

Steel 191

Chapter 191: Conrad's Arrival

The trade caravan that Elma, Conrad, and the other agent were hiding within finally pulled up to the city walls of Kufstein. Conrad gazed out from the back of the wagon and onto the magnificent city walls. Though they were not as tall as conventional castle walls, they were far thicker and designed in a way that he had never seen before.

Despite the glory of Kufstein's mighty city walls, Conrad was by no means an architect or even knowledgeable in tactics. Thus the boy did not have an overwhelming sense of inspiration for their brilliant design. Instead, he looked mockingly at the short walls, believing they would be easy to scale over with ladders.

Of course, this was not the case, as the wide moat surrounding the walls, making it nearly impossible to do so while exposing any would-be attackers to fire from every angle. Despite this reality, Conrad was blissfully unaware of such a thing, and as such, looked at Berengar's mighty city walls with contempt.

However, one of the merchants traveling with the caravan quickly exclaimed upon seeing the walls

"Boy, you should do well to remember that these walls are mightier than they appear. In all of my life, I have never seen nor heard of such a large army repelled so quickly by the defenders."

he had been present in Kufstein during Theodoric's invasion. The sight of what remained of the man's army would never leave his memories, and as such, he had decided to voice his thoughts on the matter after noticing the expression on Conrad's face.

Conrad was unaware of what had happened during the war for Tyrol, and as such, was utterly ignorant of the fate of the late Viscount Theodoric. Instead, he merely thought the ordinary merchant was exaggerating. Thus he dismissed the man's claims completely.

After arriving at the gates, the city's garrison inspected every caravan to see if they carried dangerous materials or enemy agents. After getting to the wagon, which contained Conrad, Elma handed a document to the City Guards, where they immediately waved them through. Much to the surprise of the rest of the caravan, who was stuck in the process of being vetted.

Conrad was not surprised as he knew that Elma worked for Berengar and must have had some means to enter the city directly. However, when he finally entered the city walls and got to the habited region, the boy became astonished by what he saw.

The sprawling tenements, the large chateaus, the construction of the grand projects, all of these things were a sight which Conrad had not expected upon entering the city, which was not much more than a typical town but a year ago.

After taking in the sights, Conrad was eventually led to the Castle where Bernegar currently resided. As he stepped off the wagon, he was immediately greeted by Berengar, Count Otto, and Count Audegar of Vorarlberg, who had arrived in Kufstein not long before Conrad himself. These three men were the leaders of the few counties which remained completely unoccupied by the Bavarians.

Upon stepping off the wagon, Berengar instantly greeted Conrad with a degree of respect that the boy had previously not been afforded.

"Your Grace, I apologize for the accommodations you suffered through as you traveled to my lands, but I hope you can understand the need for secrecy."

Considering Conrad was the last remaining heir of the late Duke Wilmar, Berengar had to at the very least put on a facade of respect, especially if he wanted to win Conrad over to his side, and appoint him the Regent.

Though Conrad was upset due to the conditions he had found himself in the last few days, he was just thankful to be alive. Thus he dusted himself off before approaching Berengar and the other Counts while making demands.

"I need to bathe and bring me a change of clothes while you are at it, something befitting a man of my position! We will talk after I have made myself presentable."

Berengar smiled and nodded before allowing the boy access to his Castle. He struggled to contain his laughter when the twelve-year-old child proclaimed himself a man. Luckily Berengar had a solid poker face and merely acquiesced to the boy's demands.

"Of course, your grace, you will find my accommodations most fitting."

Thus Conrad was led to the bath where he cleaned himself from the filth accumulated on his body over the last few days before changing into a luxurious set of attire fit for a Duke that Berengar had long since prepared for Conrad from his textile factories. After doing so, they met up in the Dining room, where Berengar brought out his finest cuisine to treat the boy.

Linde, Adela, and Henrietta were not present for the meeting at the dining table; aside from the three counts, only Liutbert was present as Chancellor of Tyrol. As the group dined on their lunch, Otto began to voice his concerns to Conrad.

"Your Grace, I assume you are aware that the Bavarians have captured Vienna, your brothers have all been executed, and your sisters have been taken away by Dietger to be married off to his sons. You are the last remaining heir of your father. This means you are now officially the Duke of Austria and potentially the last remaining heir to the Kingdom of Germany, considering your late mother was the King's only daughter."

Conrad was too busy stuffing his face with the delicious meal presented to him as if he had not eaten in days, which was far from the case. However, all he managed to eat was bread and beer during his travels, and as such, he was glad to have some meat in front of him finally. Even though the boy had not answered Count Otto, the man did not hesitate to continue his train of thought.

"Considering you are still underage, you will require a Regent to act on your behalf, and I recommend Count Berengar for the position. He has proven to be an exceptional battlefield commander and efficient statesman. With him

aiding you with your responsibilities, we will be sure to recover the land stolen from us by those dastardly Bavarians!"

Hearing this, Conrad immediately looked up from his plate and stared at the lords in front of him for a few moments before a devious plot formed in his head. Now that he was Duke, he could make any demands he wanted. Thus he quickly set forth his conditions.

"You are saying I am Duke now, is that correct?"

Count Otto nodded his head silently in agreement. Thus a wicked grin curved upon Conrad's lips as he stated his demands.

"Good! If that is the case, you will break Adela's betrothal to Berengar and engage her to me! It would be best for a woman like Adela to marry someone of my prestige instead of a lowly Count like Berengar!"

Hearing this ludicrous ultimatum, Otto clenched his fists and teeth in rage, noticing how he was appearing Berengar patted the man on his shoulder in comfort; however, what followed surprised everyone present for the meeting, rather than being visibly outraged, Berengar put a pleasant smile on his face and began to negotiate with the small boy, despite being the true power within the room.

"Conrad, It is best to give up on your obsession with my fiancée and find someone more suited for your position. You are now the Duke of Austria, and if you decide to press your claim, potentially one day you could be the King of Germany, you should marry a princess, not a lowly countess as you have previously referred to the status that Adela has."

Conrad was shocked when he heard this; it is true that he greatly desired Adela to be his bride, but what Berengar said had resonated with him, he was now a Duke and potentially one day could be a King; he really should marry a princess of another Kingdom, and allow Adela and Berengar to remain in their lowly position.

Besides, even if Berengar did become his Regent, one day he would be old enough to need one no longer, and at that moment, he could use his authority to force Berengar to give his wife to him for entertainment. Or so Conrad

thought, in reality, Berengar had plans to get rid of the boy before that day could ever become a reality.? However, Conrad did not know this, and with these thoughts in his head, he instantly agreed to Berengar's suggestion.

"Very well, I will do as you suggest; you can forget about my earlier request. As for my Regent, I suppose Berengar has shown that he can fulfill such a position. Thus I will consider it as an option for the time being. I will announce who I have decided to be my Regent after getting accustomed to the current situation that has occurred in my lands."

While Conrad presented such an amicable tone, in his mind, he was secretly thinking to himself.

'Even if I am compelled to make you my Regent, one day your fiancée will be mine! You just wait, Berengar; I will show you who is truly worthy of being with such a woman.'

Berengar could easily guess what the foolish boy was thinking, and while Conrad was scheming in his head to steal Adela from him, Berengar was thinking in his mind.

'Fat chance, kiddo, you will be dead before you even turn sixteen. Enjoy your few years left as my puppet...'

As such, the two noblemen plotted against one another, all while smiling as if they were the greatest of friends and allies. The sight of which sent chills down the spines of the other three noblemen who were present, who could easily guess what both Berengar and Conrad were thinking behind their friendly facades.

Chapter 192: Conrad's Ambitions

With Conrad in Kufstein, Berengar felt assured that his rise to power was secure. Thus he spent the remainder of his day visiting Ludwig's office. The man was currently busy overseeing production, it had been a while since Berengar last popped by to say hello, and there was a particular reason for him to do so this time.

Berengar had devised a much smaller, flintlock revolver based on the old pepperbox revolvers; the previous pattern was too large to be kept well hidden

by his agents across enemy lands, and he had wanted to fix that issue. Thus he stopped by Ludwig's office unannounced.

Berengar quickly knocked on the door, and a few seconds passed before Ludwig opened it. Seeing his old friend for the first time in a long time, a broad smile appeared on Ludwig's face before he immediately realized that Berengar had a set of blueprints in his hands.

"Oh, of course... Your excellency is here to give me more work! You couldn't bother to stop by for a drink every once in a while like the old days, huh?"

Berengar chuckled at Ludwig's response before forcing his way into the room and laying out his blueprints for the old craftsman to witness; as he did so, he responded to the older man's jest.

"I am afraid with two women and a County to run; I do not have much time to visit you; I'm sorry, my old friend!"

Ludwig immediately thought about Berengar's current lifestyle and understood his pain. Thus he pulled out a pair of mugs sitting in the corner of the room before filling them with beer; he handed one to Berengar while taking a sip of the malty liquid himself before getting down to business.

"What is it you have brought me this time?"

Berengar pointed at the design before him and said with a prideful smile on his face.

"I call it the pepperbox revolver, the old revolving flintlocks which my agents use are much too large to be properly concealed. Thus I thought of these weapons for use. Granted, their range is inferior to the other models, but as a personal defense weapon, they are more than enough firepower!"

Ludwig took a glance at the blueprints before nodding in approval

"As always, you do not disappoint with your designs."

The two men took a few gulps from their beers before discussing more matters of business. Berengar was the first to ask about his production capabilities.

"So, how is production going?"

Ludwig looked at Berengar as if he were an idiot; that question was broad to say the least and had many answers he could potentially say. As such, he asked for clarification.

"Your excellency, which production line are you talking about in particular?"

Berengar smiled before finishing off the beer in his mug; he only began to answer after Ludwig had refilled it.

"The Byzantine armor."

Hearing what Berengar was asking about, Ludwig scratched his beard slightly before answering to his best ability.

"It is going as planned, luckily the new industrial district in Innsbruck is operating at full capacity, so they have been able to alleviate the pressure on our shoulders. As per usual, the Byzantine armor will be readily available when the time for shipment has arrived. Why are you planning a visit to the Empire?"

