

## Steel 211

### *Chapter 211: Designing the Linde-Class Ship of the Line*

For the last three days, and nights Berengar had been locked away in his study. So much so that the only thing he had to consume was tea. Considering he could not easily get his hands on coffee, he was left with tea to stimulate his mind and keep him from falling asleep.

Yet, now after all his hard work, it had finally paid off. Sitting before him on his desk was a comprehensive schematic for a large first-rate ship of the line. It was a massive beast, that had a total of three decks, and could house a total of 130 cannons on it. Each cannon would be a new class of naval artillery, and that would be the 32 lb Cannon.

The ship itself was basically a carbon copy of the USS Pennsylvania with some small changes to it. Due to a lack of the material known as sisal that only grew in the new world. Berengar had to improvise and replace the sails and ropes with hemp.

As for the shell of the ship itself, it was covered in a thin sheet of Zinc. Not as an armored layer, but to protect the ship from wood-eating parasites that dwelled within the ocean. The reason for this was simple, it would save on maintenance costs, and ensure the longevity of the vessels that were built.

How Berengar knew of these designs? Well, that could be explained by his brief visit to the US Naval academy in his previous life. He was visiting a friend during vacation, well more like an acquaintance.

Berengar did not have many friends in his previous life, but he had plenty of acquaintances. This acquaintance had grown up on the same street as Berengar or Julian as he was known then. Eventually, they both joined the military, Julian had joined the Army, and this acquaintance whose name was Derek had joined the Navy.

During one summer break, Julian was invited out to the Naval Academy by Derek to spend some time with him, his stay only lasted a week, but during this time he spent it almost exclusively in the library studying the history of shipbuilding in the vast archives.

What started out as a friendly invitation, quickly turned into a week of extensive study, as Derek decided to go partying during this time period, and Julian was not exactly the most skilled wing-man, thus like most times, he hung out with other people he was quickly abandoned to his own devices. Not desiring to endure the humiliation of being alone at a party, he opted to stay in the library and study for his stay at the Naval Academy.

Apparently, that experience that Berengar frowned upon became a blessing in disguise because it provided him with the knowledge on how to build ships from a variety of eras. Berengar planned to draft two classes of ships for his future navy, the first of which was the monumental 130 guns first-rate ship of the line that he referred to as the Linde-Class.

The reason for him naming it this was simply because Berengar was a man of culture. He decided to name his ship classes after his two women, and of course the first of each class would be named after them as well. The reason for making the bigger ship named after Linde instead of Adela who was his future wife ultimately came down to the disparity in bust size between the two girls.

Even if Adela's family were fairly busty, he somehow had a nagging suspicion that Adela would have a B-cup-sized chest at best that when compared to Linde's D-Cup-sized breasts, the answer was obvious as to which ship should be named after which girl.

Eventually, Berengar heard a knock on the door after admiring his blueprints, and he quickly answered with a casual phrase.

"It is open."

With that said Linde walked into the room, and noticed that Berengar's usual charming appearance looked exhausted, he had deep bags under his eyes that showed he had been awake for some time. Though she knew he was working on something important and was currently undergoing about of inspiration and thus she did not intervene in his 72-hour marathon of drafting blueprints.

The young beauty quickly approached the desk where Berengar was seated gazing passionately at the schematics with a large smile on his face. Thus she quickly asked about the designs as she tried to sneak a peak.

"What is this? Linde-Class Ship of the Line? Oh, darling! You are naming a ship after me?"

Linde was so happy she quickly grabbed ahold of Berengar and stuffed his face into her perfectly shaped D-cup breasts. The softness of the feeling made Berengar want to sleep, yet he still had to add the finishing touches to his project, as such he forced himself to stay awake.

He was too tired to voice his thoughts properly thus he just nodded his head slowly and released the sound

"mhmm"

Seeing that her man was so tired Linde instantly began to pout before dragging him from his seat, he had been up far too long and was in no state to continue working, though Berengar attempted to resist he was much too weary to do so and thus found himself quickly being dragged out of his study and towards his bedroom where Linde chastised him.

"Though I am happy you named such a magnificent ship after me, I am more furious that you put your health at risk! You seriously needed to get some rest. You can finish the project later!"

She knew Berengar well enough to know what he was thinking at this moment, and thus she forced him to get some sleep. As such Linde stripped herself, and Berengar and climbed into bed with him, before resting his head on her naked lap while she sat up in the bed, against the fluffy feather pillows. Berengar fell asleep to the sensation of Linde's soft thighs, and the sigh of two mountains hovering over his head. The last thought on his mind before drifting into unconsciousness was as follows.

"Life is good!"

Berengar slept for a total of twenty-one hours, and when he awoke he was in the same position he had fallen asleep, and Linde was staring down at him

with a warm smile. He did not know how long he had slept for and thus casually asked after yawning heavily and wiping his eyes.

"How long was I out for?"

Linde pondered about it for a few moments while placing one of her dainty fingers on her luscious lips before smile and responding to him.

"About twenty-one hours?"

Berengar was shocked by this figure, it had been a while since he pulled such a long streak of staying awake, but he was more shocked that he woke up in the same position. As such he asked the second question on his mind

"You stayed here the whole time?"

Hearing this Linde giggled lightly before stroking Berengar's golden hair.

"No silly, Unlike a certain someone I don't have the luxury to sleep for twenty-one hours straight. I got back into bed about an hour ago..."

Hearing this Berengar smiled before nuzzling his head against Linde's thighs, the soft, sensation was far better than Adela's slender legs, though he would never say that to Adela's face. Seeing that Berengar was about to fall back to sleep Linde decided to reveal some important news to garner his attention.

"By the way... Did you request a shipbuilder from Venice? He arrived something like twelve hours ago, saying that the Count of Tyrol requested his presence. I told him you were sleeping and to wait, but he is growing rather impatient."

Hearing this Berengar's eyes immediately snapped open and he began to groan.

"Ugghh! Fine I will get up!"

With that said he slowly rose from Linde's lap and got out of bed where Linde helped him get dressed, after doing so she put on her own attire. Now that the two were fully upright for the day Berengar walked into his great hall where

the shipbuilder known as Evio Azzopardi was waiting rather impatiently for his arrival.

The man was striding around the room with a scowl on his face, and when he noticed Berengar's arrival he instantly began to shout at him.

"Do you have any idea how long I have been waiting? Who do you think you are to make me the great Evio Azzopardi wait for so long?"

Evio was not only a shipbuilder, but he was one of the best in Venice, however, he was not loyal to the City or its republic, he simply desired to build the greatest ships, and get paid a great sum to do so.

Berengar had enticed the man by claiming he had designed a new vessel, one that was greater than anything the Venetian Republic had at its disposal and offered a great deal of gold for the man to come work for him, and build his fleet in the Adriatic sea.

Seeing the man so visibly upset Berengar put on a graceful facade and apologized profusely to the man.

"My sincerest apologies for delaying our visit for so long. I had spent a total of three days and three nights ensuring that the schematics to the ship were perfect, and as such when I finally got some rest, I slept for a long time. You must be weary from your travels, come join me at my dining table and we will discuss the details of our cooperation."

Hearing that he was going to get a free meal out of this debacle greatly lessened Evio's wrath, and thus he accepted Berengar's invitation. It would be nice to see what kind of cuisine the man from a backward region like Tyrol could offer him. Thus the two left the great hall and headed towards the dining room. Where they would have a long discussion about the possibility of building a Grand Navy for Berengar in the coming years.

#### *Chapter 212: Meeting with the Shipbuilder*

The two men entered the Dining Hall of Berengar's Castle, where they quickly sat down for breakfast. Berengar fully intended to display his Counties culinary arts and thus had ordered a variety of dishes, both breakfast, and dinner to be brought to the table.

Since Evio was an Italian, Bernegar knew he most likely wanted wine, so he brought forth a fortified wine that he had developed. It used the local wine production as a basis and added distilled liquor to it. The man instantly tasted the alcohol and nearly jumped with delight; it was intense but had excellent flavor and was unlike any wine he had encountered before.

Evio immediately asked about the wine.

"What is this? I have never had such a wine before?"

Berengar chuckled lightly before briefly explaining the origin of the wine.

"I don't have a name for it yet, but it is a specialty we make in Southern Tyrol. I enjoy the taste."

The man instantly frowned; as a wine connoisseur, he wanted more details about its production, but Berengar was unwilling to share such secrets. Instead, he used it as further enticement to draw the man over to his side.

"If you work for me, you can drink as much of this as your heart desires!"

Evio's amber eyes flashed when he heard this, and he began to stroke his brown beard. The man was in his early thirties and had spent his life building ships, like his forefathers. He was exceptionally talented at it. However, it would take more than just good wine to convince him to work for Berengar, and thus he immediately put on a slick demeanor.

"Bah, it will take more than good wine to convince me to work for you!"

Hearing this, Berengar merely smiled especially when he saw the first round of dishes being brought out, as he replied to the man with a smug expression on his face.

"I think you will soon enough realize the benefits of working for me; for now, let us enjoy the meal in front of us."

On the table were a group of appetizers, different kinds of bread, cheeses, and sausage platters were laid out for the man to partake of and which each bite Berengar could see the light of excitement glimmer in his eyes. Despite

his initial reservations, he quickly began to compliment Berengar for his hospitality.

"For a bunch of Germans, your people know how to cook very well..."

Berengar chuckled upon hearing this and accepted the man's compliment.

"Well, thank you, my chefs work hard every day to provide the best meals for me, my family, and my guests to dine upon. Such cuisine is slowly starting to spread across the rest of Austria."

Hearing this news, Evio started to desire to work for Berengar more and more, but he quickly pressed the concern to the back of his mind; it would take more than good wine and food to convince him to work for a man. Thus he quickly brought up the matter of compensation as the next round of food was brought out.

