the war room were left in silence as they waited for their Liege and Commander to give his passionate speech on the future of the War in Austria, one which would one day be recorded in history as a symbol of Berengar's rise to power.

#### *Chapter 174: War Council II*

The silence permeated throughout the stale air of the war room for some time before Berengar finally voiced his concerns over the upcoming period with an impassioned speech.

"Gentlemen, we are at the dawn of a new era! The invasion from the Bavarians has brought us an unforeseen opportunity. Vienna is under siege, and the Habsburg Dynasty is nearing its end. If we take advantage of this upheaval to rescue the youngest member of the Dynasty from the predicament he finds himself in; we will be able to benefit from this crisis and establish a government in exile, with our County at the center of the resistance! Imagine a new Austria with Tyrol at the core of its power! For this vision of the future to become a reality, I need every one of you to seize this opportunity that lies before us! For a Greater Austria!"

Every man within the war room of the headquarters of the Department of Defense was an ambitious man, at least to the point that they were eager to follow Berengar in his future conquests, not a single one of them were displeased with this plan that would allow their liege to usurp the Duchy of Austria in the future. As such, when Berengar finished his speech, it was met with the battle cry of the Tyrolean Army from all of the officers present.

"God with us!"

Seeing the officers pound their chests in a unified salute and scream the battle cry of his army, Berengar was pleased; it would appear that the core of his officers had taken his side in the upcoming conflict. Though Berengar did not doubt their loyalty, he was an exceptionally cautious man and had to prepare for the event that he would be betrayed; as such, he was closely examining every member of his staff before nodding his head in approval. After witnessing the scene of his officers come to terms with his plan, Berengar pointed towards Vienna on the map before sharing his and Linde's plan with the high-ranking officers who made up the core of his military hierarchy.

"Our agents have long since infiltrated Vienna's Castle when the City falls and the Castle with it, we predict that Duke Dietger of Bavaria will butcher any potential rivals to his claim over Bavaria, and as such we will smuggle Conrad out of the Castle of Vienna where we will coerce him into making myself Regent, while we work towards restoring the Habsburg Dynasty to power over Austria. In name only, of course, the real power behind the Throne will be me as Regent, and by extension all of you as Officers in my Army. You all do not need to worry about this operation's success as it is left to the Department of Intelligence; as for your jobs, it will be to ensure that our forces are prepared

and amassed at our Eastern border for the three-prong invasion through Salzburg, K?rnten, and Upper Austria! After we have seized those regions, we will rally with the forces of Steiermark and march on the Bavarians in Lower Austria, which will allow us to seize Vienna, and declare our war a victory."

Hearing Berengar's plan for invading Eastern Austria and reclaiming it, the Officers were all impressed. By the time they were able to invade Bavarian-Occupied Austria, they would have roughly 30,000 men. They would be able to split their army into three Divisions of 10,000 Men each to advance on the three locations, each Division would have enough firepower to successfully defeat any army they might come across.

The strategy itself was planned by Berengar, considering Eckhard was currently overseeing the forces stationed in Kitzb?hchel, the young Count had to design the operation entirely by himself, and as an avid strategy gamer from his past life, he was more than capable of devising an invasion plan such as this. The officers comprised of the core of his military hierarchy all agreed with the strategy, and though a few of them added some minor inputs, the invasion plan was mainly complete. As such, after a thorough discussion, the Officers were eventually dismissed, and Berengar found himself alone in the war room staring at the map. One day soon, Austria would be his, and his plans for unifying Germany into a Greater German Empire would be one step closer to reality.

After looking over his battle plans one more time, Berengar rolled up the map and stashed it away, where he then left the headquarters of the department of defense and returned to his Castle, where Linde and Henrietta were waiting patiently for him to attend dinner. The moment Berengar sat down at the head of the table, he overheard Linde's feminine voice call out to him.

"So, how did the War Council go?"

Upon hearing these words Berengar smirked, before tussling Linde's silky red-gold hair. Afterward, he took a sip out of the doppelbock beer, filled in his skull chalice before responding.

"You do not need to worry so much; everything is going according to the plan. Soon enough, we will rule this land."

Henrietta, of course, had no idea what the young couple was conspiring about this time, nor did she care. Instead, she spoke up voluntarily for the first time in a while with a broad smile on her face.

"I made a friend today!"

Hearing Henrietta openly declare such a thing brought a great sense of surprise to both Berengar and Linde, who had not expected her to make a friend so quickly after they had given her advice. They thought it would take a while before Henrietta would leave her comfort zone and approach the other girls in her class. As such, Berengar immediately took a sip from his chalice before replying to Henrietta.

"I am glad to hear it, so who is this little friend of yours?"

Henrietta was all too eager to announce her friend's name and how they met; as such, she quickly began to spit out the events of what happened as rapidly as machine gunfire. Not that such a thing existed in this world.

"Her name is Charlotte, and she is the daughter of one of the soldiers in your army! We met at lunch when I overheard her talking about how her father always brags about your victories in battle and how he was a part of them! So I told her you were not always the bold commander you are today and how you used to be a sickly, foolish boy! She was eager to hear about your past, so we talked throughout the lunch period about how you used to be and how you changed!"

Berengar nearly choked on his beer when he overheard Henrietta informing her friends of his embarrassing past, Linde. On the other hand, she was smirking at Berengar's misfortune and began to encourage Henrietta to continue with her behavior.

"That's good, Henrietta; I remember when I first heard of your brother years ago, the rumors that were flowing about then was that he would not live to be twenty, and he spent most of his days idling about and throwing childish tantrums every time something did not go his way..."

Berengar glared at Linde when she reminded him of the original host of his current body; every time he looked back on those memories, he began to



cringe at the old Berengar's immature behavior and dull mindset. If he had not reincarnated in this body, that fool would have ended up dying anyway, and Berengar would never be able to achieve anything significant in life. Luckily for him, he was able to reinvent his image through many difficulties, that is.? As such, the younger generation was utterly unaware of his original reputation, despite it roughly being a year since his massive change in behavior.

After listening to the two girls criticize his past, Berengar coughed a little before addressing Henrietta's conversation about him with her friend Charlotte.

"Henrietta, my dear sister..."

Henrietta perked up her head like a bit of meerkat when she heard Berengar address her in such a manner.

"Yes?"

Berengar took another sip from his beer before finishing his train of thought; the whole scenario vexed him.

"If you love me as your brother, you will do best not to remind people of my embarrassing past..."

Linde chuckled as she witnessed Berengar's pained expression; as for Henrietta, she was confused; after all, Berengar was the one who encouraged her to talk about information most people did not know about him to the other girls in an attempt to make friends. However, she quickly realized she might have wounded Berengar's pride as the Count of Tyrol and began to pout before nodding her head in agreement.