After hearing Ludwig's question, Berengar was shocked; he indeed planned to visit the Empire, but only after he had won his war and made himself Duke, he was still a long way away from achieving such things. Thus merely shook his head as he responded to Ludwig's inquiry.

"Not at the moment, if I am to travel to the Empire, I need more prestige, or else they will try to walk all over me. One day though, I would like to see the city of Constantinople for myself."

Ludwig nodded his head in agreement; he too longed to city the legendary city for himself. However, he did not have the gall to ask Berengar to take him along for the journey when he finally went. Thus he merely toasted Berengar with his mug.

"To your future success, may those imperial bastards bow before your prestige!"

Hearing such a bold toast, Berengar merely chuckled before drinking the remainder of the contents in his mug. Afterward, he began to ask Ludwig about various questions; the two men talked for some time before Berengar bade farewell and returned to the Castle.

After entering the Castle, he was immediately notified by one of his servants that Conrad had called for a meeting in his study, and thus Berengar quickly strode towards it. When he opened the door, he saw the little brat sitting in his chair, surrounded by the other Counts, who gazed at him with worried expressions on their faces.

Berengar's face twitched when he saw the boy in his chair, this was Berengar's personal study, and the brat treated it as if it had belonged to him. However, for now, Berengar had to suppress his ire and put on a respectful facade. As such, he bowed gracefully before greeting Conrad.

"Your Grace, I came as soon as I heard. What is so important that you must call a meeting at such an hour?"

Conrad had a smirk on his face as he began to interrogate Berengar about his plans for reconquest.

"Count Berengar, exactly how long will it take you to raise an army to recapture my lands?"

Berengar could tell this little brat was trying to push him into the war ahead of schedule. Clearly, The boy was impatient and did not want to sit around in Kufstein for long. However, Berengar had no plans to march until his armies were powerful enough to sweep through the Bavarian forces, and as such, he merely smiled before giving the number he had in mind.

"Three more months and a sufficient number of men should be finished with their training. By then, we can march on Salzburg, where we will liberate it

from the Bavarians. The plan from there is to seize the County of K?rnten before marching on Upper and Lower Austria."

A frown immediately appeared on Conrad's face as he heard these words; he did not desire to stay in Kufstein for three whole months doing nothing but waiting for troops to be raised. As such, he asked the question on his mind.

"How many men do you have available at the moment?"

Berengar struggled to maintain his respectful facade as he answered the boy's inquiry.

"Aside from the men necessary to maintain the garrisons in Tyrol, I can field at most 20,000 men at the moment."

Before Berengar could protest what he knew that Conrad was thinking, the boy interrupted him by asking Count Otto the same question.

"How many men do you have available at the moment Count Otto?"

Count Otto frowned while being asked such a question. However, he eventually answered.

"Roughly half that amount"

Berengar not only had one of the largest counties in all of Austria, primarily after he conquered Trent and incorporated it into his lands but also due to his growing mechanized agriculture, he could field significantly more troops than others of the same level of status. As for the Count of Vorarlberg had the lowest number of troops, as his County was much smaller than the regions held by the other two men. Conrad quickly asked the same question to which he responded.

"I can spare at most 5,000 men."

Conrad then looked at Berengar with an impatient expression on his face as he began to question Berengar's determination.

"You are telling me, a seasoned and heralded commander like yourself will be incapable of taking Austria with 35,000 men? Maybe I need to name a more experienced battlefield commander, like Count Otto as my Regent after all."

Hearing this, Berengar began to frown; this boy was starting to push his limits. Nevertheless, he kept his wits about him and thoroughly lectured the boy who would be Duke about the reality of warfare.

"Your Grace, it is a possibility to win with such a small amount of troops. However, the Bavarians will be back with a vengeance, and we will have suffered substantial losses. In my honest opinion, we should wait three months for my next division to be properly trained and outfitted before we begin our campaign. With 45,000 - 50,000 men in total, we will stand a much better chance of winning this war with minimal casualties. I urge you to be patient; wars are not won overnight!"

The other counts quickly nodded in agreement to Berengar's terms and attempted to convince the boy to listen to reason; Otto was the first to speak on Berengar's behalf.

"Your Grace, listen to Berengar's council; he knows what he is talking about."

After hearing Berengar's reasoning and Otto's support, Conrad knew he was not going to get his wish, and as such, exhaled deeply in disappointment before accepting the terms.

"Three months! Not a moment longer! As soon as your troops are ready, I want them deployed!"

Berengar smiled and nodded as he finally convinced Conrad to go with his plan. Conrad's following words brought an even greater smile to the young Count's lips.

"With this understanding, I hereby name you Berengar, Count of Tyrol as my Regent, until the day I come of age!"

With this, Berengar had finally gotten what he wished for, and Conrad had unwittingly sealed his fate. It would not be long before Berengar and his

armies marched to war, and when they did, the Bavarians would learn first hand the might of steel and shot!

Chapter 193: You Will Be Home Before the Leaves Fall From the Trees

Three months passed as quickly as they came, and Berengar was ready to march to war. During this time, Adela returned to Steiermark with her father, where Otto defended his borders. Albeit the two Counts came to an agreement and Berengar began to support Otto with food aid at a discounted price. After all, Otto's people were suffering from the constant raids on their lands, and Berengar could alleviate that suffering for a fee.

It had been over a year since Berengar was first reincarnated into this world, and he had already accomplished a great deal during this time. As for what Berengar was currently occupied with, at the moment, he was once more outfitted for war, standing Before Linde, who was holding onto their infant child, the baby boy was growing by the day. Henrietta was also gathered to send her brother off to war.

During this time, Berengar had become accustomed to losing his vision in his dominant eye and was now ready to fight once more, albeit he would no longer be the commander once he was brazenly fighting on the front lines. However, at least he would still be on the battlefield commanding his troops.

Linde had a worried expression on her face, the last time Berengar had left for war; he had lost an eye and nearly his life; now he was going to face such danger again. It greatly pained her to see her lover risk his life on the battlefield. As such, she kissed Berengar passionately before muttering under her breath.

"I will pray for you!"

Berengar chuckled at this remark. Linde was never an exceptionally religious woman, but for him, she was willing to pray to God for his safe return; he found this to be cute. As for Henrietta, she hugged her big brother before making him promise her a solemn vow.

"Come back in one piece this time!"

Berengar laughed at the girl's sheepish expression before he tussled her silky golden hair; after doing so, he agreed to her conditions.

"I promise, I will be back safe and sound!"

After saying such a thing, he departed from his home. It had been too long since he had smelled the gunpowder in the air, and now he was eager to face the enemy who had dared to intrude upon his lands.

As for Conrad, he had stayed behind in Kufstein, ever under the watchful eye of Linde and Berengar's house guard. With Berengar's departure, Conrad would be guarded closely to make sure he didn't try anything malicious.

Berengar mounted his new steed, the brave beast was opposite in appearance of his old horse Erwin, as its coat and mane were entirely white. Though this mighty destrier had been purchased at a great sum, Berengar still profoundly lamented the loss of his old Warhorse and vowed never again to make such a costly mistake.

After mounting the bold white stallion, which was clad in its own set of Blackend steel plate barding, with magnificent brass trimming, Berengar rode off out of the Castle and regrouped with his army in the streets.

This was the last of his forces to rendezvous with Eckhard and the rest of his army in Kitzbühel. Once the army was on the march, it would split into two, with the more significant portion of the military staying with Berengar as he marched on Salzburg.

As for the smaller portion, they would regroup with Count Otto's forces in Steiermark before marching on Kärnten. Berengar sat at the head of the army, with his burgonet over his head, marching amid summer; he began to hum along to the marching song that the military behind him was singing.

After a few hours, the army reached the eastern border of Kitzbühel, where they proceeded to get settled into the tents surrounding the border fortress. Berengar quickly got off his mount and approached Eckhard, who had long since defended the Northeast border from the invading Bavarians. Still, he was left in control of the region to ensure no other army came to attack.

Seeing his Lord and Commander approach him, Eckhard quickly pounded his chest in a salute before addressing his old friend, that he had not seen for some time.

"Your excellency!"

Berengar chuckled when he saw Eckhard being serious and slapped the man's backplate with his leather-covered palm.

"It is good to see you, Eckhard; it has been quite a while!"

Eckhard smiled, seeing that Berengar was back to his old self, even after such a grievous injury. Thus he responded to Berengars informal approach in an equally laid-back manner.

"It is just a damn shame we will be leaving each other's company so shortly after reuniting."

A wide grin spread across Berengar's face as he looked off into the distance with his good eye. He was gazing towards the direction of Vienna, by re-conquering the capital of the Duchy he would soon establish himself and his Dynasty as the main power of Austria.

"Worry not, Eckhard, if we do our jobs right, this war will end soon enough."

After reuniting with his Field Marshal, and his other General Arnulf; Berengar had opted to gather his high-ranking officers on a hill in front of the Borderfort that his army was occupying, there was not enough space for the total amount of his troops to stay within the Fort's walls, so many of them were gathered in tents outside of the fortress.

As the high-ranking officers gathered Around Berengar, he quickly addressed them, as he tried to encourage them with a speech fit for the situation.

"It has been a while since we last marched to war, and though many of you have been defending our borders, others have been enjoying the stability that we have brought to our lands. However, as you all know, the price of freedom is paid with the blood and bodies of those willing to defend it.

Suppose we wish to continue our existence as the overlords of our region without interference from a foreign power. In that case, we must fight, not for ourselves or our families but all of Austria! For though we are all Tyroleans, we are, more importantly, Austrians! Our brothers and sisters in the other regions have bled and starved while we have hidden behind our borders allowing it to happen!

Now our actions were not without good reason, as we needed time to build up an army large and powerful enough to defeat the enemy, or else we would end up just like our neighbors. Yet that does not forgive the fact that that we have chosen to hide in our well-fortified mountainous terrain.

Yet no longer! Tomorrow we march to war to liberate Austria from the occupation of our enemies! The Bavarians seek to press claim over us all and rule us under their rules and their customs! I reject it, for Austria shall forever remain in the hands of the Austrians! I promise you, if you all do your part in this upcoming conflict you will be home before the leaves fall from the trees! God with us!