"Though I admit the food and wine you have presented is of excellent quality, I am more concerned with two things that will determine whether or not I settle in Austria and work for you. Compensation, but more importantly, these so-called ships of the line you spoke about with such passion in your letters!"

Seeing that the man was rather impatient in discussing business, Berengar decided he might as well get it over with and began to negotiate with the man. Berengar was bold, and he needed a competent shipbuilder who could construct his Navy for many years to come; as such, he let out an offer that nearly made the man's eyes jump out of his sockets.

"I will double what the Venetians are paying you and give you a noble title. With a sizeable estate in any region of Austria that you desire. As for my ship design, once we are finished with the meal, I will gladly show you what I have been working on..."

The Venetians were paying the man a large sum, and Berengar knew it; his spies had infiltrated the Venetian republic to find out about this information. However, with all of his current enterprises, and the new one he had recently established, he could afford such an expense.

After all the cost of building his Navy itself was going to be an astronomical figure, he might as well pay a hefty price for a competent underling. Of course, when Ezio heard this, he nearly choked on the piece of schnitzel he was eating from.

Not only would he be presented with a large sum of money, but also a noble title, and an Estate, this was too good of an offer to pass up.? Yet, even this did not fully sway the man; most importantly, he would have to look at the ship designs that Berengar had prepared. Thus he quickly finished his meal, to the point where Berengar still had half a plate left.

Nevertheless, seeing how impatient they were to see his ship designs, Berengar sighed before standing up and wiping his mouth with his napkin. After doing so, he began to convey his thoughts to Evio.

"If you would follow me, I would be more than happy to show you the design I have come up with for the first and largest class of ships I intend to build. Hearing the term largest got the man's hopes up. If it were anything bigger than the Carracks he had been building, he would greatly enjoy his new work."

With that, the two men left the Dining Room and entered Berengar's Study, where he showed the blueprint to Evio. The moment the man saw such a monumental ship, he scoffed, however before he could express his thoughts that Berengar was out of his mind, he once more looked it over and noticed that shockingly such a ship could feasibly be built! It would need a massive and dedicated shipyard and take years to construct, but it could be done.

The ship was titled, SMS Linde. The SMS stood for the German Spelling of "His Majesty's Ship." The man could not believe his eyes and stood still and in awe for several moments, going over every detail of the complex set of schematics. It was only after an hour of the intense study had passed that the man put down the blueprints and snapped his attention over to Berengar, who was staring at him with a smug grin the entire time.

"When do we get started?"

Berengar's smile increased when he heard this, and he began to inform the man of the process.



"It will take roughly a year to construct the shipyard I have in mind; the first of these shipyards will be built in Trieste, others will follow in Pola and Fiume. During the time it takes to build these shipyards, I will be mass-producing pre-manufactured parts so that once the shipyards are completed, we can immediately use an assembly line to construct the ships in a rapid process."

Hearing this, Evio was excited; he could see that Berengar's shipyards would soon be able to produce many of these ships in quick succession if he planned to come to fruition. Despite only looking at one ship's design and overhearing Berengar's plans for the future, the man was wise enough to know that Austria would quickly become the premier maritime power in the world within a decade.

The idea that he would be the one to usher in such a sudden change to the world's power structure brought tingles to the man's spine. He was excited just thinking about it. He quickly reached out his hand and said to Berengar with a joyful expression on his face.

"I look forward to it! I will move to Trieste as soon as I am able and help oversee the construction of the shipyards. Rest assured, your vision for a Grand Austrian Navy will become a reality in just a few years!"

Hearing this, Berengar was filled with excitement; he had taken the first step into establishing himself as a major Naval Power. He could already envision the vast fleets of his future German Empire dominating the world's major trade routes and destroying any enemy foolish enough to try to block his path to world hegemony.

As such, he quickly latched onto the man's hand and shook it fervently with an equally joyous smile on his face. He could tell this would be a lucrative partnership and was glad to have another capable subordinate under his area of influence.

Despite making such a monumental decision on behalf of the Duchy of Austria, Conrad was left utterly unaware that Berengar intended to build a massive fleet and challenge the Venetians, Genoans, and other Mediterranean powers for maritime dominance.

If the boy had known, he would have thrown a tantrum, believing Berengar to be foolish, for how could they possibly construct a powerful enough Navy in such a short period to counter the principal naval powers of the world?

Luckily for Berengar, he was smart enough to keep the young Duke out of the loop. As Regent of Austria, he had full authority to enact these laws while Conrad remained a child. Luckily for Austria, Conrad had no authority, or else the boy would undoubtedly lead them to ruin.

### *Chapter 213: Trapped in a Cage*

Throughout the weeks since Arethas' visit, he traveled across the Mediterranean and got back to Constantinople. At a certain point, the man was struck in the Adriatic sea due to an ongoing storm and thus had just now made his way back with the first arms shipment.

At the moment, Arethas was once more in the Palace of Constantinople, informing Emperor Vetransis about his exploits. The two had gathered in the courtyard outside the palace's walls, where they walked around the beautiful gardens throughout the area.

Unbeknownst to the two individuals, Princess Honoria was nearby playing with her pet falcon. She was trapped inside the palace from a young age, like a bird in its cage. Her only companion throughout this time was her pet falcon, who she had named Heraclius after the great Emperor. At the moment, she was stroking the feathers on the majestic bird's head while the creature perched on her forearm.

A gorgeous smile spread across the young beauty's face as she played with her pet; she began to compliment the bird.

"Oh Heraclius, you have been such a good friend to me all these years. Despite this, our time together grows ever closer to an unjust end. For I fear I will not be able to bring you with me to France where I will be sold off to the Crown Prince as if I were mere cattle. Only you care enough to listen to my complaints..."

The bird was by no means stupid; it could tell the pretty girl that was his master was deeply troubled about something important; as such, it nuzzled its head into her own in an attempt to comfort her.

While Honoria was playing with her falcon, she overheard a conversation being held nearby; with nothing else going on she decided to eavesdrop out of curiosity. After all, any topic her father and one of his greatest generals were discussing would surely stem her overwhelming boredom.

The Emperor Vetrans was smiling as he asked Arethas the question he had been longing to hear.

"So tell me, good Arethas, have you procured the weapons from the West?"

With an excited smile, Arethas nodded his head and confidently proclaimed his success.

"I had managed to do so, though they are not the same weapons that Berengar's forces were equipped with when they crushed the Bavarian invaders. They are still far more advanced than anything else that exists in the known world!"

The Emperor smiled as he nodded with approval before addressing the issue at hand.

"Good! I will set some men to task with reverse-engineering these mighty weapons. However, that may take some time to accomplish, so until then, I want you to procure as many of these Arkebuses as you possibly can get your hands on. The war in Egypt depends on it!"

Arethas quickly bowed his head in respect and responded to the Emperor's request.

"I will do so at the first opportunity!"

Honoria, who was listening nearby, began to pout, she initially thought this conversation would be interesting, but it was just a discussion about a mere arms trade. How impressive could these weapons be? As she was about to get up from her seat and walk away, she heard the topic shift to something more interesting.

The Emperor scratched his beard before asking the question on his mind.

"Tell me the truth Arethas, is what they say about Count Berengar true? Is he the true power behind the Duchy of Austria?"

Arethas sighed heavily before expressing his opinion on the matter.

"Without a doubt, despite only being twenty-one this year, Berengar has risen from the position of a lowly Baron's son to the power behind the Ducal Throne of Austria. The current Duke is nothing more than a young boy whose entire existence can be described as a puppet of Berengar. From the last conversation I had with Berengar, I get the feeling he intends to usurp the position shortly and establish himself as the Duke of Austria."

Honorina was instantly intrigued by this conversation; she had never heard of this Count Berengar, but if what the Strategos said was true, he was an ambitious and clever man to be able to rise to such a prominent position despite his lowly birth and young age. Thus she listened in closely to the conversation, trying to hear every word.

The Emperor responded to Arethas' claims with a slight nod of his head before expressing his approval.

"Truly a talented young man, it is a shame he has made enemies out of most of Europe, the Catholic Church has declared him a heretic for his reformist ideology, in a way it closely resembles that of Jan Hus, the situation in Bohemia has become volatile, and now Austria is following in its footsteps under Berengar's direction. I fear the Catholics will try to have him executed. Do you think Berengar has the power to resist such an attempt?"

Arethas thought about this subject for a few moments before finally giving his response.

"If he continues to expand his military power like he has been doing so? Yes, even if the Pope calls for a new crusade against him and his adherents, he will crush any army that enters his lands. The weapons he has sold us are terrifying, and supposedly the firearms issued to all of his infantry are even more impressive.

It is no wonder he routed the Bavarian forces in a little over a month. I would not be surprised if Berengar used the Papal response to his actions as an

excuse to annex his neighbors and create a new Kingdom located in central Europe.

Given a few years to consolidate the power that he has gained over Austria, he will soon have an army that will be entirely unmatched, and I assure you his ambitions do not end with Austria. Mark my words, one day Berengar will be a King."

Hearing these words, Honoria gasped; after doing so, she quickly covered her mouth in fear of her being found out by her father. She did not expect the infamous Strategos of Ionia to praise a stranger from the West so highly. Primarily since until now, she had never heard of this Count Berengar. However, Arethas' words quickly filled Honoria's young mind with images of the young Count of Tyrol as a heroic conqueror on par with the likes of Trajan or Caesar.

Honoria had never met Berengar; she had no idea what he looked like, nor did she even know his surname. Yet just from this conversation, an image of Berengar formed in Honoria's head, and a lasting impression was built.