"Okay, I will only say the good things about your past from now on!"

Seeing that Henrietta had agreed to his request, Berengar smiled gratefully before reaching across the table and patting Henrietta's little head while praising her.

"Good girl!"

This action, of course, brought a gentle smile to Henrietta's face as she basked in the affection of her dearest older brother. Linde, of course, would not miss the opportunity to make fun of Berengar and quickly muttered under her breath.

"Lolicon..."

This statement instantly disrupted Berengar's actions and brought a frown to his face. As such, he withdrew his hand from Henrietta's glossy golden blonde hair before awkwardly digging into his meal. After which Henrietta began to pout at Linde for disrupting her moment, the meal continued in awkward silence as the trio enjoyed the gourmet cuisine made for them by the talented chefs of Berengar's Castle.

#### *Chapter 175: A Normal Day for the Count of Tyrol*

After dining with Linde and Henrietta, Berengar was finally able to relax, as such he sat in front of the fireplace as the evening came and went, drinking wine from his skull chalice, the more he drank, the more intoxicated he became until finally, he started speaking to his goblet as if he were speaking to his brother himself.

"Lambert, my little brother, why do you hate me to such a degree that you must attempt to end my life and usurp my title?"

Though Berengar had roughly heard about the reason for Lambert's actions during their duel at Obserdoft and could slightly sympathize with him, after all, if he was in the boy's position and had an older brother like Berengar from before his reincarnation, he too would have plotted against such a fool. Yet to Berengar, Lambert's actions were unforgivable, mainly because he continued to engage in such behavior after Berengar had proven himself capable of leading the House to greater power and prosperity.

Obviously, the chalice made from Lambert's skull did not reply to Berengar's question. Meanwhile, Linde had walked in and observed Berengar's drunken conversation with the inanimate object, and as such, she quickly approached him and grabbed the chalice from his hands as he attempted to take another swig.

"I think you have had enough, master..."

Gazing at Linde's worried expression and the look in which the skull chalice was giving him, Berengar merely chuckled before allowing Linde to snatch his goblet away from his grasp; the young Count voiced his support for his lover's actions as he struggled to get to his feet while leaning on Linde for support.

"You are probably right..."

After finding his balance, Berengar slowly followed Linde to their room, where she helped him get undressed and into bed, shortly thereafter she followed suit. Berengar was too drunk to fulfill his promise earlier in the day, and because of that, the young beauty pouted. Nevertheless, she found comfort in the act of cuddling in the arms of her lover as the two drifted to sleep. Before long the light of dawn shone through the window, and Berengar awoke from his drunken stupor, miraculously he did not have a hangover which he was thankful to Dionysus for such a result. He commonly found himself thanking the old pagan gods whenever something good happened to him related to their mastery. It was a lighthearted joke, and obviously something he kept to himself. As an atheist, he did not truly believe in his jests.

However, when he gazed at the unsatisfied expression on Linde's sleeping face, he realized that he had failed to fulfill his promise. As such a wicked smile appeared on his face as a sinister plot formed in his mind. However, before he could begin to enact such a thing, Berengar heard the infant cries of Hans in the other room, and Linde's maternal instincts took over with her sky blue eyes instantly opening and her head is rising from her pillow.

Seeing her bare body glistening in the light of dawn, Berengar wanted to pounce on the mother of his child then and there. Still, unfortunately for him, she was too focused on their son and his cries as such; she quickly got out of bed and dressed in her nightgown before leaving Berengar to pout like a child who had just been denied his favorite toy. Seeing that he no longer had the opportunity to fool around with Linde this morning, Berengar too got out of bed and dressed in his loose-fitting athletic attire before beginning his daily routine.

After doing his morning run, pushups, situps, squats, and pullups, Berengar began lifting weights before training in swordsmanship. Now that his right eye was no longer usable, his combat prowess was greatly diminished, especially since he had been forced to retrain himself in using his off-hand. After all,

without the use of his dominant eye, to oversee the use of his dominant hand, fighting with his right hand was merely asking for trouble. As such, he was once more thoroughly thrashed in his sparring session with one of the Knights under his command.

However, Berengar was a persistent man, and he would not give up until he was once more adequate in using the sword. However, he would not be leading any charges on the battlefield until then and would merely stay at the rear and allow his soldiers to fight for him. The idea of which greatly wounded his pride as he thought about it. Nevertheless, that was the price to pay for his arrogance. As such, he spent his bath time greatly reflecting on the foolish actions of his past, the results of which were brought upon by his growing ego.

After getting out of his bath and fulfilling his other basic hygiene requirements, Berengar ate breakfast with his family. Ultimately the meal was uneventful, and nothing of importance was discussed; as such, Berengar soon found himself thrust into his work where he mainly oversaw the approval of budget concerns enacted by the House of Lords. Now that he had capable and loyal men leading the charge in his reforms, Berengar had little to micromanage and thus had a much larger degree of spare time than he had in the past when he had to lead the efforts in every small thing.

Eventually, a peculiar file found its way to his desk, which was for the approval of the appointment of a member of the House of Lords, a man with which Berengar had spent much time in the past, but lately had left to his own devices. Gunther, the reputable farmer who had helped him implement his agricultural reforms in their early stages, was voted into the House of Commons by the standard population capable of voting, which was still very few at this point in time. He had greatly embraced education and spent a significant degree of his spare time educating himself on various topics. Seeing that he passed the test that was established to determine one's ability to vote and the other exam that determined one's ability to hold a position of political office, Berengar had no complaints in approving his appointment.

During one of the previous amendments to the Constitution of Tyrol, Berengar had amended his constitutional powers to allow the ability to accept a nominee onto the House of Lords and the House of Commons to reside with the Head of State. Even though the ordinary people and the Lords could vote on their representatives, assuming that they had passed the minimum

standard of education to do so, and the other constitutional requirements, it was still not a guarantee that elected person would fulfill the position, ultimately the power to choose who represented the people still rested with Berengar.

For example, he would never approve someone into a position of power who was antagonistic to his and his family's interests. Nor would he support someone with a track record of sheer incompetency or corruption. Sometimes the people did not know what was best for Society, and it was at that point a Monarch must step in to prevent the foolishness of said people from harming the Nation.

However, Berengar had no complaints with Gunther. The man was quite intelligent for someone born into the position of a serf. He had also proven his competency in the initial stages of Berengar's agricultural reforms. Now that he was fairly educated, he was the perfect representative for the common people; As such, Berengar quickly signed his approval to the document before moving on to the next candidate.