Right before Berengar had finished the last part of his speech, he drew his sword and pointed it northward into the night sky before shouting the battle cry that his armies had become renowned for. The moment he did so, the officers who had gathered to witness his word all withdrew their swords and pointed them into the sky before also screaming the Tyrolean battle cry.

"God with us!"

After chanting those words a few more times, Berengar finally silenced the crowd and addressed his officers.

"Now, go rest, for tomorrow we march to war!"

After hearing Berengar's orders, the high-ranking officers all began to head towards their quarters, where they all rested for the night. Berengar, on the other hand, had a private drink with Eckhard; he would finally reveal his schemes to become Duke to his most trusted General.

Eckhard knew something was suspicious from the start; after hearing that Conrad was saved by Berengar and brought to Kufstein for safety, he knew Berengar was plotting something serious; though he did not know what.

Berengar brought two mugs of beer over to the table where Eckhard was sitting hat before he sat down. After doing so, he handed a mug to Eckhard and began to drink from his own. It was only after the two had tasted the beer that Berengar began to address Eckhard with a grave expression.

"I will be Duke of Austria soon enough."

Eckhard merely laughed as he heard these words; Berengar's ambitions were never satisfied; as such, he began to ask Berengar what his plan was.

"How do you plan to do that? Last I checked, Conrad was the Duke..."

Berengar was utterly frank with Eckhard, and as such, he told the truth.

"After I have won that boy's wars for him, I will continue to be his Regent; during this time, he will be slowly poisoned until the point of severe illness, it may be years, but before that boy turns sixteen, he will croak. Leaving me as Regent in a position to sweep in and usurp his title."

Eckhard gazed at Berengar with a shocked expression on his face. Before leaning in and whispering to him

"You are going to poison a child?"

Berengar merely took a drink from his mug before answering Eckhard's question.

"It is either that or I will be forced to start a civil war."

Eckhard looked at Berengar with a sense of disdain before asking Berengar another question.

"You want to be Duke so badly that you would kill an innocent child?"

Berengar shook his head and looked sternly at Eckhard before he began to lecture him.

"The boy covets my fiancée; the moment he gains any real authority by becoming a Duke, he will demand I hand her over to him; by that point, Adela will be my wife, and I will refuse to do so. He will try to have me killed for resisting his orders, and I will raise an army to fight him."

Eckhard could not believe Berengar was willing to throw the Duchy into another Chaotic war all for a woman; as such, he tried to reason with Berengar since this was the justification Berengar had used for his actions, Eckhard would be sure to offer an alternative solution.

"You could just give the girl over to the boy; after all, you already have Linde, just marry her and legitimize your child!"

Berengar shook his head while taking another sip; after doing so, Eckhard grew furious and pounded his fist on the table before screaming at Berengar.

"Give me one good reason not to!"

Berengar glared at the man fiercely before answering him

"Because I love her!"

hearing this, Eckhard scoffed; seeing that the man was displeased with his plans, Berengar decided to pose a philosophical question.

"Eckhard, with all your infinite wisdom, explain to me why it is more righteous to have thousands of men die on the battlefield than it is to poison a single child?"

With those words, Eckhard stared at Berengar with disbelief. He honestly did not know how to answer that question. Berengar decided to add salt to the wound as he further pressed Eckhard, he pointed to the door while doing so.

"Why do the lives of those men not matter as much as Conrad's? Whether it is to secure Adela's hand in marriage or fulfill my great ambitions, it truly does not matter. If I can spare the life of a single one of my soldiers by poisoning Conrad, then I will do it! You would do best to remember where your loyalties lie. It is not just to me, but the men, women, and children beneath my rule,

and if I can spare them the pain of war by engaging in a bit of evil, then I will gladly do so."

Eckhard drained the mug of beer down his gullet before pouring another one, where he proceeded to consume its contents rapidly. It was only after he had chugged three beers and wiped the foam from his beard that he decided to say his final thoughts on the matter.

"You are right! I am sorry, I find it a bit cruel to poison a child, but you are right, as always. Even if you were willing to give up on Adela, put aside your ambitions, by allowing Conrad to be Duke that would only bring disaster to our lands, that boy is not fit to rule our people, but you are!"

Hearing Eckhard finally agreed to his plans, Berengar smiled and patted him on the back.

"Go get some rest, old friend; we will be marching to war at dawn."

With that said, Eckhard smiled before departing, leaving Berengar by his lonesome. It was only after Eckhard was long gone that Berengar began to think about the actions he would have to take before reaching the heights of his ambition. In doing so, his lips turned into a sinister smile before voicing his thoughts aloud.

"For the path that I walk upon, poisoning a child is but a drop in the well. Oh, my dear friend Eckhard, I am destined to do far worse in the future. Yet, in the end, by doing so, I shall establish global hegemony for my Dynasty!"

Chapter 194: Lightning War

The following day Berengar and his armies packed up their supplies and began to march, an army of 30,000 men, comprised of three divisions of ten thousand men each. Was fielded to fight this campaign that Berengar had decided to name the Lightning War. The Divisions were split into four brigades in total, two infantry, one cavalry, and one artillery.

The Artillery Brigades contained roughly 3,000 - 4,000 men in and total and up to 70 field guns in each. The amount of explosive firepower that a single Artillery Brigade wielded was in itself enough to bring down any armed force

that dared to get in its path. Especially when complemented by the Infantry Brigades.

As for the Infantry Brigades, they held 3,000 - 5,000 men in each brigade, and these units consisted of various units, ranging from Line Infantry, Grenadiers, Jaegers, and even Light Infantry. Obviously, there were other units within, like Medics and Sappers. It was a well-oiled machine designed with a single purpose, absolute annihilation of the enemy.

The Cavalry brigades, on the other hand, were much smaller in size. They were filled with 2,000 men and their horses per brigade. As for the units within these Brigades, there were also split into different groups, such as Cuirassiers, Demi-Lancers, and Hussars. There were also units of Dragoons and Mounted Infantry, but they were smaller in number, as their purpose was more specialized.

The expense that Berengar had to pay to not only train these troops but maintain them was significant. If one counted the sheer cost he paid to acquire the horses to ride; it was enough to bankrupt most Counties in the European world. However, Berengar was very wealthy after the monumental success of his diverse economy and could afford to bear such an expense.

This massive force was followed by the medieval army of the County of Vorarlberg, who were all completely shocked by the size of Berengar's army, and the equipment they used; there was likely no other army in the world as grand as his. They felt inadequate when they gazed upon the blackened steel plate and extravagant clothing beneath it that the Tyrolean forces wielded.

The plan was for two divisions to follow Berengar to Salzburg, where he would meet the Bavarians in the field and retake the castles and cities they had seized. With such a large force that contained an absurd degree of firepower. Berengar could easily swamp the entire County within a matter of weeks, at most a month.

The other army would be led by Eckhard and Count Audegar and would consist of one of Berengar's divisions, supported by the 5,000 men of Audegar's military. They would attack the County of Kärnten, where Count Otto and his 10,00 men would reinforce them. They would launch an attack

from both sides of the County and meet in the middle after dispelling the Bavarians from the region.

After both regions were secured, Berengar would march his army on Lower Austria and Vienna, and Eckhard and his allies would march on upper Austria. From there, any Bavarians who remained in the other counties would be quickly defeated, thus restoring Austrian control over their territory.

This was the invasion plan, and Berengar felt he had enough men and firepower to complete it. Thus he met up with Eckhard and Audegar at a crossroads which would take them in a separate direction. The three men sat on horseback as Berengar said his farewells.

"The next time I see the two of you, I will have taken Vienna! I look forward to the day we can all meet again!"

Eckhard nodded at Berengar before saluting one last time.

"Your Excellency, I will do as you have instructed to the best of my abilities!"

Berengar nodded with a smile on his face before responding to Eckhard's claims.

"I am sure that you will not disappoint me. Until we meet again, Ser Eckhard, Count Audegar."

After saying such a thing, Berengar and Eckhard's forces separated. Where Berengar slowly made his way to the County of Salzburg. By the time he arrived in the region, he had noticed that the villages that he passed by had all been looted, many of them were abandoned entirely.

The devastation brought to the Austrian lands was horrifying, bodies of men, women, and children were hewn about, and many of the women had appeared to have been thoroughly used by the men of the Bavarian armies before their deaths.

Berengar and his army eventually made their way through the border town and towards the first Castle on their path, which was supposed to protect the villagers; it was currently undergoing a siege by the Bavarian Armies, who had

not yet noticed Berengar and his own army's approach. As such, Berengar instantly gave an order to his army.

"Get into formation, and ready the cannons to fire! Infantry, prepare your muskets, cavalry, be on alert!"

Berengar had two divisions under his command; he currently had 140 12 lb field cannons in his ranks which were rapidly put into position and loaded. Before long, tens of thousands of infantry loaded their rifled muskets and formed ranks.

By the time they were entirely in formation, the Bavarians had just noticed their approach and began to panic; such a large army had crossed the Tyrolean border and encountered them during a siege, it was as if they come across a poisonous snake as they were crapping in the woods.

They had no idea how to react to the situation before them. Still, seeing the army hundreds of meters away, with over a hundred cannons being rapidly loaded, many of the men instantly began praying to God for their salvation.

These prayers were cut short as the thundering echo of 140 cannons firing at once filled the air while the shells fell from the sky and pounded the besieging army. The massive ranks of line infantry and grenadiers advanced towards their effective range so that they too could batter the enemy, while the jaegers fired from a distance of roughly eight hundred meters.

Thousands of besieging Bavarians were shredded by the explosive blasts and shrapnel of the cannon fire, only for the survivors to be mercilessly gunned down at a distance by the muskets. This besieging army was not large and held only about 5,000 men in total; it did not take more than a few cannon and musket volleys to mercilessly tear the siege camp and its forces apart instantly.

Limbs were scattered across the ground, and blood pooled in the grass as the defenders of the Castle gazed on with horror at the scene that had just transpired. Such overwhelming power was inconceivable, and Berengar did not even need to unleash his cavalry.