Finally, she had found a powerful and ambitious man to chase after. Even if she was already engaged to the Crown Prince of France, she had no intentions of marrying such a man and would rather chase after someone like this Count Berengar she had just heard about.

If only she had a way to contact him, thus Honoria began to sulk when she realized that the thoughts she had just now about chasing after Berengar was an impossibility. As long as she was trapped in the palace, she would never be able to meet the man and see if he lived up to the hype.

As such, she quickly sat down onto the bench nearby and once more began to speak to Heraclius, her pet falcon. The young beauty sighed heavily as she did so.

"Oh Heraclius, what am I to do? There is no way for me to contact this Berengar, but if I don't contact him, I will be forced to marry that twink, Aubry. Can my life get any worse?"

Heraclius gazed at Honoria with a curious gaze before taking off into the air and flying away. The bird had become hungry and thus had gone out to hunt. Leaving Honoria by her lonesome as she thought about the issues she faced. As such, Honoria pouted as she expressed the thoughts on her mind.

"Stupid bird!"

As for Arethas and the Emperor, they continued to stroll throughout the garden and discuss various topics; they had long since passed from Honoria's earshot. Thus she could no longer eavesdrop on their discussion.

Vetranis had no knowledge that his daughter had overheard his conversation with Arethas and in doing so taken a fancy to this Berengar from the West. For if he did, he would most certainly try to end such a fascination before it could turn into an infatuation. The last thing he needed was a scandal about his errant daughter running away with some Duke from the West.

Instead, his conversation with Arethas shifted from the topic of Berengar to the war with the Egyptians; with the new weapons acquired from Berengar, his forces would have to be trained in its use, Arethas had informed the Emperor of the pike and shot strategy Berengar had briefly suggested.

Thus, the men had to design a new set of tactics for their armies to overwhelm the Mamluke Sultanate with. With this, they hoped to reclaim the long-lost territories of North Africa and incorporate them into their mighty Empire.

#### *Chapter 214: Establishing the Navy*

At the moment, Berengar was sitting in his study, overseeing reports on his desk. There were several notes of importance he had to go over. Many of these were focused on the procurement of resources for his vessels.

To accomplish this, Berengar had sent trade representatives to the Kalmar Union in Scandinavia in an attempt to garner an ample supply of oak timber. The reason for this was simple, Norway would be a massive stockpile of such material, and presently there was little demand for it. Thus he could acquire his shipbuilding materials at a low expense.

As for the procurement of hemp to use for his sails, and rope Berengar had already begun growing the product alongside flax for some time. Thus he did

not need to spend too much money when it came to acquiring the amount he was missing from his current stockpile.

Berengar needed a powerful fleet of at least three ships if he would send an expedition to the new world. These ships would require thousands of sailors, and he could not purchase such a vast workforce.

Instead, he was at this moment officially signing into law the establishment of the Austrian Navy and had decided to purchase a few carracks from Venice to act as training vessels. They would be docked in Trieste, where he would funnel recruits over to the region to train as sailors.

He severely lacked in sailors for his territory. The Duchy of Austria, despite holding a coastline in the southern tip of K?rnten, an area that belonged to Slovenia and Croatia in his past life, had never bothered developing a Navy. Instead, they merely had trading vessels and fishing boats.

Thus Berengar desired to hire some professionals, and in doing so, looked towards veterans of the Venetian Navy to act as instructors to his new sailors. The expenses for the construction of his Navy were growing by the day, but they had to be made. Without a powerful Navy, his future German Empire would never be able to maintain control over its colonies that would be vital to the success of his Dynasty.

On top of all of this, Berengar had to design a basic training program for the Navy; luckily, he had a little bit of knowledge of the U.S. Navy's basic training program from his previous life; after all, he had an acquaintance who was an officer in the Navy, and they would commonly chat about the differences between Army and Navy life.

Many hours passed, and eventually, Berengar had finished all of the necessary tasks to start the foundation of the Austrian Navy. After the last stroke of his quill was signed, he let out a heavy sigh and leaned back in his leather chair while stretching his muscles before expressing his thoughts aloud.

"The work of a Duke is never finished."

After finishing his work for the day, Berengar left his study and entered the dining hall, where he found Linde and Conrad in another conflict. The sight of which instantly brought a sense of fatigue to Berengar. He could not wait for this little brat to croak finally, but it could not be too sudden. Otherwise, the blame would surely fall on his shoulders, and the other nobles of Austria would be up in arms against him.

Linde was furious. Conrad had said something that had visibly upset her, and she quickly slapped Conrad across the face once more before yelling at him.

"You little brat! Who do you think you are? How dare you call me that!"

Conrad's outbursts were becoming more frequent, and Linde was usually the one who had to put up with his crap. However, the following words that came out of his mouth invoked Linde's ire and Berengar's.

"You fucking whore! Just because you are sleeping with Berengar doesn't mean you get to lay a hand on me!"

Conrad's fists were curled as if he were ready to strike, and the guards were once more moving into position to separate the two; however, when they noticed Berengar's slow approach with a murderous glare in his one good eye, they immediately backed down. The Count wanted to handle this himself.

Just when Conrad was about to pounce on Linde, he felt an arm wrap around his little neck, and as it did so, it quickly began to cut off the supply of oxygen to his brain. Berengar had put the 12-year-old child in a rear-naked choke so tight that within a matter of seconds, the boy passed out. As he did so, Berengar slowly let the kid fall to the ground before releasing the chokehold.

Linde gazed at Berengar with a cruel smile on her luscious lips; she loved it when her man took charge of the situation and hindered those who insulted her or did her harm. This was not the first time he had taken action to protect her against a violent male. She instantly got flashbacks to the time Berengar beat his little brother for his actions.

It only took a few seconds for Conrad to regain consciousness, and when he did, he awoke with a fright; he had no idea where he was or what had happened; when his mind finally adjusted to his surroundings, he saw



Berengar and Linde passionately kissing in front of him. Conrad did not know that Berengar had just choked him and instead glared furiously at Linde who was the initial target of his fury.

Upon seeing the boy's gaze, Berengar stopped his public display of affection and put on a terrifying expression as he glared down at Conrad. Berengar slowly kneeled in front of the kid and grabbed him by the throat with his hand, squeezing it tightly, but not tight enough to suffocate the lad. Afterward, he coldly stated a bold threat.

"If I hear you insulting my woman or see you getting violent with her again. I will end you..."

Conrad put on a tough facade, despite the intense fear he felt in his heart before scoffing at Berengar's words.

"Is that a threat?"

Berengar, however coldly shook his head before responding

"It is a promise!"

With that, Berengar stood back up and walked over to the guards in the room who witnessed the entire display; he patted the man on the shoulder who was about to aid Linde before his interruption and said with a smile on his face.

"The Duke is tired; escort him to his room so that he can get some much-needed rest..."

Hearing this, a pair of guards marched over to Conrad and lifted him off the floor, where they then responded with the term.

"Your Grace..." before escorting the boy to his room. All the while, Conrad threw a tantrum.

"Let me go! I command you! I am not tired; God damn it!"

After he was no longer visible and his screams could no longer be heard, Linde giggled slightly before getting in a snide remark.

"The Duke is tired? Really? That was your best excuse?"

Berengar laughed alongside his lover as he wrapped his arms around her and dragged her into his embrace.

"It worked, didn't it?"

After saying that, the couple resumed their passionate display of affection for a few moments; they became ever closer to engaging in carnal relations in the middle of the dining hall, that is, of course, until Berengar spotted Henrietta was sitting at her spot at the dining table with a sheepish expression on her face.

The entire time she was sitting quietly in her spot observing the situation, and now that Berengar was so passionately kissing Linde's breasts, she did not know how to react as such, Berengar froze into place before awkwardly addressing his little sister.

"Oh, Henrietta... I didn't see you there."

hearing this, Linde immediately began to blush; she had utterly forgotten Henrietta was present and had lost herself in the moment. As such, she quietly pulled up her dress which had slightly slid down her body while Berengar was toying with her.

After doing so, she quickly recovered herself and sat in her seat. Henrietta was frozen in place as if she had just seen a ghost. She had no idea how to react to the scene in front of her, and thus she just began to stare into her plate awkwardly.

Luckily not long after, the servants arrived, and with them, the food was prepared for Berengar and his family. This scene broke up the awkward silence that had permeated the air—allowing Berengar and Linde to recover from their embarrassing display just moments earlier.

Thus Berengar enjoyed a lovely meal with his family, all while dreaming about the day he can finally dine on his glorious potato pancakes, as well as consume Bauernfrühstück for breakfast. Both of these things needed potatoes that could only be obtained from the new world. If not for the risks that

involved hiring foreign sailors to explore the aforementioned region, he would have gladly done so by now.

However, the new world and its discovery were of vital strategic importance to his future Empire. Thus he would never allow it to be revealed until after he had already begun to seize the most resource-rich lands. These were the thoughts that flowed through Berengar's mind as he dined in silence with his family.

#### *Chapter 215: Conrad's Misdeeds*

After being slapped by Linde, and choked out by Berengar. Conrad was forced to return to his room, where he was locked inside for the remainder of the night. Eventually, he fell to sleep, but by the time morning came and he was released from his quarters, he was still fuming with anger over the events that had occurred during the previous night.

Conrad had no say in how his Duchy was being run, Berengar did not inform him of the matters of importance that the man was constantly working on, and as such, Conrad had a lot of free time. However, he was locked away in the Castle of Kufstein without any ability to escape. After all, Berengar did not want the boy causing trouble.

Thus with no authority and no way to entertain himself, the boy became increasingly bitter. As time passed, he eventually found himself bored out of his mind and had begun to behave in childish antics. Yet, those childish antics were always met with a firm slap by Linde. Eventually, those childish antics turned to thoughts of wicked acts.