After getting through a list of potential candidates to fill the vacant seats in both parliamentary branches, Berengar had rejected over 75% of them. Mainly due to the lack of ability they had demonstrated in their respective fields. As such, the Parliamentary system was still largely unfilled. Yet, it was beginning to take shape, and as such, Berengar's workload thoroughly decreased with each passing day. Still, Berengar had plenty of documents to read through and sign, and as such, he spent the rest of his day doing such a thing.

By the time he had finished with his day's work, it was well past the dinner hour. He had once more missed the occasion to dine with his family. Nevertheless, Berengar quickly got up from his seat, in which he had been sitting in all day for the most part, and headed to the kitchen for a meal. Where he dined by his lonesome before returning to his room. Much to his surprise, Linde was waiting for him, completely naked and lying on his bed with a lustful smile on her face while showing off her alluring figure. Berengar quickly shut the door behind him as he entered the room, and Linde beckoned for him to join her as she stated the words.

"It is time to fulfill your promise!"

An eager smile appeared on Berengar's face as he stripped out of his luxurious clothing and pounced on his lover; he had been waiting for this all day. The couple spent the rest of their waking hours making love, where Berengar was exceptionally careful not to get her pregnant. After all, they already had one child, and Linde was still young, with many years of fertility to come. It was best not to rush such things. With this, Berengar ended endured a typical day in his routine as the Count of Tyrol.

### *Chapter 176: Selling Armor to the Byzantines*

While Berengar's armies were maintaining the situation at the border, Berengar himself was able to thoroughly enjoy the peaceful nature brought about by the stability of his lands. Though several of the other Lords of Tyrol in which he had subjugated in his conquests were primarily upset by the many reforms he had forced upon them, due to his careful deployment of troops in every central region, they had little power to rebel against him. Most of them, of course, was wise enough not to take such an action while the Bavarians ravaged the rest of Austria. Berengar may be a Tyrant who stripped them of several of their feudal powers, but he provided a stable and economically efficient realm in a time of chaos and destruction. As such, the benefits they gained from Berengar's economic ventures outweighed the disadvantages they gained by surrendering their authority to raise their own troops.

In fact, with Berengar's military reforms, creating a centralized army under his command, the individual Lords of his realm were spared the expense of training and outfitting such troops. Though these soldiers who Garrisoned their cities were fanatically loyal to Berengar, they had not caused any problems for the authority of his vassals, aside from reminding them to follow the laws in which Berengar had enacted. The complex Imperial Style bureaucracy which Berengar had put into effect throughout Tyrol had greatly diminished the amount of time these Lords needed to work on governing their realms, allowing them to maintain a lavish lifestyle filled with far more leisure than before. The younger nobility greatly appreciated Berengar's political reforms, as they had far less work to do and could enjoy themselves with their vast fortunes.

The critical positions of nobility, such as Viscounts and Barons was filled mainly with Berengar's generation; after all, most of their parents had taken part in Lothar's rebellion and ended up with a similar fate to the late Count. At first, many of them greatly despised Berengar and blamed him for the result.

However, Berengar was crafty, and he showed off the wealth generated from the industrial districts in the cities of Kufstein and Innsbruck to lure these young noblemen to his cause. If they proved their loyalty and put aside their foolish beliefs, they too could gain the approval for an industrial district in their region. Ultimately whether or not Berengar was to blame for their parents' deaths quickly became an afterthought in the minds of many of these young noblemen when they realized the vast fortune that could be gained by following Berengar.

Peace reigned over Tyrol while most of the German-Speaking regions were bleeding in constant conflict; because of this, Berengar's trade flourished internally and with his trading partners in Italy and the Byzantine Empire. At the moment, Berengar was hosting a feast for Arethas, who brought him some great news from the Empire in the East. It had been several months since he last saw his most significant trading partner. As far as Berengar was aware, the man was in the process of convincing the Empire to outsource a portion of their equipment to Berengar's factories. Finally, the Strategos of Ionia had brought him the news in which Berengar wanted to hear.

"The Emperor has finally agreed to my request; we expect a third of our army's equipment to be manufactured here in Kufstein; I assume your facilities can handle such a large request?"

Berengar chuckled as he drank from his skull chalice before answering the man's question.

"Of course! It will not be a problem."

Arethas was happy to hear such a thing as he toasted his chalice of wine to Berengar and their upcoming business venture.

"To our collective fortune! May it be a long and fruitful relationship!"

Berengar lifted his goblet in the toast before drinking from it once more. The fact that Berengar was now drinking from an exquisite skull chalice and had an eyepatch did not go unnoticed by the Byzantine nobleman who awkwardly brought up the subject.

"So... I can't help but notice the skull chalice and the eyepatch. Is there something I should know about?"

Berengar quickly put down his knife and fork when he heard those words; his expression became stern as he closely observed the skull of his little brother, which had been turned into an extravagant drinking cup. Eventually, a sinister smile spread across his face as he told the man the truth of the matter.

"Someone close to me sought to do me harm; after they had made numerous attempts on my life and were exiled from my domain, they returned with an army to usurp my position. During the battle, that person took the sight from my right eye, for that I killed them and seized their skull as a trophy; I decided to turn it into a drinking cup so that I always remember that even the closest members of your friends and family can betray you, and the price that is paid for being merciful..."

Berengar's chilling words permeated the air and were quickly followed by silence; Linde was the only person aware of who Berengar was referring to; Henrietta was blissfully unaware that the skull chalice in which Berengar always drank from was that of her other brother. Naturally, she was not informed of Lambert's death nor his treasonous actions. As such, she assumed it was someone else. As for Arethas, he was greatly disturbed that the chalice was an actual human skull dipped in gold and not some monstrous work of art. Such barbarism was unacceptable in the Empire to the East, yet the Count of Tyrol looked upon the skull chalice with a sense of pride; such a thing was genuinely unthinkable for civilized people. Despite his inner protests, Arethas knew that his business relationship with Tyrol was worth more than his internal disgust; as such, he quietly calmed himself before responding to Berengar's tale.

"I see..."

With that said, Berengar shifted the conversation to that of business and began to inquire about the order's details.

"Tell me, what style of armor will I be creating for your Empire's forces?"

Seeing that the topic was shifted from its previous grim nature, Arethas quickly addressed Berengar's question.



"I believe you referred to it as mirror-pattern armor. As long as you can make those complex pieces, we can handle the rest of the production, such as the mail armor that goes underneath it."

This was a simple enough request, and Berengar would be happy to fulfill it; mail took longer to manufacture anyways and was hardly worth the efforts of his industry; as such, he was pleased with such news. Thus Berengar quickly addressed his next concern.

"Will you need us to manufacture Helmets or arms?"

Arethas shook his head before answering.

"Unfortunately, all I was able to get approval for was the production of the mirror-pattern breastplates and its pauldrons. As such, that is those are the only pieces of equipment we require you to manufacture."