The Lord of the Castle sat atop his ramparts looking at the simple yet dignified banners of the von Kufstein family and thanked God for his salvation; he was in a crisis having no idea how he would be able to defend his territory against the besiegers effectively. Yet, in his hour of need, the Tyroleans finally arrived from beyond the border and liberated him and his people from the injustice of the Bavarian occupation of Salzburg.

There were still plenty of regions within Salzburg that were holding out, hoping for a savior; the same could be said across all of Austria; though it had been months since the Bavarians invaded, they could not bring down the enemy's walls as quickly as Berengar could. Thus they were forced to besiege every Castle and City slowly. The Bavarian invasion of Austria was a prolonged process that was intended to take months, if not years, to complete.

Now that Berengar had arrived with 140 cannons, he would be able to bring down a city's walls within a day, it was an army the likes the world had never seen before, and Berengar had deliberately waited until he had three divisions before marching to war because he wanted his campaign to be another overwhelming victory.

With the power in his hands, a mere Duke would not be capable of defeating him in battle. To counteract Berengar's hundreds of cannons and thousands of infantry equipped with mostly rifled muskets, there would need to be an army 2-3 times the size of his own, and only a Kingdom could muster such a force.

After defeating the besieging army of 5,000 men as easily as cutting through the grass, Berengar did not bother approaching the Castle's gates; many more battles like this needed to be fought, and as such, he quickly gave another order to his troops.

"Regroup, and prepare to march!"

After spending a considerable amount of time getting back into marching formation, the army once more began to set out on its destination; they intended to fight their way until they had liberated the Capital of Salzburg, which was currently under siege, Wolfgang's brother valiantly defended the region, while the man who is supposed to be the current Count of the area hid within his wife's family's estate.

As such, Berengar would encounter many minor skirmishes like this on his way to liberate the capital. They all ended just as quickly and in just as brutal of a fashion. Wherever his army marched, they reaped thousands of Bavarians lives. Any fool who placed themselves in between him, and the main Bavarian army in the County of Salzburg, would be rapidly gunned down by Berengar's troops.

This Lightning War or Blitzkrieg as Berengar had dubbed it, named after the German strategy in the early days of WWII from his past life, was highly influential in cutting off the enemy; not only did Berengar practice this tactic in Salzburg, but Eckhard also similarly commanded his armies in K?rnten.

Berengar was not exaggerating in the slightest when he stated in his speech that he and his men would be home before the leaves fell from the trees. Though it was a reference to Kaiser Wilhelm II's speech to his troops before the start of the Great War in his previous life, he entirely meant those words and knew he was fully capable of making them a reality. As such, the war waged on, and Berengar would soon be the power behind the Austrian throne.

Chapter 195: The Hunter has Become the Hunted

The Tyrolean army was on the march, Berengar leading his two divisions in the fields of Salzburg was currently at the head of his majestic army. Every soldier who served alongside him was clad in blackened steel plate armor, with the black, gold, and white attire beneath it.? Some wore half-plate, while others were equipped with the three-quarter plate armor.

The Non-commissioned and commissioned officers stood out from the regular enlisted personnel. Their armor was trimmed with brass to show off their prestige and to indicate to the individual troops who were leading their units. Though they might become greater targets for the enemy, with the protection their armor provided them, they seldom had to fear a deathly blow at range.

At the moment, Berengar and his forces had set up an encampment in the field. Berengar spoke to General Arnulf and several of his high-ranking officers about the current situation in the County of Salzburg. Arnulf was the first to bring new information to light.

"Our scouts have reported that the Bavarians have begun to flee from their posts. We are not exactly sure of the reasoning, but they may have figured out our advantage in this conflict and are attempting to mitigate casualties.? In their hasty retreat, they have begun to torch every village they come across. They massacre the people, burn the fields, and slaughter the livestock. The Bavarians are determined to halt our advance by any means necessary!"

Berengar immediately frowned when he heard this report; this was scorched earth tactics, a strategy which Berengar personally despised. The principle was simple, as the Bavarians withdrew, they would destroy any possible resource that Berengar and his forces could take advantage of, forcing the Tyrolean army to slow down their advance. An army that could not eat could not function.

Luckily Berengar had anticipated this use of tactics and had long-established supply Caravans to follow his army in the rear. His forces protected these caravans and would continuously bring much-needed resources such as food,

water, and munitions from Tyrol to the front lines. Logistics are the key to victory, and Berengar had no plans of advancing beyond his means of resupply.

After hearing this report, he gave a command to his officers.

"Make sure supplies are being properly rationed; I don't want to see any waste of the products that the men consume. As for our advancement into Salzburg, we can only slow down and wait for the supply caravans to catch up. The Jagers are skilled in wilderness knowledge, set them to the task of foraging and hunting any food that they can acquire!"

Hearing the Count's orders, the officers quickly pounded their breastplates in salute before responding.

"Yes, sir!"

After saying that, they were set to the task, and the army began to fulfill his orders. As for Berengar, he stayed at his post with Arnulf by his side; the man had been a valuable ally and formidable General during the past and was once more alongside him. Berengar valued his advice and quickly began to ask the man his opinions on what the Bavarians were planning.

"Tell me, General, do you think the Bavarians are plotting an ambush for us?"

Arnulf nodded his head before expressing his opinion.

"It is what I would do. By now, the Bavarians should realize that they are facing overwhelming firepower. Thus they don't stand a chance fighting against us in an open field or within a siege. The best they can do is engage in skirmishing tactics to try to prevent our advance long enough for them to muster the forces necessary to overwhelm our armies with sheer numbers."

Berengar's face contorted into a worried expression as he began to anticipate the Bavarian's next move.

"Halt our advance, and make sure our supply lines are properly protected. I fear they will try to cut us off from our logistical network; in doing so, they will attempt to wear us down with attrition; I will not have my men starving in the field while cut off from support from the homeland. It is better to move with caution than to walk into a trap."

Arnulf nodded in approval with this line of thinking and began to make his suggestions.

"We should split off some Grenadier units and set them to the task of searching for and destroying the enemy skirmishers and their encampments. I

find it hard to believe the Bavarians are fleeing from the region entirely; they are probably waiting in ambush for our forces."

Berengar nodded in agreement before adding to the suggestion.

"I want the Dragoons and Mounted Infantry tasked with protecting the supply caravans; they should have more than enough firepower to deter any potential ambush while still maintaining the mobility necessary to keep up with the caravans."

Arnulf quickly made a mental note of the orders he had received; he would soon relay these tasks to the necessary units. The Tyrolean army was powerful primarily because of its superior training and equipment but also the diversity of the troops they employed.

With the specialized training that specific units underwent, they could perform these deeds that they would soon be commanded to fulfill with excellent efficiency. Thus Berengar indeed did not have to be too worried about what dangers might approach them in this ongoing conflict with the Bavarians.

After giving Arnulf his orders, Berengar parted ways with Arnulf for the night and immediately proceeded to his tent, where he slept peacefully. As for the units and their new orders, they quickly began to deploy to fulfill them.

During the middle of the night, the Grenadiers tasked with search and destroyed missions advanced beyond the primary host, determined to find any Bavarian forces waiting for them. In doing so, a battalion was sent out in total and split into six individual companies where they canvassed the territory ahead of them.

If one of the companies were to make contact with the enemy ambushers, the other companies would be alerted by the sound of gunfire and advance upon the position, encircling the enemy ambushers and taking their lives.

At the moment, one company of grenadiers had made the first contact with the enemy; as such, they quietly hit in the tree line as they pulled back the hammers of their flintlocks. The Bavarians had not yet noticed that the Grenadiers were in range, and they were sitting by a fire enjoying themselves.

They had seen that the Tyrolean army had halted their advance, and so they were waiting patiently in the perfect position for an ambush. After the muskets were loaded and aimed at a distance of a hundred yards, The Captain in charge of the company gave his order loud enough for the men nearby to hear.

"Fire!"

immediately the thunder of a hundred and twenty muskets went off, echoing in the distance. The moment they did so, the lead projectiles fired from their muzzles found their way into the enemy ranks. Torsos were shredding, with gaping holes the size of golf balls appearing through the enemy's breastplates.

The less fortunate victims had their limbs severed by the rounds and were thrashing about on the ground screaming in agony. The flash of the fired volley instantly lit up the area, and the surviving members of the ambushing troop realized they were surrounded.

Several dozen Bavarian men at arms were killed on the spot, and even more, were wounded. Yet when compared to the size of the ambushing troop, this was not much. However, what followed instantly sent fear down the spines of the Bavarian skirmishers as they heard a battle cry filled the air around them as if over a thousand voices screamed the powerful words in unison.

"God with us!"

Shortly afterward, the Tyrolean grenadiers converged on the enemy position.

They were alerted by the sounds of gunfire and the sight of the muzzle flashes. Where they quickly formed ranks and fired off their shots at the Bavarian ambushers.

Gunfire echoed in the air, and the advancing Bavarian skirmishers were rapidly cut down as they attempted to approach the lines of grenadiers. The scene quickly turned chaotic as more men had their lives snuffed out by a single minie ball projectile piercing through their chests. Others gurgled on their own blood for a period of time before finally leaving this world.

Before the Bavarians even got a chance to unleash their swords upon the Tyrolean forces, steel balls were lit and thrown into the ranks of the enemy, where they quickly exploded, sending shrapnel and body parts flying through the air.

Though the Grenadiers were outnumbered, the Bavarians began to panic, trying to find a way to break out of the encirclement. However, all they managed to do was run into a wall of bayonets that were ready to engage in melee combat. The long triangular bayonets were thrust into the gaps of the men at arms armor, creating devastating wounds, which would be very difficult to patch up assuming they were able to survive the onslaught.

Eventually, the Bavarians finally managed to muster a resistance and clashed headfirst with the grenadiers who had encircled them. Despite this courageous last stand, the damage had already been dealt to the Bavarian skirmisher's ranks, and they found themselves quickly being pushed back. By

now, a sea of corpses and blood had filled the floor, and the Tyrolean Grenadiers were advancing over the bodies and into the fray.