At the moment, Conrad was walking through the Courtyard, trying to think of a way to get revenge on Linde for how she had always treated him. Eventually, he came across a peculiar sight. Linde was currently putting out multiple saucers filled with milk, and there were a total of three cats who came rushing over to greet her.

The beautiful young woman had a gorgeous smile as she happily petted the cats before allowing them to have some of the milk. Linde was exceptionally fond of cats and had recently taken in a few strays. She made sure that they were given fresh milk from the farm every day.

Berengar had allowed this for three reasons, firstly it made Linde happy, and seeing her happy made him happy. Secondly, he was a cat lover, and as such, he also enjoyed their company. Thirdly, Cats were excellent at hunting pests, and the castle had more than enough rodents running around that needed to be taken care of.

After feeding the Cats, Linde said goodbye and quickly returned to her work as a spymaster; she would be back later that evening to feed the cute little creatures more milk. Seeing the gracious smile on Linde's face as she was around her new pets brought a wicked idea to Conrad's mind.

He may not be able to harm Linde; after all, the guards protected Berengar and his loved ones around the clock, but he could hurt what she cared about. Thus the devious little cunt vowed that later in the day when the patrols had begun to switch shifts, he would sneak into the Courtyard and murder the three cats. Such a thing would surely upset the young woman who had so thoroughly invoked his ire.

After hatching such a vicious plot, Conrad returned to his room, where he began to make preparations. First, he needed a knife, and as such, he headed towards the kitchen where he planned to fetch one.

Thus as Conrad entered the kitchen, he immediately began to behave suspiciously; the kitchen staff all began to question him with their gazes until finally, the boy demanded access to what he desired.

"I need a knife!"

The kitchen staff looked at one another for a few moments before the head chef inquired about the reasoning.

"Why do you need a knife?"

The kitchen staff asking questions immediately caught Conrad off guard; seeing how he never had a servant question his orders, he instantly became outraged and began to rebuke the chef.

"Because I am the Duke, and I ordered you to give me one! Now hand it over!"

The head chef had a look of concern in his eyes as he struggled with the decision. On the one hand, he knew the kid was up to something, and if Conrad did something horrible with a knife he provided, then he would be held responsible.

On the other hand, the boy was right, he was technically the Duke, and though he had no real authority, as a commoner, he could not very well deny the Duke's orders, or else it would expose Berengar's charade.? Considering the two options, the chef thought it was unlikely that Conrad would do anything too vile and thus handed him a kitchen knife before warning the kid.

"Your Grace, this object is dangerous; I suggest you be careful with it!"

Conrad instantly ignored the chef's comments and did not even bother thanking the man. Instead, he immediately returned to his room, where he played with the knife; he could already imagine the look on Linde's face after he cut her cats' throats. He longed to see the woman wailing with tears in her eyes like a hysterical bitch.

These wicked thoughts are what kept him entertained until the time arrived. After he noticed the patrols would be switching shifts soon and that the window of opportunity was near, Conrad quietly snuck out of his room and rushed through the hallways as he tried to act normal. Though the more he did so, the more suspicious he appeared.

While walking through the hallways, Conrad hid the knife under his tunic as he carefully pressed forward. Eventually, he ran into a servant girl and knocked her over. Rather than help her up, he glared at her menacingly, and the girl quickly ran away in fear. Unfortunately for him, this was right in front of the Courtyard, where the cats were housed.

However, the boy was not smart enough to realize he had just created a witness who could testify that he was in the vicinity, and thus he proceeded towards the structure that was constructed to act as a house for the cats. When he approached, the little furballs instantly walked out of their home and greeted him while purring. Everyone in the Castle treated them with exceptional care, knowing they were Linde's pets, and thus they were used to everyone being kind.

The naive little cats did not have the slightest clue of the evil intent that Conrad had. Thus when the three cats approached to sniff him, he unleashed his blade and cut their throats, killing them instantly. Their blood spilled across the cold stone floor of the Courtyard and onto his tunic. However, he did not notice this.

In his wicked mind, merely cutting their throats was not enough to indeed disturb Linde; as such, he quickly proceeded to decapitate the creatures and leave their heads mounted on sticks outside their home, with their bodies mangled below. After he had concluded this brutal and cruel act to a trio of innocent cats, the boy fled back to his room with a knife in hand. Utterly unaware that he left a trail of blood in his wake.

Conrad was by no means a criminal mastermind, and despite believing he had easily gotten away with such actions, he had left multiple pieces of evidence in his wake, with even a witness seeing him shortly before the action happened. Luckily nobody saw him on the way back to his room, or else he could have gotten spooked and killed one of Berengar's servants.

Not long after Conrad returned to his room, a horrific shriek echoed across the Castle; it was so loud that even Berengar heard it in his study. He instantly recognized that the voice belonged to Linde, so Berengar quickly rushed to the scene with his sword in hand. However, before he arrived, his guards had beaten him to the area and began to secure the crime scene.

By the time Berengar had entered the Courtyard to see what had happened, the House guards were keeping the scene in check, and Linde was sobbing like a mother who had just witnessed her children's deaths. Nobody dared to approach her when she was in such an unstable condition. Well, nobody other than Berengar. The moment he saw his lover sobbing in such a manner, he dropped ahold of his sword and rushed over to her, holding the weeping beauty in his arms in an attempt to comfort her.

Gazing at the brutal scene before him, Berengar did not believe this to be an attack on Linde but one on himself. To him, it was clear that this was a veiled threat from one of his political opponents. Stating, "If I can get to your pets, then I can get to your loved ones." Thus as Berengar tried to comfort Linde, he began shouting orders to the nearby guards.

"Lockdown the Castle nobody gets in or out until we find out who is responsible for this! As for the rest of you, begin an investigation into this immediately; I want to know who would dare to engage in such a barbaric display within my territory!"

The guards immediately responded to Berengar's orders by pounding their chests in salute and screaming at the top of their lungs.

"Yes, your excellency!"

With that said, the men quickly got to task and began to lock down the castle, quarantine the area, and search for any potential clues. All while Berengar held onto his weeping lover, comforting her to the best of his ability, in doing so, he made a solemn vow.

"When I find whoever is responsible for this, I will make sure they pay with their blood!"

#### *Chapter 216: A Lover's Fury*

After Conrad's horrific actions, the Castle was entirely on lockdown. Like Berengar had ordered, nobody was allowed in or out of the Castle, and the castle garrison immediately was put to task in looking for every clue available. While Berengar and his forces were piecing together what had happened, Conrad had fled to his room where he was currently hiding behind his door, breathing heavily.

The adrenaline and excitement that filled his veins after committing such a heinous act and getting away with it filled his mind with joy. Adrenaline and endorphins pumped through his blood in a way that he had never felt before.

He could get used to this. Or so he thought. However, when he appeared in front of the mirror, he noticed his clothes and hands were stained with blood, and he was still holding onto the murder weapon. He immediately began to panic and stripped his clothes before wrapping them around the murder weapon and tossing it out his window.

Conrad was not exactly the smoothest criminal; not only had he left a massive trail pointing in his direction, but he tossed even more crucial evidence such as the murder weapon and his blood-stained noble clothing outside the

window, directly into the bushes below. With the way he had handled this act of cruelty, it was only a matter of time before Berengar found out he did the deed.

Of course, he had no way of knowing this, and thus he grinned in the mirror; he could not wait to kill something else that Linde loved, but the only thing she loved other than those cats was Berengar, Henrietta, and Hans. It would not be easy to inflict harm upon either of those three individuals.

Berengar had for some time suspected Conrad might do something to his son, and thus he had the infant's room constantly under lockdown; only he, Henrietta, and Linde were allowed into the room. Since becoming a father, he had grown paranoid and did not even trust his staff to take care of his infant son.

As for Henrietta, there was no way Conrad could harm her; the little girl was incredibly skittish and would never get near enough to Conrad for him to hurt her; even then, guards followed her around the clock to ensure her safety. If Conrad even attempted to harm the girl, a bayonet wall would be placed in front of him, and he would be killed on the spot.

Thus, for now, he had to wait until Linde found something else she loved, then Conrad would make sure to torment her by taking it away! He could already feel the excitement of doing such a thing. It was just a shame he did not get to see Linde's disturbed face, but her scream was enough for him to enjoy; it replayed itself in his mind on repeat, thinking about such things brought a wicked grin to his face.

As for Berengar, while his forces led an investigation, he had personally buried the three cats that were Linde's dear pets and brought his lover into the bath, where he scrubbed her clean. She was incredibly distraught by the barbaric display that somebody had made out of her pets, and she could not stop sobbing.

Berengar was in the middle of comforting her in this crisis as she held him close and stroked her silky strawberry blonde hair.

"I swear I will find whoever did this and end their miserable existence!"



Berengar was not exactly the best at comforting others; the best he could do was be there for Linde and promise to avenge the cats. Though Linde was sobbing, she managed to make out a phrase.

"Why... why would someone do this? What did I do to deserve this?"

Berengar instantly grabbed ahold of the girl and wrapped her into his embrace as he tried to comfort her once more.

"This is not your fault; if anything, it is mine. I have made too many enemies, somehow they must have gotten to someone in the Castle, and this is their way of warning me! When I find out who plotted this, I will raise their Castle to the ground and butcher their family in front of their eyes!"

Berengar was thoroughly outraged; this act had pressed on three of his reverse scales. First off, it challenged his authority and control over his own home. He would not sleep easily at night knowing that his enemies could so easily accomplish something like this.