Berengar nodded in approval; it was much simpler to divert a production line to a single piece of equipment, and as such, he was more than happy to manufacture it, after all, it was an expensive piece of armor to produce, and doing so in massive numbers would allow him substantial profit. As such, he replied to Arethas' request in the affirmative.

"Fine by me, the price is negotiable, but such complex pieces will require a significant production line to be laid down for it; as such, my initial offer is 15 Hyperpyrons per piece."

The Hyperpyron was a gold coin in use by the Byzantine Empire during its later days of Berengar's past life. In that timeline, it was gradually debased to the point of worthlessness; however, in this timeline, the Byzantine Empire was still powerful, wealthy, and largely stable. As such, the currency maintained its value of roughly 20.5 carats or 4.1 grams of gold. It was by no means a small sum, but then again, Berengar's armor would be of substantially better quality than the iron products the Byzantines currently used.

Arethas' face twitched as he heard such a large number, luckily Berengar prefaced his statement with the phrase "the price is negotiable" as such, he

began to haggle with the young Count sitting before him as he dined on his schnitzel.

"ten Hyperpyrons!"

Berengar shook his head as he counter-offered

"fourteen"

the two noblemen haggled over minute details until finally, a price of 12 Hyperpyrons per armor set consisting of a breastplate and pauldrons. Berengar was satisfied with the result, but Arethas was clenching his teeth; this would cost the Empire a significant amount, but it would be well worth the price, and as such, he finally accepted the outcome. After the two men concluded their negotiations over the cost of the equipment, they shared a meal and continued to enjoy the peace that was afforded to the region of Tyrol. Now that Arethas acted as the importer to Berengar's equipment within the Byzantine Empire, he gained some degree of profit. The two noblemen from very different regions of the world were now intertwined in the arms, and textile trades, which acted as a huge source of income for both parties.

With the business negotiations concluded, the two parties enjoyed the remainder of the meal, engaging in casual conversation about what the two had been up to over the past few months since they last met. Obviously, Berengar made sure to stay away from the topic of his battle with the Teutonic Order, as his savagery in that event seemed to cause great discomfort to the Nobleman from the East, then again Berengar was a German, a descendent of the barbarians who sacked Rome and destroyed its Empire. The idea that a Roman from the East and an intensely nationalistic German who took pride in his ancestor's accomplishments could form such an amicable relationship was entertaining to Berengar. Despite this, Berengar was aware that such a relationship was vital to his plans. Thus he tried his best not to pour salt on the grave of the Western Roman Empire.

### *Chapter 177: School Days*

At the moment Henrietta was currently in class, silently listening to the teacher explain basic arithmetic, in the classroom around her were a bunch of female students her own age. Under Berengar's public education system he had separated it by Gender in order to avoid any unnecessary distractions,

especially among those who might be entering their adolescent years. This way he was also able to design the curriculum in a way that catered to the ways in which boys and girls tended to study. As such this was an all-girls school, with only female instructors. The woman in charge of teaching basic mathematics was a noblewoman who had at Berengar's request filled the position, after all, there was not much for a woman of her status in life to do, and it felt good to aid in the development of the next generation.

Charlotte was sitting next to Henrietta and was struggling with the basic concepts, she was by no means a prodigy when it came to math, but she had a fairly creative mind, unlike Henrietta who's mind greatly resembled Berengar's in so far that it functioned well with mathematics, and critical thinking. After the basic instruction was concluded the girls were split into groups to work on the problems where Henrietta and Charlotte grouped up together with a third girl who was nearby. The problem was a simple product of multiplication. However, the other girls were struggling with the concept, as such Henrietta showed the multiplication table Berengar had designed and informed them as to her understanding as to how it worked.

" $2 \times 2 = 4$ , because it is the addition of two, twos. However,  $2 \times 3 = 6$ , because it is the addition of three twos, and so on and so forth."

Charlotte, on the other hand, was incredibly frustrated, it was basic mathematics, and yet she was already struggling, one could tell she was not destined to be an engineer or anything which utilized a great deal of math. Instead, she had drawn a picture of a bird, which for her age and lack of proper education was quite acceptable. She of course drew it on the back of her worksheet, which caused Henrietta to lecture the girl.

"Of course you are not going to understand it if you keep drawing on the back of your worksheets instead of paying attention to the lecture!"

On the other hand, the other girl in the group perfectly understood Henrietta's explanation and thanked her for the help.

"Thank Henrietta, you are always a great help!"

This caused Henrietta to smile, she never knew it would be so fun to interact with people of her same age. If it was not for Berengar insisting she go to

school, and interact with the other girls she probably would have been sheltered alone in the Castle her entire life. As such she responded to the girl's compliment

"It is no problem!"

seeing Henrietta and the other girl get along so well Charlotte began to pout. She was quite a cute girl with a dirty blonde ponytail, and mint green eyes. Though compared to Henrietta her appearance was severely lacking, after all, she was dressed in a peasant gown, compared to Henrietta's luxurious noble attire. By the expression on her face, she greatly desired to monopolize Henrietta to herself. Of course, the young girl quickly found a way out of work and began to ask Henrietta questions about her older brother.

"Henrietta tell us another tale about Berengar!? I heard that he has an eyepatch now that looks super cool!"

The moment Charlotte brought up such a topic all of the girls in the class began to listen in to Henrietta and the tale she would tell this time. They had completely forgotten about the lesson plan and were attracted by the stories of the dashing young Count of Tyrol. Remembering what her brother had told her, Henrietta decided to tell a story from Berengar's past that was not super embarrassing.

"Hmm... Where should I begin, I suppose you could say that Berengar was always sickly growing up, ever since he was a small child, yet despite that he tried not to let his frail nature get in the way of living his life. For example when I was five, and he was roughly fifteen at the time. Some older kids among the nobility began to bully me, they had stolen my doll and tossed it up into a tree. When Berengar found out about it he decided to climb the tree and get the doll himself, despite being incredibly weak. He initially fell down from the tree after only managing to climb a few steps. However, he was determined, and as such, despite not having the strength to climb the tree himself, he found a ladder and used it to scale the tree and get my doll back. Afterward, he told me that if I was ever bullied again, to come to get him, and he would give the girls a scolding."

Charlotte's eyes began to glitter in excitement when she heard the chivalric actions of Berengar helping his beloved little sister, she could not help but ask the question on her mind.

"What happened next?"

Henrietta instantly realized the remainder of the story was not favorable to Berengar's prestigious image, but the entire class was staring at her with curiosity, and as such her resistance immediately collapsed and she revealed the embarrassing details.

"Erm... The girls returned and bullied me again, so I did as my big brother instructed and went to get his help. After he chastised them for their behavior the older girls... well... they beat him up..."