With each thrust of the bayonet, a Bavarian was either wounded or killed. Slowly but surely, the Bavarian Ambushers had dwindled to a few hundred men whose backs were pressed against each other as over a thousand bayonets pierced at them from all sides. Before long, the surviving Bavarians cast their weapons aside and shouted at the top of their lungs.

"Yield! I yield!"

With a declaration of surrender, the Tyrolean grenadiers ceased their violence and quickly rounded up the survivors for interrogation. With a little over a hundred captives, they could easily find out the whereabouts of the remaining ambushes and potentially the plans that the Bavarian army was resorting to.

Thus the Tyrolean forces marched their prisoners back to the Tyrolean encampment, where they would be interrogated for every piece of information that they harbored in their minds.

While Berengar slept, his grenadiers had mercilessly hunted down the first of the Bavarian Ambushes set in place and captured a few hundred prisoners whose intelligence would be critical in the fight ahead. As such, the tactics he

had put in place earlier that day had already born fruit, and Berengar would have a much swifter conquest of Salzburg than he had initially estimated.

Chapter 196: Battle in K?rnten

While Berengar and his forces were bogged down and slowly advancing through Salzburg due to the tactics employed by the Bavarians, Eckhard had a much easier time fighting the enemy, for they had not resorted to such underhanded tactics to defeat him. Thus at the moment, he was currently engaged in a field battle with the enemy.

Eckhard had deployed Audegar's forces to protect the flanks of his infantry while they marched in their lines into engagement distance. As for his cavalry, they were waiting on standby for their orders to charge.

At the moment, Eckhard's 70 field guns were in position and had just begun their bombardment upon the enemy army, which was between 5,000 - 7,000 men strong. As the cannons echoed into the air and the explosive shells repeatedly pounded the enemy lines, the Bavarians did not panic. Instead, they marched faithfully into the fire and towards the Tyrolean ranks.

As for Eckhard, he was at the front lines, with his sword in hand, which was also based upon the 1877 British Heavy Cavalry sword; it had become the

basis for all swords wielded in the Tyrolean army. The blade balanced perfectly in his hands as he continued to march orderly by his troops.

Arrows and bolts fell upon the marching soldiers in volleys, but the Tyroleans did not fear their sting, for their armor would protect their vitals. Because of how resilient their defenses were, they were undeterred by the minor flesh wounds which accumulated on their bodies as they continued to march at an orderly pace.

Only when the enemy was at a distance of roughly three hundred yards did Eckhard give his command to his line of infantry with the authoritative voice of a veteran Field Marshal Eckhard raised his sword and pointed it at the enemy as he bellowed for all his men to hear.

"Present Arms!"

The moment he did so, the soldiers who held their loaded rifled muskets lowered the weapons into a position where Eckhard once more gave a command. The front rank instantly knelt while the rear column pointed their rifled muskets above their heads.

"Take Aim!"

After doing so, his words were relayed to the thousands of infantry among his ranks by the various officers and NCOs within earshot. When he finally felt that the enemy was within an acceptable range, he gave the final command.

"Fire!"

In doing so, thousands of muskets went off in unison, at the distance of three hundred yards. Where they spit lead out of their flashing muzzles, accompanied by the roar of gunfire, which instantly echoed across the battlefield.

The moment the muskets went off, thousands of .58 caliber Minie ball projectiles went downrange. They crashed into their targets, shredding apart the steel body armor in which many of the enemy troops were equipped as if it were nothing more than wet toilet tissue.

Blood splattered, and bones splintered as the lead projectiles made their way past the enemy's defenses and into their flesh, often coming out the other side of the steel armor. Instantly thousands of men collapsed to the ground, either gravely wounded or dead upon impact.

The Bavarian vanguard was shattered in a moment, and the surviving veterans among their ranks began to panic. Yet this was not the end, as

another artillery barrage began to pound the Bavarian ranks while the Tyroleans reloaded their weapons.

As for the troops from Vorarlberg, they were stunned by the sight of such destruction. The might in which the Tyroleans possessed was unfathomable, and it was at this moment they remembered that this was merely a third of the forces that Berengar had under his command. Such an army was more than capable of sweeping across Austria and reclaiming the land themselves; they felt as if they were merely present to witness the carnage.

Blood-curdling screams filled the air alongside the thunder as the Tyrolean forces finished reloading before the same series of commands were ordered. However, at this point, the Bavarian commander could no longer withstand the sight of his troops routing and thus ordered his cavalry to charge.

The heavily armored knights of Bavaria, alongside mounted men at arms, rushed towards the Tyrolean infantry with anticipation; thus far, none of Berengar's armies had been defeated in combat, with the cavalry charge, they truly believed they could change the tide of this battle.

Eckhard immediately noticed the cavalry beginning their attack and gave another order to his soldiers, which was quickly relayed in fashion by the numerous officers and NCOs among their ranks.

"Square formation!"

Upon ordering this command, the soldiers in Eckhard's army quickly began to form ranks in the form of a hollow square. They did so in rapid speed, proving that they had drilled this formation, time and again throughout the months of their training, to such proficiency that they were capable of doing so under the pressure of pursuing cavalry.

After forming into squares, with their bayonets affixed, the Tyrolean infantry waited for the Cavalry approach until they were within 30 yards; only then would they fire for maximum damage. Despite the superior range of their rifled muskets over traditional smoothbore muskets, they still would be the most effective while firing by rank against the approaching cavalry at a close distance.

While the Tyroleans formed such ranks, the relatively undisciplined Vorarlberg infantry quickly fled the oncoming cavalry and ran behind the massive squares that had appeared on the battlefield. Confused by the strange formation, the Bavarians charged straight into the line of fire, where after reaching the thirty-yard range, the individual commanders in charge of each formation began to give orders to fire based upon the nearest rank.

The moment they did so, the destructive power of the .58 caliber lead projectiles in the form of Minie balls shredded through the steel plate armor and barding of the knights and their horses, instantly dropping the cavalry bold enough to attack. Some riders survived as their horses fell before them, yet the Tyroleans' disciplined ranks were unphased, never once breaking formation.

To break ranks was to face certain death; these were the words their drill instructors had beaten into their heads throughout the many months of training the men had undergone to be fully recognized as soldiers. As such, the Tyroleans stood in their ranks, reloading before firing on the next cavalry attempted Cavalry charge, which was met with equally disastrous results.

All the while, Eckhard was within the hollow area of the formation alongside several officers; as a man with a sword, his usefulness in this formation was nothing more than being a commanding voice. Thus he spat out commands as the cavalry continued to charge at the formation, hoping to break through with superior numbers.

"Left flank fire!"

"Right, flank fire!"

"Center column fire!"

The veteran field marshal continued to declare his orders. While the men beneath his command followed them to the letter; before long, the cavalry was eliminated, with those few surviving members having fled the scene during the second attack. They could not believe that their heavily armored knights were useless in the face of the absurd Tyrolean weapons.

Seeing their knights being broken, the Bavarian forces were filled with trepidation. Yet, their worries were far from resolved, as the artillery brigade continued to batter their ranks, no matter how far they fled. However, suddenly the artillery battery stopped, and for a brief moment, they felt reprieve. That is before they noticed the Tyrolean Cavalry dashing down the hillside and towards their broken ranks!

Berengar's rules were simple, so long as an enemy did not surrender, they were fair game and were to be given no quarter, even if they were running with their tail between their legs. Thus, the Tyrolean Cavalry, a mix of Cuirassiers, Demi-Lancers, and Hussars, rushed down the mountainside and into the routing enemies, showing no mercy to the fleeing Bavarians.

The Bavarian Commander, who had taken part in the initial Bavarian cavalry charge, lay on the ground, with his dead horse lying on top of him, slowly

crushing his internal organs. He bled from the mouth, yet this was not visible due to the helmet on his head obscuring such a scene.

The battle was over, and though Eckhard ordered his troops to keep their wits about him, he and members of his line infantry approached the body trapped beneath the horse and lifted the helm from his head, revealing a horrifically scarred appearance of a man who had seen many battles.

Eckhard gazed at the man with respect before asking him a question.

"Are you the Bavarian Commander?"

Struggling to breathe, the Bavarian commander coughed up blood before answering Eckhard

"Yes..."

Eckhard felt pity for the man and the situation he was in and, as such, decided to show mercy; thus, he asked the man the final question on his mind.

"Do you regret coming to Austria?"

The Bavarian Commander chuckled as he gurgled on his blood before spitting it out of his mouth and onto the ground.

"With every fiber of my being!"

with that said, Eckhard pulled out his pistol, cocked the hammer, and pulled the trigger, sending a musket ball into the commander's head, giving him a quick death. Afterward, he spoke the words on his mind aloud for all of his men to hear.

"May God have mercy on his soul..."

The first battle in K?rnten was an overwhelming Victory for the Tyroleans, and they had drastically cut down the numbers of the Bavarian forces within the region. It would appear that the war for K?rnten would be much smoother than the one in Salzburg.

Chapter 197: Crushing an Insurgency

During the past few days, Berengar's advance into Salzburg had been reduced. With the constant need to send out advanced parties on a series of search and destroy missions for enemy skirmishers, the Tyrolean host was forced to march through Salzburg at a slow but steady pace.

Because of this, Berengar had become impatient, and it was only due to the constant advice of Arnulf that he did not make a rash action like marching through Salzburg undeterred by the idea of ambush, which would surely result in more casualties than it was worth.

Thus at the moment, Berengar found himself within the encampment that his army had made in the field, with a significant degree of spare time. His army's hierarchy was so well implemented that he honestly did not have much to do on the campaign as Commander in Chief, as the officer class was more than capable of fulfilling their daily duties without his interference.

Berengar found himself whittling wood for entertainment, and as such, was in the middle of carving a wooden figure which greatly resembled that of his

lover Linde. Though his artistic skills were lacking, the crude figure displayed the woman's natural curves in great detail. It was not a bad piece of work, considering his relatively poor art skills.