Secondly, this was a threat to him, and his loved ones and Berengar did not tolerate threats. To do something like this meant someone was confident enough in their ability that they believed Berengar could not harm them even if he found out their identity, and for that degree of arrogance, he could not abide by it.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the son of a bitch responsible for this savage act had crossed the line in the worst way possible, he had made one of his women cry, and for that, the penalty was death. Berengar did not care who was responsible for making Linde scream; they would face the full might of his wrath!

After a while, the couple finally got out of the bath, where Berengar sent Linde to their room; he also got Henrietta to sleep alongside her. The room was under constant guard by his most elite and loyal units. Men who had served beside him in many battles, and would risk their lives to protect him and his family, men who would never betray him.

After settling these affairs, Berengar sat on his seat of power, where he consumed copious amounts of alcohol, he would sit here until the perpetrator

was revealed, and then he would have his vengeance.? An entire night passed before all the evidence was gathered, the head chef, the maid in the hallway, as well as the blood trail, and the blood-stained clothing wrapped around the murder weapon.

All of these things had been gathered before Berengar while he drank from his skull chalice with an ice-cold expression on his face. The Captain of his guard approached Berengar after bringing the evidence before him and began to make his accusation.

"Your excellency, all signs point to Conrad being the perpetrator; there is a blood trail leading to his room. We found his tunic stained in blood and wrapped around the weapon that was used in the killing in a bush below his window. We even have an eyewitness reporting that they saw him enter the courtyard shortly before the crime. The head chef and his entire staff can also testify that Conrad has ordered him to give up a knife earlier in the day without explaining the reason for it."

At this point, Berengar was consumed with rage; however, his rationality told him he couldn't very well kill the legitimate Duke for murdering a few house pets. Nevertheless, something needed to be done, and as such, Berengar asked the question on his mind.

"Where is the boy now?"

The Captain of the guard quickly offered his knowledge in response to his lord's request.

"He is currently contained within his room; we have guards posted outside the door to ensure he does not escape. What do you want us to do with the young Duke, your excellency?"

Berengar thought about it for a few moments before making a shocking declaration.

"Nothing... I will speak to the boy myself. As for the rest of you, swear upon pain of death that you will not reveal the contents of this conversation."

After seeing the murderous glare in Berengar's eyes, everyone in the room who had witnessed the conversation pledged a vow of eternal silence on the matter.

"I swear by the pain of death that I will never reveal the contents of the conversation that has taken place here."

Afterward, Berengar signaled for the people to be dismissed. He then sighed heavily before getting up off his chair and strolling towards Conrad's quarters. When he finally arrived, the guards saluted him, and Berengar gave his command.

"Open it!"

with that, the guards nodded and opened the door that led to Conrad's room; they were about to follow him in when Berengar raised his hand and halted them.

"Stay outside, and make sure nobody enters."

One of the guards immediately protested the decision

"Your excellency, I don't think this is a good idea..."

Yet all he got in return for his warning was a hateful gaze that burned with the fury of a thousand suns; upon seeing that, he quickly shut his trap and did as he was told. Afterward, Berengar proceeded into the room and closed the door behind him, latching it in place.

Upon entering, Berengar saw Conrad staring at him with a nervous expression. He did not realize how he managed to get caught so soon. Berengar was as cold as ice and slowly approached the window where he opened it, allowing the cold breeze of the summer dawn to waft upon him.

After a few moments of silence, he leaned on the wall next to the window and crossed his arms before breaking the silence.

"Conrad, enlighten me if you will because I am dreadfully confused... Are you so arrogant that you believed even after figuring out who was responsible for such a heinous crime that I would not punish you? Or are you simply the most unbelievably stupid criminal in the history of mankind? Did you really believe I would not find out you did it?"

Conrad immediately played dumb and looked away from Berengar as he did so.

"I have no idea what you are talking about..."

With this, Berengar sighed before raising his tone to that of an oppressive Tyrant.

"There is a blood trail that leads directly to your room, your tunic soaked in the blood of the victims was found wrapped around the murder weapon in the bushes below your window, and there were eyewitnesses who can put you within the vicinity of the crime scene shortly before it happened.

On top of all of that, my entire kitchen staff can testify that you showed up and took the murder weapon from their hands. So cut that act, and answer my questions. Why on Earth would you do such a thing? Are you that unsatisfied with the way I am managing the realm that you must resort to threatening me by killing my lover's pets?"

Realizing that he had been caught red-handed, Conrad began to laugh until finally, he asked a question to Berengar that he did not expect.

"Do you have such a glorious image of yourself that you believe I did this to threaten you? This has nothing to do with you, Berengar!"

Berengar was astonished when he heard this; he could not think of another reason why the boy would behave in such a vile manner, and as such, Berengar inquired about the boy's reasoning.

"Then why?"

Conrad immediately gritted his teeth and ground them in a fury before screaming at the top of his lungs.

"To teach that bitch a lesson!"

Hearing that the target of Conrad's attack was not himself but his lover, Berengar's mind immediately became engulfed in fury. He could no longer contain his anger as it quickly consumed all rational thought. If there was one thing that could destroy his logic and reason, it was someone targeting his loved ones.

He was fair game, but those he cared about were strictly off-limits. Despite his devouring rage, he looked at Conrad with a cold and indifferent expression, leading one to believe he was perfectly calm. In doing so, he turned his attention to the light of dawn that slowly began to reveal itself, and as such, he beckoned Conrad over to his side.

"Conrad, come here. I want to show you something..."

Conrad was confused as to why Berengar was so calm, but in his naivety, he did not feel a hint of danger, for Berengar would never kill him off so abruptly. After all, if he had a sudden unexplainable death, it would cause the other lords of Austria to rise against him. As such, he humored Berengar and walked next to him, standing in front of the open window, gazing upon the beautiful sunrise.

After arriving next to Berengar, the young Count of Tyrol began to speak to Conrad in a chilling tone.

"Conrad... Tell me something. Do you know what the punishment is for harming my loved ones?"

Conrad immediately shifted his gaze from the sunrise to Berengar's calm and stoic look before putting on a shit-eating grin; he was extremely confident Berengar would not kill him and as such arrogantly challenged Berengar.

"No, what?"

At that moment, a murderous aura erupted from Berengar and displayed itself through his eyes; the moment it did so, Berengar revealed the penalty for Conrad's crimes.

"Death!"

before Conrad could even react to this statement, Berengar had pushed him over the windowpane, and the boy fell headfirst into the stone courtyard below. The moment his head came into contact with the hard surface, he died on the spot. Conrad was truly and utterly dead, and with his death, the mighty Habsburg Dynasty was brought to an end.

As for Berengar, he gazed coldly upon the scene of his crime for but a moment before leaving Conrad's chambers with an apathetic expression on his face and a murderous glint in his eyes.

*Chapter 217: Preparation is the Key to Survival*

Down on the ground below Conrad's room was the shattered body of a young

boy; this boy was the Duke of Austria, that is until moments prior. The servants of the Castle of Kufstein quickly gathered around the corpse and gazed with horror. Though they were aware that this boy was a puppet of Berengar, they could not imagine what events had led to his death.

Quickly the guards gathered and began to secure the scene. Berengar, of course, was long out of sight; he had murdered the boy by defenestrating him, and in doing so, covered his tracks quite well. Not a single soul had seen Berengar in the window with Conrad, and only his most loyal men knew that he had visited the boy during the hour of his death.

Thus while the guards secured the scene, Berengar was sitting on his seat of power, staring off into space. He had a momentary lapse in judgment after hearing that Conrad had murdered Linde's pets specifically to cause the

young woman mental anguish and had thrown the boy out of the window and  
to his untimely demise.

However, by now, Berengar's clarity had returned, and he realized his actions  
were not only rash but also foolish. With Conrad's death, he had to move up  
his plans for usurpation by several years. The boy was supposed to die a slow  
poisoned death that appeared to be a natural illness. Yet now he lies  
splattered on the stone floor of his Castle courtyard.

This would undoubtedly cause the Nobles of Austria to view Berengar with  
suspicion, and that was the best-case scenario. The moment Berengar  
revealed Conrad's death to the rest of the realm, he would potentially face  
open rebellion. He could undoubtedly manage with his current armies but the  
results of such a conflict would certainly delay his reforms by a large degree.

Austria still had yet to recover from the war with the Bavarians, and now a few  
months later, they were once more on the brink of war. Though rebellion  
against his rule by the higher nobility was a certainty, he had yet to fully  
prepare for a quick and thorough war with the other nobles. Berengar deeply  
pondered his next step.

Considering only the people in the Castle of Kufstein knew of Conrad's death,  
Berengar would try to conceal such a thing as long as he possibly could. At

most, he could buy himself a few weeks. How he utilized this brief period would be of critical importance in securing his authority over Austria. However, before he could do anything related to that, he needed an excuse for Conrad's death.

While he was thinking about such an Outcome, Linde arrived in front of him; her eyes were red and puffy from a long night of crying. Despite this, she had a stern look on her face, she knew that by now, Berengar should have some idea who the culprit was behind the death of her beloved pets, and thus she quickly asked him the thought on her mind.

"Did you find the culprit?"

Berengar, who until now was in deep thought reflecting on his actions and the future events that they had spurred, suddenly noticed his beautiful lover standing before him and nodded his head in silence.

Linde bit her lips as she was afraid to ask the perpetrator's identity, but ultimately she felt she needed to know who was responsible for such a heinous act if she were to gain closure; thus, she steeled her resolved and asked the question.

"Who was it?"



Berengar sighed heavily before revealing the identity of the criminal.

"Conrad..."

Hearing this news, a look of disgust and hatred combined itself upon Linde's immaculate heart-shaped face before she finally snapped.

"That bastard! Where is he now!?! I want to punish him severely!"

However, Berengar's following words shocked her completely

"Dead..."

A series of complex emotions overwhelmed the heavenly beauty at this moment; she had no idea how to react to this news. On the one hand, she was glad that justice had been dealt to the sadistic brat for his vile actions.