The cute and innocent expression on Henrietta's face when she revealed another embarrassing secret of Berengar's made the girls in the class instantly break out in laughter. Even the teacher began to chuckle when she heard about this side of the man often referred to as "Berengar the Indomitable" by his supporters. To think the man who ruled over the region with supreme authority, and dominance was so pitiful in the past, was truly an entertaining thought.

Henrietta continued her story for a brief bit longer as she addressed the class.

"After that, I learned that I should not rely on Berengar when I needed to teach someone a lesson, instead I went to my other brother Lambert... Though I guess that is no longer the case..."

The girls were curious about Lambert as most of them had not heard the name before, this sparked curiosity among Henrietta's classmates as they began to daydream about who Lambert was. Surely if he was the stronger of the two brothers then he would be a renowned warrior, thus one of the girls quickly asked about Lambert.

"Who is Lambert? Where is he now?"

Henrietta's expression sunk, though her family did not explicitly tell her that Lambert had done something horribly wrong, she was not foolish enough to

believe he was innocent. She knew Lambert must have done some unspeakable act to be exiled from her family, she just did not know what exactly had transpired. Thus, a gloomy expression appeared on her face as she went silent. The teacher noticed the sullen expression on the girl's face and immediately tried to redirect the girls' attention so that they would focus on their work and give Henrietta some reprieve. Though she was not aware of Lambert's fate, she knew it could not be something good by the way Henrietta looked when he was mentioned.

"Come on girls, pay attention, and get your work done!"

The classroom full of young girls all began to moan in displeasure, but they eventually did what they were told and got back to work. Charlotte whispered to Henrietta while they were going over their worksheets

"That was really funny! Your big brother is the best!"

To which Henrietta blushed in embarrassment, she knew full well that she should not be revealing such info to the girls in her class. However, they all seemed so interested in the story, and as such she could not prevent herself from leaking the information. As such, she felt slightly guilty for her actions, but not enough to prevent her from doing it again. Henrietta quickly buried herself in her work, and it would not be until lunch period where she was vocal about Berengar's embarrassing past once more.

...

Meanwhile, in Berengar's office, the young Count felt a sudden itch in his nose, and before he knew it he had sneezed loudly, enough so that if one were nearby they might think it was a blast of thunder. After doing so he rubbed his nose and instantly said his thoughts aloud.

"Who is talking shit about me?"

Berengar had no way of knowing that Henrietta had revealed another embarrassing event from his past, for if he did he would surely grab ahold of her puffy little cheeks and pull on them until she was red in the face. However, being unaware of Henrietta's revealing his embarrassing secrets for social clout, he quickly got back to work on approving budgetary concerns.

### *Chapter 178: Escaping from Vienna*

Weeks had passed since the siege of Vienna had begun, and the army of the Bavarians had already breached the city's gates. They were close to accomplishing what Lothar had failed to achieve during his life, and that was to capture the City of Vienna and overthrow the main Habsburg line. Duke Dietger smiled from afar as his battering ram smashed into the gates of the city's castle. Soon enough, he will be the reigning authority in Austria and unite the Austro-Bavarian Kingdom; he would no longer be a mere Duke but a proper King! At least that was his ambition in life, and he was close to seeing it to fruition.

As the battering ram battered open the sturdy gates, the remaining defenders did their best to persist, but eventually, the gate fell. With it, an army of Bavarians charged into the Castle seeking to claim it for themselves and round up the late Duke Wilmar's family so that they could be properly dealt with. The clash of steel resounded throughout the stale air of the castle's walls. Though Duke Dietger was not leading the charge against the invaders himself, the same could not be said for Gautbehr, who bravely defended his family home until his last dying breath.

The young Duke, who had yet to be appropriately recognized for his title, courageously fought against a Knight of Bavaria, as the two men wielded their swords with excellent skill in a fantastic display of medieval might. Surrounding them were the soldiers of both sides thrashing about in a grand melee, trying to gain the upper hand in the conflict. As their swords bound against one another, Gautbehr unleashed a vicious backhand with his steel-clad fist, which smacked against the Knight's pig-faced bascinet; Though the damage was not severe; it bought Gautbehr enough time to redirect his blade into the gaps in the enemy's shoulder, which was not adequately protected by a rondel. As such, the knight staggered from the tempered high carbon steel which founds its way piercing through the mail armor, the gambeson beneath it, and finally his flesh.

However, at this moment, Gautherbart was struck by the attack of a nearby opponent, which merely glanced off of his mighty steel armor. Despite this, such a blow forced him to redirect his energy to defend against a second opponent; as such, the Knight who had his shoulder pierced was allowed reprieve as another soldier took his place in the front line. Gautbehr and his

allies quickly found themselves on the backstep, slowly receding into the hallway, while their numbers dwindled to the exceptional display of violence.

While the Bavarians slowly made their way into the castle, the young boy Conrad was hiding in his room, scared witless from the ongoing events. His father had recently perished, and the city had fallen, his family's enemies had come to take their lives, and as a male of the family, his fate was sealed. Though his sisters might be spared and wed off to members of the von Wittelsbach family, he was a threat, and he knew with Duke Dietger's reputation he would for sure be destined to die. However, as the boy started to lose his mind to the sound of the echoing screams in the hall, he felt a hand grab ahold of him and drag him from his hiding spot. The boy was in no condition to observe his surroundings and quickly began to struggle as he struck the person who had grabbed ahold of him, screaming for his life.

"No! I don't want to die! Please spare me!"

However, the result was not what he was expecting as he felt a dainty and feminine hand slap him across the face, which dragged him to his senses. In front of him, clasping onto his arm, was one of his maids, who went by the name of Elma. She stared at him fiercely, with a degree of determination in which he had not witnessed before. She quickly threw a set of peasant clothing to Conrad and ordered him in a stern voice.

"Get dressed in these! Do it quickly if you want to live!"

Hearing there was hope for survival, the boy quickly stripped himself and got into the clothes; despite the fact that there was a pretty woman in front of him after he was dressed in such clothing, Elma pulled a hood over his head and gave him further orders.

"Come with me!"

She quickly dragged him away by the arm as the two absconded from the Castle into a secret corridor that led into the city below. Conrad, of course, was greatly confused by the sudden changes in events and began to ask the questions on his mind.

"Where are we going?"



However, Elma merely glared at him and gave him further orders

"Don't ask questions, and stay silent."