It was at this moment that the flaps to his tent parted, and Arnulf forcefully entered, seeing that his Lord and Commander was in the process of making a wood statue of what appeared to be a full-figured woman, Arnulf wisely chose not to question it, and instead reported the news that he had received.

"Your excellency, I have a report to make."

Berengar did not bother placing down the wooden figure that he was still in the process of carving. Instead, he continued to do so while listening to Arnulf's words. As such, he nonchalantly approved Arnulf's request to inform him of the matters at hand.

"Go ahead..."

Seeing that Berengar was more interested in his sculpture than the important news he had to share, Arnulf quickly sighed before starting the report with a phrase that would be sure to grab Berengar's attention.

"We have gained some viable intelligence from the captives!"

Hearing this news, Berengar's ears perked up, and he immediately stopped his activity. Instead, he placed the half-finished wooden sculpture on the stand next to him and the knife with it before shifting his full attention to Arnulf, where he responded to this news with a great deal of curiosity.

"Go on..."

Seeing that Berengar's interest was fully captured, Arnulf smiled before fulfilling the rest of his report; as such, he placed the map in his hand down onto a nearby table in Berengar's tent and spread it out where it displayed several marks on specific positions in the nearby hills and forests.

"These are the locations of the enemy Ambushes within the nearby area; our scouts have determined the information to be accurate!"

Hearing this news, Berengar quickly got up from his seat, where he proceeded to the table where the map was displayed and carefully observed it, with a broad smile on his face. Now that he knew the enemy positions, he could easily bombard them with the overwhelming firepower of his 140 cannons.

After seeing this information, Berengar quickly gave his orders to Arnulf for the army to fulfill. He pointed at the different locations and ordered a bold attack on them.

"Move an artillery battalion to each of these positions, supported by a battalion of infantry. I want these damned skirmishers sufficiently bombarded before we surround them with our line infantry! Only after they have suffered the barrage of our shells will our infantry move in and mop up what remains of them!"

Hearing Berengar's orders, Arnulf quickly saluted the man by pounding his breastplate with his fist.

"Yes, Sir!"

Afterward, the General left the tent and quickly got the orders into action. Though Berengar wanted to participate in the operation, he was forced to stay behind with the primary host. As such, he sighed heavily before pouring himself a chalice of beer. Where he quickly drained its contents.

As for the operation itself, the Tyrolean forces who were ordered to partake in the attack quickly moved off to their positions; the amount of firepower Berengar had ordered to bring down upon the skirmishers was overkill. Yet, Berengar wanted to put the fear of God in the Bavarians, and what better way than to massacre their forces which lie in wait for his army.

As such, the locations that the skirmishers hid were quickly surrounded by Berengar's artillery and infantry. At all four areas, there were hundreds if not thousands of Bavarian ambushers gathered, hiding, and waiting for the main Tyrolean force to pass by so that they could converge on the enemy and surprise them with a rapid assault.

Unfortunately for the Bavarians, they had been betrayed by the captives, and thus without realizing it quickly came under the assault of artillery, whose

roars echoed in the air like the thunder of God. The explosive shells landed upon the position of the Bavarian skirmishers exploding upon impact and sending shrapnel throughout the air.

The 12 lb steel ball, which was utilized as the host of the explosive, contained enough shrapnel to gravely wound or even kill those unfortunate to be caught in its range. The shards of steel were flying out at such speed that they were fully capable of penetrating through the less solid armor like brigandine. As for the full plate armor, it was partially resistant to the shrapnel. However, the explosive blast itself was more than capable of killing the men caught within its lethal range.

Most of the men at arms of the Bavarian army were not fully equipped in plate armor, maybe a breastplate and a helmet, but there were plenty of gaps in their armor, and as such, the shrapnel easily pierced through those gaps and into the flesh of the men unfortunate enough to be hit by it.

The bombardment did not stop with a single volley. The men who had survived the initial onslaught only had roughly half a minute to get their thoughts in order before another volley was fired from the 18 field guns present at each location. Thunder echoed in the air, and what immediately followed was death and destruction.

The Bavarian men at arms wept and wailed as their comrades were blasted apart, and the artillery fire sufficiently injured them. Yet despite their attempts to rally forth and advance on their attackers, 18 shells repeatedly bombarded their location every 30 seconds like clockwork.

Corpses littered the forests and hills where the Bavarians had gathered, blood pooled into a small pond, and limbs were scattered across the area. The armor the Bavarians wore was scrapped and hewn across the land, along with the bodies that equipped it. Shields, swords, and spears were cast aside and mangled by the explosive blast of the 12-pound shells which bombarded the area.

It was as if death himself had descended on the land. Unfortunately, for those lucky enough to escape the bombardment, they quickly realized they were surrounded as they walked right into the musket fire of the Tyrolean forces.

Their brief moment of hope for survival was met with a lead projectile piercing through their breastplates and leaving a massive hole in their chests.

With the first wave of Bavarians utterly decimated by the artillery bombardment, and the second gunned down by the muskets, the Tyroleans rapidly reloaded their weapons as more men desperately tried to escape the encirclement.

However, their fates were sealed the moment their locations were revealed to the Tyroleans. Though the artillery bombardment continued to focus on the center of the encirclement, blasting apart those unfortunate enough to get caught within its shockwave. The majority of the Bavarians had now rushed out of the forests and hills they occupied and into the Tyrolean infantry, who were well prepared for their attacks.

In doing so, another volley was fired from the line infantry, which shredded the bodies of the men at arms, equipped chiefly with melee weapons, the few archers in their ranks who were still alive had opted to stay from afar launch their missiles into the Tyrolean forces. However, it was far less effective than they had imagined.

Only a tiny number of Tyroleans were killed and wounded by the arrows and bolts that fell in their direction. The rest unleashed their bayonets on the men at arms, who rushed to their positions in a desperate attempt to break through and flee the scene. Yet the Tyroleans were well prepared for such a reality, and thus the bayonets thrust into the gaps in the enemy's armor, piercing the limbs and bodies of the Bavarians and spilling their blood and guts onto the field.

This chaotic scene of absolute brutality showed itself throughout the four regions that harbored the Bavarian units. No man could escape the encirclement that the Tyroleans had captured them in. As for the Archers, they were quickly picked off by the Jaegers who stayed in the distance of over five hundred yards and expertly shot their foes with their hexagonal bullets, piercing through the brigandine and gambeson of the Bavarian archers and crossbowman.

With this assault, the Tyroleans had single-handedly brought down the threat that loomed over their heads for the past few days, one that had slowed their

advance. The course of the war for Salzburg had shifted in a matter of hours, and those who were fortunate enough to survive the carnage found themselves captured and interrogated for information.

With the insurgency crushed and his supply lines secured, Berengar could once more swiftly march onto Salzburg and meet the main Bavarian force preparing for his eventual arrival. The war for the County of Salzburg would be decided in a large-scale battle between roughly 20,000 Tyroleans and 5,000 Bavarians. Berengar was sure that the conflict would be a one-sided massacre.

Berengar's army was already of considerable size for the era, far more than a Count like himself should have. On the other hand, the Duke of Bavaria had paid a significant expense in raising such a large army of his own to march on Austria; it had a fair amount of levies, mercenaries, and men at arms among its ranks.

In total, the Bavarians had roughly 50,000 men in the region at the start of the conflict. With Berengar's and Eckhard's multiple victories, both at the border conflicts and in their ongoing invasions, the Bavarians now had had less than half of that remaining. Salzburg was considered an area of critical importance, and thus Duke Dietger had invested a fair amount of troops into the region; most of them were now either dead or captured.

Thus Battle of Salzburg was a fight that Berengar was greatly anticipating. For if he could display his overwhelming might in Salzburg, it might intimidate the future Bavarian armies to surrender at the sight of his forces. At least he hoped for such an outcome, though he recognized the possibility of such a thing was slim. Nevertheless, he intended to wipe the floor with the Bavarian army waiting for him at his destination.

Chapter 198: An Unexpected Welcome

With the skirmishers defeated, Berengar and his army were once more on the march, and it did not take them long to arrive at the city of Salzburg. However, when they arrived, they noticed that the Bavarian forces had already fled the scene, there was not a single sight of an ongoing siege effort, and the camp they left behind appeared as if it was quickly abandoned.

Berengar was quite disappointed at the sight, seeing how he wanted to crush the Bavarian army and spread fear among their ranks. However, it would appear that they were already greatly intimidated, and as such, had fled the region in its entirety, leaving it in the hands of the Austrians.

Though Berengar had wanted to pursue the retreating Bavarians, he also had business to discuss with Wolfgang's little brother. The man had valiantly defended Salzburg to the best of his efforts, and such Berengar approached the city gates with his guards. The banners of House Von Kufstein were flying behind him as he neared his destination.

When the city garrison noticed the massive army approach their gates, they were filled with trepidation; however, when they noticed the friendly banners that the approaching forces flew, their concern rapidly dwindled. As Berengar approached the gates, they were opened for his arrival, where he was greeted upon entry by the garrison's commander.

"Count Berengar, we were not expecting your arrival; I now understand why the Bavarians so rapidly abandoned the siege against such overwhelming numbers; it is no surprise that they would flee for their lives!"

Berengar smiled as he returned the compliment.

"Even if I were not on my way to aid you, I feel as if the brave men of Salzburg would be capable of repelling the enemy forces. Tell me, is it possible for me to meet with Adelbrand? I have much to discuss with the man."

Seeing that the Count of Tyrol was here on urgent business, the commander of the garrison dared not to hold him any longer and swiftly led Berengar to the Castle where he and his men entered its gates and proceeded to the great hall where Adelbrand, Wolfgang's little brother was currently acting as the authority within the region.

The man was not expecting Berengar's arrival. However, the moment he saw Berengar's charming appearance, he knew then and there why the Bavarians had so suddenly fled the area. How could such a small force compare to the might of Berengar and his Grand Tyrolean Army? As such, he extended his hand in greeting to Berengar as the two noblemen quickly approached one another.

"Count Berengar, I must say I am glad to see your appearance; I was beginning to fear you that you had decided to stay within your domain and wait out this war."

Berengar smiled as he heard such a remark and responded with a well-crafted statement.