However, she knew the consequences such a thing could have; as such, she never actually planned to kill him when she heard that the young Duke was responsible for the deaths of her pets. Without realizing it, Linde became increasingly concerned and spat out the question on her mind.

"What did you do?"

Berengar looked around his Great Hall for a few moments, inspecting to see if anyone was listening in before he finally revealed what had transpired moments ago.

"I don't know; It is all a blur. Initially, I intended to scold him, maybe even beat him severely for his actions. However, when he told me that the reason for his wicked deeds was for the sole purpose of causing you anguish, something just snapped in my mind. The next thing I knew, Conrad was falling out the window headfirst into the courtyard below."

Seeing the complicated expression on Berengar's face, Linde quickly approached him and kneeled before him, grabbing ahold of his hand and bringing it to her heart. She understood that his love for her and overwhelming desire to protect her had caused him to lose control of his actions and murder the boy.

She, too, would likely do such a thing if their roles were reversed.? Rather than allow Berengar to reflect on his actions and further stress about them, Linde shifted the topic to something more productive.

"What now?"

With this said, Berengar looked into his lover's sky blue eyes with a solemn expression before revealing the intentions that he had come up with in his mind.

"We conceal his death for as long as possible; during this time, we prepare for war and have our troops armed and ready to march on the other Counties. I need you to gather intelligence, on the other Counts, from Voralberg to the Kustenland. I need to know who will challenge my usurpation and who will bend the knee. As for his cause of death? We will say it was a suicide. Without a proper investigation, nobody will know what has happened here on this day."

Linde quickly nodded; she still had a gloomy expression as she was still troubled by the deaths of her furry little pets, but she knew now was not the time to grieve; work needed to be done. They were in a period of critical importance; one mistake and all of their ambitions would come crashing down around them. Thus she did not have time to mourn her precious pets. After thinking about it for a few moments, the woman spoke her mind.

"I will get it done as quickly as possible. By the time the news is leaked, we will know who are our enemies and who are our allies!"

Seeing the woman he so dearly loved put aside her emotions for the greater good put a bitter smile on Berengar's face as he caressed his lover's glossy strawberry-blonde hair before hugging her tightly.

"I promise when this is all over, I will give you a period of reprieve where you can properly deal with your loss. I know how much you cared for those cats. I swear I will never allow something like this to happen again."

Though Berengar could not see her face, he could tell that the tears Linde had worked so hard to choke back had begun to flood down her exquisite face; she quickly latched onto Berengar and cried to her heart's content for the next few minutes. Afterward, she wiped them from her eyes before thanking Berengar.

"Thank you, and I promise I will have a comprehensive report on your desk by the end of the week!"

Berengar did not keep Linde any longer; he, too, had many matters to attend to in the upcoming days. For starters, he needed to write a series of official declarations of Conrad's demise and his usurpation of the boy's title. Of course, he would only release it after everything was in place for the transition of power in Austria.

Thus Berengar and Linde quickly got to work on preparing for the unknown future. Though it was entirely possible that the other Counts would respect his rise to power and bend the knee peacefully, Berengar was not a man who believed such a thing was likely. To him, it was better to be prepared for the outcome of the war, even if it didn't happen, than it was to hope for the best and leave himself vulnerable.

Berengar had an idea in his head of how this war would play out, but he needed to know for sure. Thus he had set Linde to task to find out who his enemies were. However, Berengar was pretty confident that Count Otto, who ruled over Steiermark, Count Audeger, who ruled over Vorarlberg, and Count Adelbrand, who under Berengar's direction, had replaced his brother Wolfgang as the Count of Salzburg would be aligned with him.

As for the Counties of Upper Austria, Lower Austria, K?rnten, Krain, and the Kustenland? Berengar did not know how they would react to Conrad's death or who they would side with. Thus he needed to prepare himself for the possibility of a Civil War.

### *Chapter 218: Surprise Visit*

While Berengar and Linde were preparing for the possibility of another war, the Byzantine Princess had an important guest visit her. Though At the moment, Honoria was entertaining herself in the courtyard with her pet Eagle Heraclius, utterly unaware that her fiance was about to see her.

Since Honoria was five, she raised the eastern imperial eagle as her pet, and it was quite honestly her only friend. She was the only daughter of the current Byzantine Emperor, and to say her relationship with her brothers was strained could be considered an understatement.

Since a young age, she had been heavily sheltered by her parents, to the point where she had never even left the palace or its grounds. The only men she had met outside of her family were either her father's subordinates or the various suitors that had heard of her legendary beauty and traveled a long way to meet her.

Despite this, she found every man who attempted to gain her hand in marriage to be genuinely insufferable. Thus she had rejected them all ruthlessly, to the point where she was now fifteen and close to the age of marriage without a fiancé. That is until relatively recently where her father had, against her wishes, engaged her to the Crown Prince of France.

Honoria wore a pretty smile and giggled as she played with her pet eagle. Its majestic wingspan revealed itself as it took off into the sky and hovered in the air, like a watchful guardian of its friend and master. However, seeing an unknown man approach Honoria's vicinity, the eagle instantly dived down and got in the man's path.

This man was Aubry de Valois, the Crown Prince of France and Honoria's fiancé. He had traveled a great distance to meet the gorgeous young princess whom he was engaged to. However, the moment Honoria saw the man in front of her, a frown instantly spread across her exquisite face, and she merely snubbed the man.

Aubry was by no means a masculine man, even though he was said to be a talented warrior. The young man was overtly feminine not just in his facial features but also in the shape of his body. He was petite, slender, lean, and had the skin of a woman. He had long center-parted dirty blonde hair that went down to his waist and emerald green eyes. If one did not know his identity, they might mistake him for a woman upon first glance.

This was one of the reasons Honoria was not fond of the man; another was that he was a well-known pillow biter. Despite the Catholic Church's and society as a whole's intolerance for homosexuality, it still existed. Sometimes,

there were instances of men like Aubry who, despite being infamous for such proclivities, held high positions and were not subjected to the harassment of the Church.

Seeing his fiancée in front of him and an eagle blocking his path, Aubry put on a pretty smile as he maintained his distance, the sight of which instantly disgusted Honoria to the core of her being. Afterward, Aubry spoke in a voice so feminine it was virtually indistinguishable from a woman's.

"Honoria! I am so happy to meet you finally! I am Prince Aubrey de Valois of the Kingdom of France! Daddy said you were beautiful; it appears he was not lying; how do you make your skin so pale? It is gorgeous! I wish I had skin as fair as yours."

The man did not even try to hide the fact that he was not the slightest bit interested in Honoria as a woman. The way he complimented her was as if he was another girl seeking beauty tips. Honoria was convinced that if cross-dressing were not a severe offense in Europe, this man would undoubtedly walk around in women's clothes, and nobody would be any the wiser about his actual gender.

As such, Honoria merely snubbed the man and lifted her arm before shouting a command.

"Heraclius, come!" With that, the eastern imperial eagle flew down onto her forearm and perched upon it, where the young princess proceeded to walk away from her fiancée without paying him the slightest bit of attention.

Seeing his fiancée flee in the opposite direction, the young man attempted to approach Honoria. However, the moment he got close to her, the eagle known as Heraclius, quickly splayed its wings and cawed at the French Prince.

Though Aubry was a battle-hardened knight, the overprotective nature of the eagle sent a shiver down his spine as he could very clearly feel its killing intent. He immediately became aware that with the eagle protecting Honoria, he would have no way to approach her and accomplish the goal his father had set for him, which was to gain her favor.

After all, the Kingdom of France needed a powerful ally. It was currently engaged in a war with England. Their neighbor to the East was presently embroiled in a civil war, with a notably problematic individual rising to power amid the Chaos. If France wanted to maintain its dominance over European affairs, they would need to cultivate an alliance with the major power of the Mediterranean, and that was the Byzantine Empire.

However, before he could even begin to accomplish such a task, the princess had snubbed him as if he were nothing more than ordinary refuse. Aubry quickly let out a sigh, and seeing that he was the only one around, he promptly began to pout as he expressed his thoughts.

"If only I could marry one of her brothers, it is much easier to seduce a man than it is to befriend a woman, and no man can resist my charms!"

After leaving Aubry behind with his thoughts, Honoria ran into the palace with Heraclius attached to her arm before leading him up to her room, where she quickly shut it behind her. Afterward, the eagle flew over to a perching post and rested upon it while gazing at his master with a mocking expression.

The eagle was brilliant and was essentially making fun of the fact that Honoria would be forced to marry someone who was more woman than a man. Seeing the shit-eating grin on Heraclius' face, Honoria tossed a pillow at the bird before chastising it.

"What are you laughing at!?!"

Heraclius, of course, dodged the attack and landed on the bed in front of Honoria, where she was sprawled out and pouting. She clutched another one of her silk-covered pillows and began to scream into it at the top of her lungs. Of course, the sound was muffled, and nobody but her and Heraclius could hear such a thing.

After releasing her pent-up frustrations, Honoria felt a little bit better about the whole situation, and she began to think aloud, as she so often did when she was alone.

"Am I destined to be sold off to the sissy French Prince and live out the rest of my days as a trophy wife for that fairy?"



Honorina instantly began to bite her luscious pink lips as she continued to pout over the situation she was in.

"Won't somebody save me from this marriage?"

At that moment, she heard a knock on the door and the worried tone of a familiar voice came from the outside.

"Princess, are you in here? I heard that you ran off from the meeting with your fiancé. Are you alright?"

Honorina instantly began to pout once more before yelling at the door.

"Go away!"

She knew exactly who was behind the door, and she did not feel like talking to him at the moment. The man standing behind the door was Arethas, and he heavily sighed when he heard these words before acquiescing to the princess's demands.