Conrad may have been an entitled brat and a fool, but he was at least capable of understanding the situation he was in at the moment, and as such, he nodded and obeyed Elma's orders. After the duo exited the secret tunnel, they entered the city below, where they began to act like a pair of peasants stuck in the city. As they slowly navigated the chaotic scene which displayed itself in the town, they were eventually stopped at the City's gates, where they were interrogated by the men at arms who were left to guard the city's entrances and make sure that nobody of significance escaped the town. Unlike Lothar's army, the Bavarians conducted themselves with some form of dignity. As such, they were not going around looting, raping, and burning the city to the ground, at least not yet. The guard on duty quickly halted. The duo soon noticed the team approaching the gate and bellowed his commands at them.

"Halt! Nobody is allowed to leave the city; you must return to your homes!"

Elma had already prepared an excuse beforehand and held onto forged identification papers to allow her access through the city's gates. As such, she quickly reached into her cloak and received a letter, which contained the seal of Count Siegmund of Bavaria; the letter notified that she was a spy set in place by the Bavarian Count at the request of Duke Dietger, and she had urgent business to report to her liege, it appeared to have the proper mark of Count Siegmund, and as such, the Guard accepted it as appropriate identification. He had no way of knowing that it was a counterfeit made by Berengar after his spies intercepted one of Count Siegmund's letters. They had largely replicated the Count's handwriting and seal through great effort, at least so much so that someone who was not overly familiar with such a thing would believe it. However, the guard was concerned about the young boy who was beside the woman claiming to be a spy, and as such, he quickly interrogated her about his identity.

"Who is the boy? Why is he with you?"

Elma looked over at Conrad with a glance that said "play along" before putting on a flirtatious smile and began to approach the guard in a seduction attempt.

"Who this? This is just my slow little brother; he does not know how to speak. He was sent with me as part of my cover. He is not important. However, I would greatly appreciate it if you allowed us to pass; after all, my Liege is expecting me. Since we are both in service to Duke Dietger to some extent, I am sure we will cross paths in the future, and when we do, I would owe you one..."

Elma was a relatively attractive woman in her late twenties, and as such, the man quickly bought into her charms before giving the order to his troops to let her pass.

"Open the gates; these two work for Count Siegmund; they have proper authorization!"

After the gates were fully opened, allowing the duo to pass, Elma put on a sultry facade and kissed the man on his cheek, which was on full display from his open face bascinet.

"Until we meet again..."

With that said, Elma and Conrad escaped outside of the confines of the city, and when they were far enough away, they changed directions from the main road where they entered the nearby woods. Luckily for Elma, she had long since prepared an escape route, as were her orders from Linde, and she would be meeting with another agent of Berengar's Department of Intelligence, who would be waiting outside the city gates with a wagon to carry the group off to the borders of Kufstein. As such, Elma and Conrad quickly regrouped with the other Agent of Berengar's vast spy network, where he was sitting on a wagon which was seated for two people, the back of the wagon was filled with straw, and Elma quickly gave Conrad another demand.

"Hide in the straw, we will be safe when we get to our destination!"

However, at this moment, Conrad could no longer contain his curiosity, and of course, his concerns for his safety. As such, he ripped his hand away from the woman's grasp and began to shout at her.

"Not until I get some information! For example, Who are you people, and why are you helping me?"

Elma sighed as she witnessed the fit in which Conrad was throwing, they did not have time for this, but she knew with the way Conrad was acting, he was liable to flee in the other direction and get himself killed if she did not tell the truth, as such she quickly explained her reasoning for her actions.

"We are going to Kufstein, Count Berengar has asked us to escort you to his realm so that you may be safe."

Conrad was shocked by this news, he thought for sure he had thoroughly outraged Berengar at Adela's birthday celebration, and yet the man had gone through the trouble to escort him to safety. He was beginning to reevaluate the man who his father had praised so much in the past. Then again, his father was also wary of Berengar's rise to power and had frequently spoken about the man with caution in his voice. Conrad did not know how to act at this moment. However, another thought quickly appeared in his mind, and he could not help but ask.

"What about my siblings?"

Elma quickly shook her head as she urged Conrad to get into the back of the wagon and hide in the straw.

"We don't have time for this, quickly do what I say, the Duke could realize you are missing at every minute, and if he sends out a search for us, we will be caught. If you care about your own life, you will do as I say and get in the straw!"

Though Conrad was confused and slightly concerned about Berengar's objectives, ultimately, he was more concerned about his safety than that of his siblings and did what he was instructed, jumping into the back of the Caravan where he hid in the straw. With that, the group escaped from the city of Vienna during the cover of darkness, entirely without Duke Dietger or his army realizing that the late Duke Wilmar's youngest son was missing.

### *Chapter 179: The Fall of Vienna*

As Conrad and Elma escaped into the Night, Gautbehr was currently fighting a losing battle, as he defied Duke Dietger's army with every fiber of his being. However, the longer he defended his family's castle, the more of his men fell to the meat grinder. As such corpses had begun to stack within the halls of the

castle of Vienna, their blood flowing onto its cold stone floors. With every loss, Gautbehr and his allies found themselves closer to the precipice. The young duke desperately swung at one of Dietger's knights with his longsword in his hands, however, he immediately felt a blunt object slam into the back of his helmet, which knocked him out cold. When he finally regained consciousness, he found himself sitting in the Great Hall, gathered together and bound among his siblings. Due to the impact on his skull, he did not initially realize that Conrad was missing from the group.

Duke Dietger quickly entered the scene, and when he saw that Gautbehr was bound and tied alongside his family, a wicked smile appeared on his face as he began to mock the man before him.

"I must say your struggle was brave, yet foolish. You should have just surrendered your home and title to me the moment your father died in battle!"

Gautbehr glared at Dietger with disgust; his only response to the man's provocation was spitting in his general direction, which caused a great sense of outrage to dwell within the Duke of Bavaria. In response to this insult Dietger quickly snapped his fingers, and as he did so, one of his men at arms struck Gautbehr with his steel-clad fist, knocking several of the young man's teeth loose. However, all that managed to accomplish was provoke a greater stare of enmity from Gautbehr, who continued to defy Dietger. Thus Dietger once more tried to insult the young Duke, who had only recently inherited his father's position.

"You and your family belong to me; if you do not submit, I will exterminate the male line from your bloodline and marry your sisters off to my sons and grandsons. Your Dynasty will forever perish from this world."

Though Gautbehr was at first resilient to Dietger's threats, when he heard that his family line would be extinguished forever, he grimaced as he began to contemplate his actions; Dietger was every bit as ruthless as the rumors had presented him. However, what came next was out of either of the two men's expectations. One of Dietger's knights approached the scene and proclaimed news that shocked not only Dietger but everyone present.

"Your Grace, Wilmar's youngest son, has escaped the confines of the Castle. We have no idea where he is at the moment."

Hearing this piece of information, Gautbehrnt grinned at Dietger with a mocking expression and began to taunt the man who had conquered his home.