"Unfortunately for the Bavarians, I decided to use my defenses to buy some time so that I could draft a large army, capable of fully annihilating the enemy and driving them out of our lands!"

Hearing this, Adelbrand immediately understood why Berengar had stayed out of the conflict for so many months; in the long term, such a strategy was bound to be successful, though he had no idea how vast of an Army Berengar had produced during this timeframe. As such, he immediately questioned Berengar on the size of his forces.

"Tell me, your excellency, just how large of an Army are we talking about here?"

Upon hearing this question, Berengar's lips curved into a smug grin where he proclaimed the size of his army with forced humility.

"Oh, not much, only 30,000 men."

Adelbrand nodded his head and responded to Berengar

"30,000 men, not much indeed... wait a second, you have thirty thousand soldiers!"

The young nobleman was quite shocked by this figure, such a large army was something a Duchy or even a Kingdom could draft, but he had never heard of a County having such a large army before. Maybe Lothar, but that was because he had spent a vast fortune acquiring many mercenaries. Upon seeing the man's expression Berengar of course, smiled at him and nodded his head before explaining his plan.

"I have sent 10,000 of them with my Field Marshal Eckhard into K?rnten where he alongside the Count of Vorarlberg will regroup with Count Otto of

Steiermark and forcefully seize the region. Afterward, we will march upon Upper and Lower Austria, where we will forcefully drive the remaining Bavarians out of our lands!"

Adelbrand could hardly believe Berengar's words, and then he came to a sudden realization which he was pretty fearful to ask. Nevertheless, he summoned his courage and spoke his mind.

"So that means you have 20,000 men sitting outside of my city right now?"

Berengar nodded his head in response to this question, and Adelbrand instantly felt his knees give out from under him; he slowly staggered over to his seat, where he sat down. He was incredibly thankful to God that Berengar was on his side, for he could never resist such a massive army.

Berengar, however, wanted to switch the conversation from talks about his battle plans to his long-term political goals and, as such, immediately altered the course of the conversation.

"So, Adelbrand, I have met your brother Wolfgang..."

Adelbrand instantly became enraged at the mention of his brother; his eyes contained the fury of his soul, and he began to grit his teeth in anger. As such, he quietly snarled before putting on a pleasant facade and asking Berengar about his encounter with the fool.

"Tell me, what is your opinion of my dearest brother?"

Seeing the forced expression on Adelbrand's face, Berengar struggled to contain his laughter; ultimately, he decided to stride back and forth in front of the man before telling him the truth.

"Honestly, he is an imbecile and a coward. I am much more impressed with your actions to defend your lands. Albeit leaving the people to their fate was not the best idea, but I know you could not contend with the Bavarians in the field, and thus your actions were the best of a bad situation. If you had met them in the field, you would have been soundly defeated, and Salzburg would have truly fallen to the enemy."

Seeing the pained expression on Berengar's face, Adelbrand instantly began to fear the results of his actions and thus asked Berengar about what had happened in the County while he and the other Lords of the realm hid behind their large stone walls.

"How bad is it?"

Berengar clicked his tongue before responding.

"Tsk... Most of the villages I have come across were massacred and burnt to the ground; not even the fields or livestock were spared..."

Adelbrand immediately felt great remorse for this fact and slammed his fist upon the armrest of his seat of power while clenching his teeth. He could not believe the Bavarians would be so cruel as to do such a thing. Thus he cried out at the top of his lungs!

"Those bastards!"

There was not much the man could do to calm his nerves, but releasing his pent-up anxiety through violent expression was the best he could manage. Seeing the man's twisted guise, Berengar knew that Adelbrand was a man who cared more about his land and the people in it than Wolfgang. Thus he was more likely to favor Berengar's reforms, and as such, Berengar wanted him as an ally. After coming to such a realization Berengar quickly proposed a plan that would benefit both of them.

"It is not your fault, the majority of your father's forces were lost in Passau, and your brother hid with the remainder of your elite units in Steiermark. You were left with a bunch of levies and greenhorns to protect your lands. You did your best to protect the cities and the fortresses of your territory. If anyone should be blamed for this disaster, it is your brother Wolfgang!"

Hearing Berengar shift the blame for the disaster that had befallen Salzburg onto his brother made Adelbrand more amicable to the words that came next; as such, he perked up his ears and listened to Berengar's plot.

"Go on..."

Berengar smiled wickedly when he realized that he had gained the man's attention, and thus he declared his intent.

"I have been named Regent of Duke Conrad of Austria, when we have retaken these lands, I will hold your older brother responsible for the events that have transpired here in Salzburg and will proclaim him as having failed to fulfill his vassal duties. I will strip him of his title and hand it over to you."

Adelbrand was shocked by this information, he was unaware that a government in exile had been set up in Kufstein, but hearing it brought him a sense of hope for the future. If he could succeed his late father, instead of his foolish and incompetent older brother, then maybe he could restore Salzburg to its former state. However, he knew such a thing would not come without a price, and thus he inquired about Berengar's intentions.

"And what pray tell, do you receive from such a thing?"

Berengar once more smiled as he heard the man take the bait and thus elaborated further on his plans for the future.

"Well, for starters, I get a competent subordinate, but more importantly, I will need your support at a later date. In the upcoming years, I have many reforms in mind to help establish Austria as a serious power, and with that in mind, I will need a man of your position to back them without question. So long as you support my future endeavors, the position of Count of Salzburg will be yours..."

Adelbrand thought deeply on the matter for a few moments; however, ultimately, he agreed to Berengar's request, and thus shook his hand, sealing the deal.

"Alright, I will agree to your conditions. Whatever you need from me, you shall have it!"

Hearing the man accept his terms caused Berengar to grin with anticipation; soon enough, Austria would be his, and he could then focus on unifying the German Empire! Everything was going according to his plans.

Chapter 199: Victory in K?rnten

After establishing an alliance with Adelbrand von Salzburg, Berengar pursued the remnants of the Bavarian forces that remained within the County of Salzburg. It took him a span of two weeks to thoroughly mop up the Bavarian remnants before he was complete with his conquest of the region.

During this time, Eckhard had engaged in various small-scale battles against the Bavarian forces, who until now had occupied the County of K?rnten. Much like in Salzburg, the Bavarians were quickly crushed; however, since Salzburg was cut off, they had nowhere to retreat. The Bavarian's only option was to hide behind the stone walls of the central city in the region, which was Klagenfurt.

Thus Eckhard had pursued them and was now in the position of setting up a siege camp outside of the city. Much like Berengar had done during the latter days of his campaign in Tyrol, a trench line that was supported with barbed wire and sandbags surrounded the encampment. The 70 cannons were placed within them and continued to batter several critical sections of the large stone walls.

One hundred forty shells pounded the stone walls of the city of Klagenfurt every minute, rapidly deteriorating their condition. At the current rate of fire, it would be less than 24 hours before the City walls crumbled, leaving the defending Bavarians open to the musket fire of the Tyrolean forces. Thus Eckhard was watching from afar as the stone walls were chipped at one shell at a time.

The Tyroleans stayed in the trenches, providing them with superior protection as they waited for the enemy walls to crumble down. Minute after minute, hour after hour, the repeated shelling of the city echoed in the distance, and the soldiers observed the sight of stones splitting apart from the walls in and outside of the city.

Eckhard was enjoying a glass of tea in his command tent when he finally heard the loud crumbling of the walls; as such, he quickly finished his serving before placing his helmet on his head and entering the fray. Outside of the city, with the walls having crumbled in six major sections on all sides of the town, the Tyroleans and their allies had marched over the trench line and into the battle as they began to chant their warcry which echoed through the air.

"God with us! God with us! God with us!"

The Tyrolean army shouted the phrase repeatedly as if they were in a mad trance; even their allies began to join in after a while. The sight of roughly 25,000 men outside the city walls, chanting the battle cry in unison frightened the Bavarian defenders to the core. However, they knew now that there was no retreat; they either defended the city or died in the process; those were their only two options.

As such, the battle had begun, and the Tyroleans unleashed musket fire on the defending lines that stood at the gaps in between the city walls. After a few volleys, the Tyroleans fixed their bayonets and allowed the Vorarlberg and Steiermark forces to charge into the fray. For now, the Tyroleans would have to focus on the defenders atop the ramparts.

The siege quickly became chaotic as the Austrian army forced their way into the gaps of the city walls and over the blood-stained corpses of the men who had fallen victim to the musket fire. Medieval forces clashed among each other as the Austrian soldiers valiantly fought to reclaim the city of Klagenfurt from the Bavarian occupiers.

Eckhard gazed from afar with his spyglass as he saw the heavily armored Steiermark infantry act as the vanguard, the courageous men pushed their way into the fray and began to use their blunt and bladed weapons to slash and hack at their foes in a gruesome display of violence.

Count Otto personally led the charge wielding a Warhammer in his hand, which he used to smash against the helmet of a nearby opponent; the deadly blow crunched the steel helmet beneath it and fractured the opponents' skull leaving him dead on the spot.

On the other side of the city was Count Audegar, who wielded a longsword. The two Counts valiantly led their forces into battle from opposite directions as they cut away at the Bavarian points dwelled within the city. Audegar parried and oncoming sword thrust before adeptly counter-attacking with a lunge through the opponent's mail aventail, piercing the man's throat and ending his life.

The chaotic scene of the ongoing siege was caught by Eckhard's spyglass, who grinned at the sight. Soon enough, victory would be theirs. As for the Tyrolean forces they managed to stay back from the front lines and repeatedly fired their shots towards the enemies in the ramparts above whenever an opportunity presented itself. Any Bavarian who was foolish enough to poke his head over the merlons was quickly gunned down.

Eventually, the Bavarians were overwhelmed by the onslaught and pushed further and further into the city. The Austrians had now secured the gates of the city, as well as the walls beside them. With that in mind, Eckhard ordered the Tyrolean infantry to barge into the city. Now was the time for the Tyrolean line Infantry and Grenadiers to shine.