"As you wish, your highness."

shortly after saying these words, Honorina realized something; she was curious about the conversation that Arethas had with her father not long ago in the royal gardens and thus quickly ran to the door and opened its latch. The act of which surprised Arethas and her subsequent actions further confused him.

Honorina blushed lightly and looked away from Arethas before muttering in a low tone.

"Come in... I have some questions to ask you!"

Hearing that he was welcome, he took the princess up on his offer and entered her room, where he quickly sat down on one of her chairs. The princess herself sat down on the bed and stared awkwardly at the man who had acted as an Uncle to her growing up.

Arethas was one of the Emperor's best generals and was a close personal friend of the family. Though he had been away on campaigns for the last few years, he commonly acted as a confidant for the princess during her childhood since she did not have any friends other than her pet eagle.

After a few moments of silence, Honoria finally cleared her throat and spoke the question on her mind.

"I want to ask you about the man named Berengar..."

Arethas was even further confused when he heard this question; just where had the girl heard that name before? and why was she interested in a lowly Count from across the sea? Nevertheless, since she had asked, he had no choice but to answer to the best of his ability.

"What do you want to know about him?"

Hearing that Arethas was willing to answer her questions, Honoria became quite flustered; she had not thought through the questions she wanted to ask, and so she took a few moments to consider before the first question came to her mind.

"What is he like?"

Arethas thought about this question for a few minutes before giving an honest evaluation of the man.

"Berengar is a ruthless and ambitious man who will do whatever it takes and offend whoever he desires so long as he is capable of achieving his goals..."

Hearing this, Honoria was about to lose interest; though she wanted to be the wife of an ambitious and capable man, she did not care for cruelty. However, before she could entirely give up on the subject, Arethas continued his evaluation.

"Despite this, he is exceptionally benevolent to his friends, family, and the people under his protection. Every time I return to the city he has built, the people seem happier and wealthier than they were prior. He has spent a significant expense on building walls that rival our Theodosian walls around

his city to protect his people and has even developed an enhanced system of plumbing and waste disposal to ensure the health of his citizens.

From the interactions I have seen with his family, he seems to care deeply about their safety, health, and happiness. If I had to evaluate the man, I would say he is kindhearted and charitable to his allies but ruthless and tyrannical to his enemies. He will stop at no lengths to protect his loved ones, no matter how vile the actions may be or how powerful the enemies he may make. Berengar von Kufstein is undoubtedly a formidable man, one who is destined for greatness... Assuming he lives long enough to achieve it."

Hearing Arethas, the mighty General of the Byzantine Empire, so thoroughly compliment the man further fueled Honoria's sense of wonder in Berengar. A large twinkle appeared in her mint green eyes as she blurted out the next question on her mind.

"Is he handsome?"

Arethas was taken aback by the statement, though he never wanted to admit it; Berengar was exceptionally handsome and charming; those two aspects added to his natural charisma. Something that Arethas greatly envied about the man.

However, when the princess was the one to ask him the question, he had no choice but to answer honestly. He nodded his head in agreement rather than waste words describing Berengar's appearance.

Hearing that Berengar was handsome on top of his exceptional character made Honoria even more interested in the man. Thus the last question was one of critical importance to her. Thus she began to blush lightly as she poked her index fingers into one another without looking Arethas in the eyes.

"Is he married?"

It took Arethas a while, but he finally understood why this girl was asking about Berengar; as such, he began to chuckle before giving her an honest answer.

"I wouldn't get my hopes up if I were you, my dear princess. Not only is he engaged to a very caring young woman, but he also has a lover on the side who is equally exceptional. Her beauty is not inferior to your own; they also have a child together. I am sorry to say, but it would never work out between you and him.

Even if Berengar is a valued trading partner of the Empire, and one day becomes the ruler of significant power. Your father will never allow you to become a mere concubine, and I doubt Berengar will break his marriage to the girl he is set to marry. I hate to say it, Honoria, but you have to face the facts. You are now engaged to the crown prince of France, and despite your objections, that isn't going to change."

Hearing this news, Honoria's fragile heart nearly imploded, she felt like she had found the perfect companion, but he was already engaged and had a lover, which means there was likely no place for her in his life. On top of that, Arethas had reminded her of her dreaded betrothal. As such, her expression immediately soured, and she nodded her head with lifeless eyes.

Seeing the state of the princess's depression, Arethas felt his heartbreak, but there was nothing he could do about such a thing. As such, he decided to leave her be to have some time to think to herself. After leaving her room and shutting the door behind him, Honoria slowly broke into tears. She would spend the rest of the day moping about her future.

#### *Chapter 219: Quelling a Rebellion Before it Begins*

The illumination of high noon gleamed through the windows of Berengar's study, and with it, landed upon his handsome figure. The young Count had a calm expression as he sipped from his tea. In front of him were two people reporting the news he had been waiting for. One of these individuals was his lover Linde, and the other was his close friend and Field Marshal Eckhard.

As Berengar enjoyed the flavor of the chamomile tea, Linde spread a report across his desk; its contents revealed the general attitudes of the noblemen of Austria and how they would react to the news of Conrad's demise and Berengar's declaration of usurpation.

As Berengar read through its contents, Linde announced the general summary of what the report contained.

"As you have expected, Count Audeger, Count Otto, and Count Adelbrand will support you. Their views are simple, to struggle against you is an act of suicide. Besides that, there is a consensus by these Counts and their Vassals that despite losing power in the forms of feudal armies, the economic benefits of tying their dynasties to positions of control over your businesses far outweigh the losses they will suffer because of your reforms."

Berengar nodded in approval when he heard this and continued to read the report; while he did so, Linde further commented on it.

"Upper and Lower Austria will stay out of the conflict entirely. Our spies have reported that while the Count of those Upper Austria is not favorable towards you or your rise to power, his Vassals support your reforms, and without their aid, the Count will not have the armies to rebel against you. As for Lower Austria, as you know it is the crownland ruled by Conrad, with his death it has fallen directly into your hands. As such you will see no resistance in the Northern portion of Austria.

Berengar flipped through the pages while drinking from his tea, nodding in silence. The report was thorough and included far more details than Linde was summarizing; as such, he took the time to read through it while his lover continued to report her findings.

"The regions that are sure to rebel against you when you proclaim yourself Duke are the Counties of Kärnten, Krain, and Kustenland. In other words, the southern regions of Austria. The Counts of those regions are greatly repulsed by your rapid ascension to power and consider you nothing more than a jumped-up Baron. Aside from Kärnten, the other two counties did not personally witness the might of your forces in battle, and as such genuinely believe they might have a chance to stand against you."

While he heard this, Berengar smiled wickedly as he broached the subject with Eckhard, who was standing nearby silently listening to the report.

"Tell me, Field Marshal, how would you handle the situation?"

Eckhard scratched his beard for a few moments while he pondered about the information he had received before coming up with a solution.

"If I were you, I would deploy a few thousand troops to the southern counties under the guise of internal security. After all, since the Bavarian withdrawal, there has been a severe problem with brigands and highwaymen throughout south Austria. The local Lords may be unhappy about it, but you are the Regent of Austria, and as far as they know, Conrad is still alive.

By showing overwhelming force and occupying the regions in the name of internal security, you can squash any form of rebellion before it even begins. The advantage we have is that nobody outside of Kufstein castle is aware of Conrad's death, and before you reveal this card, they can not do anything to rebel.

When you finally announce Conrad's death and that you will be usurping the position of Duke, they will not have the means to fight you, as you will already have occupied their cities and ports—ensuring your rule over the regions.

They might try to foster an insurgency among the local population, but this can be counteracted by introducing your agricultural and industrial reforms; in doing so, the common population will see their daily lives improve and will be less likely to rebel in favor of the local nobility who treat them as slaves. There will be some bloodshed, but it will be minimal, and your reign as Duke over all of Austria will be secured."

Hearing this, Berengar began to tap his fingers on his desk repeatedly for a few moments; this was plausible and was a great way to prevent unnecessary bloodshed in his ascension to the status of a Duke. However, this action plan failed to remove the Counts in power, who would surely continue to scheme against him. Thus Berengar asked the question on his mind.

"If we do this, we will not be able to eliminate the disgruntled noblemen who will do their best to resist my reforms for years to come. How do you suggest we deal with them?"

Before Eckhard could speak up, Linde immediately voiced her opinion on the matter.

"You do not need to worry about this; I have a plan in mind that would allow us to be rid of their treachery permanently while making your ascension of power seem legitimate. As you know, my family is the major Cadet Branch of the

main Habsburg line. With Conrad's death, my brother Liutbert is the next in line to inherit the Duchy.

By luring the rebellious Lords to Innsbruck under the guise of a mutiny against your regency, we can gather every nobleman who seeks to defy your rule in one place, where my brother will raise an army against you. After a small battle, he will concede defeat and transfer surrender his claim to the Duchy of Austria in favor of you. In doing so, the mutinous Lords will be rounded up and executed for their treasonous activities.

My brother will be spared as a benevolent action on your part and will be removed from the position of Chancellor as punishment for his alleged betrayal but still allowed to rule over Innsbruck. As for the rebellious Lords' successors they can be persuaded to toe the line."

Linde made sure to emphasize the word persuaded; it would not be done civilly, bribery, skullduggery, even threats could all be used to make sure the successors of these noblemen would do as they were told. Was it corrupt? Sure, however, sometimes underhanded tactics were necessary to achieve his goals, and Berengar understood this.

Hearing his lover come up with such a dastardly plot, a wicked grin spread across Berengar's lips as he nodded his head with approval. He took another sip from his tea before revealing the thoughts on his mind.