"Conrad must be long gone; you will never find him; even if you execute me and those of my brothers who are present, you will never be the legitimate ruler of Austria so long as my youngest brother still draws breath! Go ahead and do your worst, but one day Austria will be independent and ruled by the Habsburgs once more!"

This insult stung Dietger like a thousand wasps. As a result, the Duke of Bavaria furiously backhanded the bascinet of the Knight who had informed him of such a thing; of course, he was not wearing his gauntlets and nearly broke his hand from the impact, which put a painful expression on the man's face thus causing Gautbehrnt to laugh at the man's misery—seeing Gautbehrnt's mocking expression Duke Dietger finally snapped and gave his men an order.

"Drag this bastard and his brothers out to the Courtyard and behead them; as for Conrad, I want a search party sent out to find him. I fail to believe that he has escaped beyond the city's gates!"

Despite these orders, Gautbehrnt showed no sign of dismay. Instead, he accepted his fate, knowing that there was still one heir left to his Dynasty. Though the boy was a spoiled brat and still quite naive, he had plenty of years to grow into a great man, and as such, Gautbehrnt died with a smile on his face believing that Conrad would one day avenge him and their family. As for Dietger, he spent the remainder of the night searching every corner of the city for Conrad; however, when the dawn finally rose, he came to the realization that the boy was nowhere to be found in the city and had secretly escaped. Seeing that this was the case, Dietger flew into a fit of fury and demanded to find the culprit who had been lax on their duties and allowed such a vital pawn to escape the city unnoticed.

Eventually, the guards who Elma had tricked were brought before Dietger bound and chained, where they were deeply confused about what they had done wrong. As such, Dietger made it abundantly clear as he asked them for the truth as to what had transpired several hours before.

"Did you allow anyone to exit the gates you were entrusted to protect?"

Not knowing the trouble he had caused, the man at arms who had given the order to open the gates quickly nodded his head and told the man of the information that he knew.

"One of Siegmund's spies requested to leave; she had a young boy in tow with her who she said was her little brother!"

Dietger immediately became suspicious of this news and inquired about it further.

"This woman, how do you know she was one of Siegmund's spies?"

The guard quickly coughed up the details of what had happened.

"She bore a letter with his seal, which informed me of her identity; in the letter, it stated that she was acting under your orders!"

Dietger was so thoroughly enraged by this news that he could feel his brain was about to explode; as such, he forced himself to calm down. After a few death breaths, he ordered his knights to take care of the men who had failed their duties.

"Behead these men and place their heads on spikes so that all may remember the price of failing to fulfill their orders. As for Siegmund, I will take care of him when I get the chance."

Dietger was already suspicious of Siegmund's loyalty, especially after his inactivity at the Tyrolean border and his constant request for reinforcements. He had already planned to punish the man for failing to fulfill his orders to advance into Tyrol, however now it would appear that the man had schemed against him. This was simply intolerable. Thus Berengar had inadvertently shifted the blame for Conrad's escape onto the man who was currently besieging his borders. Though Berengar was crafty, he never expected Dietger actually to believe the excuse he came up with himself.

With time being of the essence, Dietger quickly gave orders to several of his knights.

"Hunt down that bastard who has escaped and bring me his head. He is heading to Siegmund's territory! Go now!"

Dietger had given the orders to follow a trail that did not exist; as such several of his Knights would be sent on a wild goose chase in their attempts to track down Conrad and bring back his skull, thus allowing him and Berengar's agents to successfully exfiltrate back to Tyrol. When Dietger finally found out that Conrad had made it to the safety of the borders of Tyrol and into Berengar's clutches, he would lose his mind over the issue. However, for now, he suspected Siegmund was the culprit and was so enraged he could not even piece together who the real mastermind was.

As for Conrad and the others, their wagon had successfully joined up with a trade caravan headed towards Kufstein's direction. After all, the area had become the center of trade within Southern Germany, even during this time of widespread warfare. As such, they seamlessly blended in with the other merchants, who had no way of knowing they were harboring the target which the Duke of Bavaria and their armies were pursuing. Thus, Conrad, Elma, and the other Agent were able to enjoy the journey to Kufstein peacefully; after all, any trade which intended to enter Berengar's lands was protected sufficiently with proper caravan guards, but also with the understanding that if they were to be attacked, Berengar would bring the full might of his army on anyone who was foolish enough to do such a thing, a fear that was burned into the minds of any would-be profiteers after the war with Kitzbühel.

Thus Berengar's plans for the future were in full effect; with Conrad rescued and the remainder of the male line of the Habsburg Dynasty executed, there was nothing to block his ascension as he fought for power within Austria. All that remained was to convince Conrad to name Berengar regent and retake the Duchy with fire and fury. Both of which Berengar was fully capable of accomplishing.

#### *Chapter 180: Visiting Graz I*

As Conrad, Elma, and the other agent slowly made their way to Kufstein and the sanctuary it provided. Berengar was on his way to Graz, where he had planned to meet with his Uncle and discuss his plans for the future. Albeit not

to their fullest extent, after all, poisoning Conrad after assuming the position of Regent was not exactly something he wanted to become public knowledge.

However, Berengar also had a far more critical goal at the moment, and that was to meet with Adela; it had been many months since he was last able to see her cute little face, and he was beginning to wonder how much she had grown in this time. Thus, in all reality, the meeting with Otto was a cover so that he could spend some time with his cute little fiancée. For this meeting, he had left Linde behind in Kufstein; after all, he was pretty sure that Count Otto would disapprove of him bringing his lover and bastard son to the meeting.

As Berengar and his Caravan approached the city of Graz, they could tell that it had seen better days. Despite the fact that the city of Graz had not been besieged; the flames of war had ravaged many of the surrounding areas, which provided it with supplies, and as such, the people were struggling to feed themselves. When the city guards noticed the banners of House von Kufstein flying in the wind, they quickly went to inform their Liege that Count Berengar of Tyrol had arrived. Of course, Count Otto was already aware that Berengar would be traveling to Kufstein; Berengar had made sure to inform him of his visit, as such, he was welcomed into the city with open arms.



Before long, he and his caravan had reached the castle, where he stepped out of the Carriage and greeted Count Otto at the footsteps of his castle. The man had an amiable smile on his face as he welcomed his nephew and future son-in-law.

"Berengar, my boy, it is good to see you. How is your father doing?"

Berengar smiled as he returned his Uncle's greeting.