As such, the Tyrolean infantry rushed into the city, forming firing lines, and gunning down the fleeing Bavarians who desperately dashed to the center of the city in hope of some kind of reinforcement. The volleys rapidly shot down the Bavarian soldiers, and their bodies were cast aside in the street, bleeding out onto the roads.

Eckhard had personally entered the fray, marching into the city like a conquering General; the veteran Field Marshal had an aura of authority around him that was second only to Berengar's. Yet the young Count was not present at this battle, and thus it was Eckhard's charisma that carried the Austrian forces to victory.

As the Bavarians fled closer and closer to the center of the city, they were finally surrounded by the Austrians on all sides; if the Tyroleans desired, they could unleash a volley from 360 degrees and annihilate the enemy. However, Eckhard smelled a chance for profit and quickly ordered his troops as he entered the scene.

"Hold your fire! Hold your fire!"

Seeing that the Austrians had held their position but could slaughter them at any moment, the Bavarian Commander called out to the man who had given the orders.

"Are you the leader of this army?"

Eckhard merely nodded at the Commander as he held his sword within his hand.

"I advise you to surrender; it would be pointless to lose any more of your men in this vein struggle of yours!"

The enemy commander merely opened up the visor of his helmet and spat on the ground.

"You are nothing more than a minion of Berengar the Accursed that makes you a servant of the devil!"

Hearing these words, Eckhard frowned; it would appear that the enemy commander was a pious man who took his orders from the Pope. The new Pope had declared that anyone who surrenders to a Heretic shall be doomed to eternal damnation. To a true believer like the enemy commander, he would rather die than risk his soul by surrendering to those he perceived to be Heretics.

Seeing that the man was not going to surrender, Eckhard merely sighed before giving a dreadful order to his soldiers who had gathered around the Bavarians with their muskets pointed in the direction.

"Open fire!"

with that, a volley was fired from all angles, shredding apart the remaining Bavarian troops. Not a single member of the defending army had survived the siege. Seeing such pointless death, Eckhard could not prevent himself from complaining.

"Pious fool! I hope you burn for eternity for leading your men to such a cruel fate!"

As for Otto and Audegar, who witnessed the ruthless execution of the surviving Bavarians, they felt no pity. These men had invaded their lands and set the Duchy aflame; death was well deserved in their eyes; Otto approached Eckhard and clasped the man on the soldier.

"You gave them a chance; that is all that matters. They got off lightly for what they have done to these lands..."

Eckhard merely shrugged the comforting hand aside as he looked into the sky and off into the direction of Bavaria. He knew that after Austria had been reclaimed, Bavaria would be Berengar's next target; soon enough, justice would be brought against the enemies of Austria. As for how it was handled, Eckhard could only guess what Berengar would do to the Bavarians after he conquered them.

The siege of Klagenfurt was over, and K?rnten, for the most part, was secured; several weeks had passed since the beginning of their campaign, and many lives were lost, precisely that of the Bavarians. Now Eckhard would leave behind a garrison to control these lands and march into Steiermark, where he would march through the safety of its grounds and into Upper Austria. As for Berengar, he and his massive army would march on Vienna and route out Duke Dietger and end his occupation of Austria once and for all.

Chapter 200: Assassinating an Enemy General

During Berengar and Eckhard's dual advancement upon the occupied regions of the Duchy of Austria, Linde had set Berengar's spy network to task with assassination and sabotage once more. At the moment, the same young female agent who had assassinated the Garrison commander at Meran was currently operating within the City of Vienna; she was just one of Berengar's many agents stationed within the Capital of the Duchy.

She had recently received a coded message that claimed Berengar had been successful in his campaign for Salzburg and would soon be marching his massive army into Lower Austria and, by extension, the City of Vienna. As such, she had been tasked by Linde to make preparations for his arrival.

At the moment, the young and beautiful agent was clutching onto the concealed handgun in her pocket, which was a pepperbox revolver. The device could fire seven shots in a short period and would be instrumental to her plans.

The woman was currently dressed as a common man, with her breasts bound by cloth to hide their size. She wore a hood over her head and had wrapped

her long hair around her face tying it so that it looked like a beard at first glance.

Her task was a simple assassination; Since the successful capture of Vienna, Duke Dietger had returned to Northern Bavaria to fight against the House of Luxembourg and their allies in the North. In doing so, he has left a promising General in his stead; she was targeting his lead General, who at the moment was taking a walk through the city. As she approached the man from afar, she began to overhear the General conversing with another nobleman.

"Count Siegmund has been cleared of all suspicion; it has been revealed that Count Berengar of Tyrol had smuggled the Habsburg boy into his territory. The foolish child has declared himself the rightful Duke of Austria and has placed Count Berengar as his Regent.

The General talked to the Nobleman immediately scoffed as he heard such news and proudly declared his opinion.

"Count Berengar? Berengar the Accursed, as the Catholics call him, the Reformists refer to him as Berengar the Indomitable or Berengar the Conqueror; he has many nicknames. One thing is sure he remains undefeated in battle and has a large army.

Out of all the men sent to Salzburg, 5,000 men are the only ones to return from the region alive, even less from K?rnten. They say he alone has an army of 30,000 men at his back; you are renowned for being an able strategist. Tell me how this is remotely possible?"

The General sighed heavily before revealing his thoughts on the matter; it was something that he had thought about a great deal as the war continued to wage.

"Berengar had roughly 15,000 men in his field army when we first invaded Austria; this is not including the garrisons that he has fortified with hundreds of men each. In a few months, he has raised an extra 15,000 doubling his armies. He has a significant amount of wealth and heaven-defying industrial capabilities. As such, he can outfit every one of those men with proper equipment.

On top of this, his forces utilize some revolutionary form of hand cannon, which no surviving examples have been recovered; as such, we don't know how they function or how effective they are. By equipping his soldiers entirely with these weapons, he must have created a revolutionary set of tactics for them to work correctly. Thus there is no natural way of knowing how to counter them without trial and error. It is no wonder he continues to thwart our best efforts to stop his advance.

If the rumors are true about the might his army possesses, then invading Austria was a mistake; in my humble opinion, we should retreat to Bavaria until we can learn how to counter the advanced weapons and tactics he uses in his army. Yet, his grace Duke Dietger is determined to hold onto this land. Thus we have no choice but to defend it with our lives."

The General was greatly troubled by Berengar's rapid conquest of the Duchy; he had conquered critical areas and was now marching on the capital, as for the most southern Counties of Austria, the Bavarians had yet to make much progress in their occupation and had forced their troops to withdraw towards Vienna to face off against Berengar's incursion with their full might.

The female agent pretended like she was sweeping a nearby floor and listened intently to the conversation; if she could kill this General, the Bavarian forces in Austria would greatly suffer, and the reconquest of the region would be significantly affected. Thus she continued to act normal as the two Bavarian noblemen carried on their conversation, with the other Nobleman stating his opinions on the matter.

"We can't withdraw, but we also do not have enough men to defend Upper Austria; if I were you, I would pull out of the region and focus on defending Vienna; hopefully, with these walls as our support, we can defend the region well enough."

The General, however, sighed and shook his head.

"The longer Berengar's armies are split, the better chance we have to defend our territory. If the other 25,000 men from his forces and that of his allies regroup with him, we will be facing an army of roughly 45,000 men; by then, we will have no chance to defend the city. We will make our final stand here in Vienna, and if we fail... well, then hopefully, Dietger can learn from our

mistakes and use the knowledge gained from this catastrophe to further defend against Berengar and his army in the future."

The two men sighed in defeat, fully realizing that they were not able to fulfill the orders they were given; if the opportunity presented itself, they would gladly surrender and be ransomed back to Bavaria, for now, all they could do was wait, for Berengar's arrival, and prepare for the best of their ability.

Unfortunately for the two noblemen, there was an assassin in the midst, and they had no idea that their conversation was being overheard. The female agent no longer desired to hear the conversation as it began to shift to banter; as such, she checked her pepperbox revolver to make sure it was loaded correctly and drew the hammer back before approaching the two men.

Before they had time to react, the spy pulled the revolver out of her pocket, pointed it square blank at the General and the Nobleman's chests, and fired two shots rapidly into their breastplates. They could not even withdraw their swords before their hearts had been pierced by the lead balls contained within the revolver.

Now that the sound of gunfire was overheard, The woman fled into the distance, leaving the two men to bleed out on the street corner with a look of shock in their eyes. Until now, they had no idea that Berengar still had spies in the city.

The last thoughts on the General's mind as his consciousness faded into the eternal abyss was one of deep regret; though it was brief, he had finally witnessed the exchange of one of Berengar's weapons. Unfortunately, he would be dead before he could report the information to Duke Dietger, and as such, shame was the only thing he felt right before he died.

As for the Agent, she swiftly left the scene, where she untied her hair around her face and changed her attire into something more feminine. Not a single soul expected a woman was the one who had assassinated the General, and thus she was spared the pain of relocating once more. Instead, she would continue in her efforts to Sabotage the Bavarians in the coming days as Berengar slowly approached the Capital of Austria.

For now, she wrote a coded message and sent it off with a carrier pigeon, where it would travel to Kufstein, and inform Linde that the operation was a success, the General and one of his commanders were dead, leaving Vienna in a power vacuum, as at the moment the various Bavarian commanders within the city would now be preoccupied with fighting among themselves for a position of control.

With this one action, this spy had brought down the stability of the Bavarian's defense in Vienna; whoever succeeded the General in taking command would surely not be as promising a talent, and as such, would most likely ruin the security—allowing Berengar an easier time in reconquering the capital. As for the towns, cities, and Castles in upper Austria, they too were undergoing events of sabotage which greatly infuriated the Bavarian soldiers occupying the regions, and lowered their morale.

Berengar had long used his intelligence agents as both an offensive weapon, and a defensive shield. His ruthlessness in targeting key personnel for assassination and the sabotage of critical resources was one of his ways of claiming an advantage over his opponents. Unfortunately for them, Austria had long since been trapped in his web of intrigue. Thus he was always in a position of control during his campaign. This massive advantage was all thanks to the efforts of Linde, for if Berengar had to micromanage his Spynetwork himself, it would not nearly be this sophisticated.