"Though I have not had the time to visit my parents, I have received regular reports from the staff who tends to their needs, and they seem to be adjusting quite well to life in the countryside. Naturally, they are sufficiently protected from the potential invasion which tries to break into my lands as we speak. "

Hearing this news Count Otto and his wife Wanda smiled; it was good to hear that their relatives were doing well. As for Adela, she was standing in line with her other siblings, ready to greet Berengar; however, before she could do so,

Ava stepped forward with a sultry smile on her face and began to analyze Berengar's appearance from head to toe. She was deeply filled with regret that she was not engaged to her cousin when they were younger. Though he was sickly in the past, he had grown into an exceptionally handsome man and was far more fit to be her husband. The moment the woman stepped forward, she embraced Berengar as if she had seen her long-lost lover. She made

sure to press her ample bosom, which was even mightier than Linde's, into his chest; this was an act of provocation to mess with Adela's head; as she did so, the young woman cupped Berengar's face into her hands and gave her greeting to Berengar.

"Dearest me, is that you, Berengar? You have grown so handsome over the years; I remember that you could not even stomach meat when you were so sickly! Surely times have changed."

Berengar did not fall for her tricks; he quickly spotted the upset appearance on Adela's face and could guess Ava was using him to torment her little sister. Berengar promptly released himself from Ava's grip and hardly paid her any attention at all. After all, Ava's breasts may be larger than Linde's, but Linde's had a better shape and firmness; he could quickly tell such a thing just from having the woman press up against him. Instead, he merely accepted her greeting with a nod before pushing her aside to visit Adela.

The act greatly infuriated Ava, she thought she could use her figure to seduce Berengar and thus cause Adela some mental anguish, yet it turned out the man had no interest in her. Was he a lolicon? Of course, she had no way of knowing that Berengar was not easily impressed by Ava's attempts after being with Linde for so long. After approaching Adela, Berengar wrapped his arms

around the girl and openly declared his affection for her, which caused her face to flush in embarrassment.

"My sweet little Adela, I have missed you so much!"

When Berengar hugged the girl, he made sure to check up on her development, and as such, he noticed that her chest had grown a bit larger from the last time he had seen her, which greatly pleased him for he was not, in fact, a lolicon. Of course, he would not reveal such thoughts, nor his unscrupulous actions, and instead, he merely presented himself as someone who missed his fiancée a great deal.

After latching onto Adela for quite some time, she nearly passed out from embarrassment before she was finally able to address the man she loved. Eventually, she found her voice, but she stuttered as she tried to present her jumbled thoughts.

"m... me too!"

ultimately she ended up muttering the phrase, and Berengar decided to tease his little fiancée by letting go of her and acting as if she had not heard what he said; in the process, he created some distance to allow her to state it clearly for everyone.

"I'm sorry I did not hear you. Could you repeat that?"

Ava immediately noticed the mind games Berengar was playing with her little sister and found Berengar's character to complement her own, thus making her frown in jealousy. Adela struggled with the embarrassing situation she found herself in, and eventually, she just blurted out her thoughts.

"I said I missed you too, okay!"

Afterward, she immediately began to pout, which caused Berengar to chuckle; Adela was just too cute when she was upset. Seeing the young couple getting along so well, Count Otto was incredibly pleased; it appeared as if Berengar still treated Adela well despite his infidelities; as for the Countess, she was even happier at the sight of Berengar and Adela's little "dispute" to her it was a sign that they were meant for each other. However, she glared at Ava and her attempts to seduce Berengar; even if it was meant only as a means to provoke Adela, the young woman had gone too far. Luckily Berengar had seen through her actions and merely chose not to entertain such illicit behavior.

After saying their initial greetings, Count Otto made a suggestion.

"Berengar, you must be weary from your journey; how about we all sit down at the table and discuss your journey over a feast?"

Berengar smiled and nodded while holding Adela's hand before replying.

"Lead the way."

With that, the group of nobles entered the castle and approached the dining hall, where they sat down in their respective seats. Ava's husband Wolfgang had witnessed her overly affectionate display when she greeted Berengar. As such was not happy with her performance, yet he was too dull to realize that it was not an earnest seduction attempt, but just a means to irritate her little sister; as such, he did not say much during the initial portion of the meal. As for Berengar, he dined upon the delicacies which Adela had brought back the recipes from Kufstein. The chefs in this castle were every bit as talented as the ones in his own, and as such, he thoroughly enjoyed the meal presented to him. As for the beer, it was still the standard light beer brewed everywhere in Europe; it was not the grandiose doppelbock or Oktoberfest beers in which he had brewed in his domain. However, it was enough to satisfy his thirst.

While sitting at the table, enjoying his meal Count Otto began to discuss with Berengar about his trip from Kufstein to Steiermark; after all, to get to the Count's territory, he had to pass through Bavarian occupied territory.

"So, how was your journey? I hope it was not exceptionally dangerous..."

Berengar shook his head as he dug into the beef rouladen sitting on his plate before answering the question.

"Not exceptionally so, there was an attack on my caravan, but with the firepower I brought with me, the Bavarians were easily repelled. There's a reason I brought so many troops with me; it seems that Salzburg has completely fallen to the Bavarians, or at least to the degree that the roads and the forts between them are under Bavarian occupation, whoever the Count of that region is, has surely failed in his duties."

Berengar was aware that Ava's husband was the Count of Salzburg and was actively taking a jab at him; in his opinion, it was utterly disgraceful for the man to stay hiding in Graz while his brother was left to fend for the region in which Wolfgang was responsible for. As such Berengar was not afraid to insult the man directly to his face. As for Wolfgang, he was scowling at the remark. However, everyone else present at the table agreed with Berengar's statement, even if Wolfgang was too dull to realize it. Instead, the man lashed out at Berengar and used one of Ava's talking points that she had always used to scold Adela.

"If your army is so capable, why have you not brought stability to all of Austria.

Instead, you hide in Tyrol like a coward!"

Berengar smirked as he heard such a poorly thought-out response, he was more than happy to spar with this man verbally. Wolfgang was clearly out of his league; as such, Berengar responded in a condescending tone as if he was educating a moron about the art of war.

"My troops are needed to protect my borders from constant invasion; even though I am working overtime to draft new troops, these things take time; I can't just create an army out of thin air. Do not worry, boy; I will have won this war by the year's end."

Berengar, being several years younger than Wolfgang, called him "boy," which greatly outraged the man. However, Wolfgang could not think of a retort to such a well-thought-out statement. Instead, he merely gnashed his teeth and accepted his loss. Ava was outright disgusted with her husband's stupidity for fighting with Berengar in a war of words; after all, the man was well renowned for his quick wit. As for Adela, she was chuckling while sitting next to Berengar; the whole situation was funny to her. After this brief exchange of insults, the dust had settled, and Berengar was able to enjoy a fine meal with his fiancée; he would discuss his plans with Otto at a later date. As for

Wolfgang, Berengar was more interested in conversing with his little brother about the matters at hand. The man in front of him was a dullard who would only screw up any job Berengar gave him. Thus the evening went by, and Berengar was content with his first night in Graz.