"Alright, I approve of this plan. I want all critical areas of the potentially rebellious counties secure before I reveal the news. You two have your work cut out for you, and I expect it accomplished promptly!"

Eckhard saluted Berengar and responded in the affirmative

"Yes, your excellency!"

As for Linde, she put on a sultry smile before seductively responding to Berengar.

"Anything for you, lover..."

After hearing his two subordinates agree to this plan of action, Berengar leaned back in his chair and gave one more order.

"Dismissed!"

Hearing this, Linde quickly got to the task; while Eckhard stayed behind, noticing that his Field Marshal was still in the room, Berengar asked the man for his reasoning.

"Is something the matter?"

Eckhard had a complicated expression on his face. He did not know the whole truth of Conrad's death, but he suspected it was not a suicide as Berengar had proclaimed to the Castle's staff; as such, he closed the door before approaching Berengar, who was sitting calmly in his leather seat.

"Your excellency, I would like to know the truth about what happened with Conrad... I suspect there is more to the story than a simple suicide, and if you did have a hand in this, it completely goes against the long-term plan that you had in place.

Hearing Eckhard's concerns, Berengar quickly placed his head in the palm of his hand and sighed before revealing the truth of the matter to his loyal Field Marshal, albeit with some exaggeration.

"The boy targetted Linde; he killed her pets in an attempt to cause her mental anguish. Not only did he kill them, but he mounted their heads on sticks outside of their home. If he was so wicked that he would murder three innocent cats to harm Linde, what about Hans? Would the brat target my son next? I do not believe he had not thought of such a thing, and as such, I could not take the risk. So I threw him out his window."

Eckhard was shocked about hearing this news; he had no idea that Conrad had become so vile during his stay in Kufstein. As such, he let out a large sigh before speaking his thoughts on the matter.

"If I were in your position, I too would have done such a thing. To think the little brat was so far gone. It is good that he is finally dead; now we can make some real progress in Austria. Alright, I understand the reasoning for your



actions now; I had thought you might have become impatient and rushed your rise to power, and for my assumption, I apologize.

After all, it is a man's responsibility to protect his family from all threats. You are correct to assume he would try to harm your family next; even if he did not have such thoughts at the time, he was working up to it. Thank you for being honest with me."

Berengar smiled when Eckhard agreed with his actions; after the brief argument they had over the act of poisoning the boy, he was beginning to suspect that Eckhard might be too soft for the path that Berengar trod upon. Yet, Eckhard's response had alleviated his concerns for the time being as such; Berengar stood up and clasped the man's shoulder while looking into his eyes before speaking the words on his mind.

"It is no problem, my friend. Now go forth and set the army to the task."

Eckhard nodded and smiled at Berengar's response shortly after he departed and began to fulfill his plan to secure the title of Duke for Berengar. With this strategy in mind, Berengar's transition to power would be stable, and his enemies within his domain would be dealt with accordingly.

### *Chapter 220: The Brigand Act*

The following day Berengar proclaimed the realm of Austria as he passed a controversial law into effect within the entirety of the domain. This law was known as the Brigand Act, and by the time the southern Lords realized it was nothing more than a ruse it would be too late.

"I, Count Berengar von Kufstein, Regent of the Duchy of Austria hereby declare the signing of the Brigand Act into law. Under this act, the soldiers of the Austrian Army, currently comprised of the various units from Tyrol, will be stationed throughout the Counties of Austria to ensure that the plethora of brigands, bandits, highwaymen, and other ruffians who have appeared within our realm since the destruction brought upon it by the Bavarian occupation shall be brought to justice!"

With that said, the Austrian Army, which was simply the Tyrolean Army rebranded under Berengar's regency, was immediately deployed to the

regions most afflicted with brigands, that being the counties most likely to rebel against Berengar's transition to power.

Willehelm Krieger stared at the notice in his hands as he rode on horseback towards the region known as Kustenland. This region which was also known as the Austrian Littoral was critical to Berengar's plans to develop a Grand Navy.

Willehelm was a young man of common descent; his father was a man-at-arms like his father before him. He was one of the first men to join Berengar's Army; back during the days when it was considered a militia. He was one of the few members of the Officer class to come from common birth. Through his actions in Berengar's various campaigns, he had risen to the rank of Captain and was currently leading an effort to eliminate out a group of Brigands who had been occupying a village.

The unit he was in command of was mounted infantry, and they had become at the forefront of the fight against the Brigands in southern Austria. Due to their rapid mobility and exceptional firepower, mounted infantry was one of the most deployed units to combat the ruffians who had been causing trouble for the south. As for the rest of the infantry, cavalry, and artillery units they occupied the cities, towns, and ports of southern Austria. Their total numbers were within the thousands.

Willehelm and his company of soldiers approached the village and noticed that a crude barrier had been set up around it. The brigands who had taken over the town had been using it as their hideout. Seeing that they were still a safe distance away, the troops dismounted before proceeding on foot.

At the moment, an extensive fog filled the air, making it very difficult to see a few yards in front of one's location. Thus they went unnoticed by the brigands who were currently enjoying the dawn by drinking, feasting, and abusing the women and girls of the village that they had occupied. The few men stationed in the poorly constructed watchtowers had no idea that a company of soldiers was advancing onto their position.

The mounted infantry got on top of a hill overlooking the settlement, where a soldier took out his spyglass and surveyed the area; he quickly noticed that there were only half a dozen men on guard. As for the others, it was

impossible to know their numbers. However, these ruffians were poorly equipped and could easily be handled. Thus the soldiers began to load their rifled muskets before approaching the palisade on the north side.

After approaching the area, the sappers embedded with the company began to place TNT along with three positions, where they quickly fell back to a safe distance before detonating the explosive compound. A booming echo went off, and the north side of the barrier was turned into shrapnel, as such Willehelm gave the order to fire upon the dizzy and confused ruffians who acted as guards.

Immediately dozens of rifled muskets went off at the six targets, and the minie ball projectiles quickly penetrated through the flesh of the brigands. Large holes appeared in their chests and abdomens as blood sprayed in the air and onto the ground below.

Those who had fired their muskets quickly began to reload, and due to the use of the quick loading tubes they had been provided with, it was a much swifter process than it had been previously. As such, the company of soldiers was fully loaded in a matter of seconds.

Hearing the explosive blast and the sound of firearms being shot off, the brigands who hid within the settlement quickly began to flee from the buildings they were in; they knew their lives were in peril because the Austrian Army was here to deal with them, and they had no intention of sticking around to fight it out.

However, the moment they got into the open, Willehelm gave another order to his soldiers.

"pick your targets and fire at will!"

Thus while perched on the hill above, the company of soldiers fired their rifled muskets into the village below, targeting any man who wielded a weapon in their hands. Before long, those cowardly enough to flee the town were all gunned down, and Willehelm blew his whistle signaling the men to fix bayonets and charge into the settlement.

While the Austrian soldiers charged into the village with bayonets affixed, they immediately came into contact with another wave of brigands, and unleashed their fire upon them, before running them through with their bayonets.

After a brief and bloody scene, most of the bandits were killed and the brigand leader revealed himself. He had a young woman as a hostage and held a blade to her throat as he began to make his demands to the Austrian soldiers who had encircled him.

"Not a step closer! I'm warning you; I will cut this bitch's throat!"

Seeing the brigand so close to killing the hostage, Willehelm quickly gave a command to his forces.

"Halt!"

As the soldiers surrounded the man, Willehelm began to negotiate.

"Surrender willingly! Do not pointlessly shed any more blood!"

However, the man began to laugh and chastise Willehelm for his bold words.

"Surrender? Fuck off! You will just execute me! I want a horse and enough food and water for three days! if you don't hand it over to me, I will kill this cunt here, and now I swear to God!"

Seeing that the situation had turned sour, Willehelm immediately backed off and ordered his troops to fulfill the request.

"Do what he says! Quickly!"

However, as he did so, he gave a stern look to the soldier who rushed by and grabbed ahold of him before whispering in the man's ear.

"Bring my horse..."

The man quickly nodded, and as such ran off to the directions where the horses were hitched. Moments later the soldier returned with Willehelm's horse and handed it off to the Captain. Captain Willehelm immediately took control of the reins, and behind the cover of the horse, reached into the

holster that lay on the horse's saddle and grabbed ahold of his flintlock pistol, where he quietly cocked the lever.

After doing so, he brought the horse over to the brigand leader and handed the man the reins. Where the man began to laugh and mock Willehelm for his submissive attitude.

"Good! Good! Be a good little soldier..."

As the man hopped onto the horse, he quickly dragged the woman up into his lap, despite her kicking and screaming, and grinned at Captian Willehelm while doing so.

"You have helped me a lot; I'll make sure to free the lass after I have had fun with her."

Right before the man was could snap the reins and ride off into the dawn. The sound of gunfire echoed, and a musket ball pierced through the back of the brigand leader's skull and out the other side. His corpse immediately fell off the horse and onto the ground, where Captain Willehelm could be seen with a smoking pistol a few feet away. Luckily for him, his gun was rifled, and such a shot was easy enough to make without harming the women.

Afterward, he gave another command.

"Clean up the village, and make sure any other brigands who are hiding in the area are killed on the spot; there is no mercy for such villains!"

With that said, the company of soldiers got to task and investigated the village, where they found a few more brigands hiding among the peasants. After discovering these men, they were arrested, lined up against the wall, and summarily executed. This was only one village, but Scenes like this displayed themselves throughout the entire southern portion of Austria.

These actions were merely a cover Berengar used to hide his true intent. Only a tiny portion of the troops sent to the south was used for hunting down the brigands. In reality, Berengar needed less than a thousand men to accomplish these tasks.

Yet instead, he had sent thousands of soldiers into the southern Counties, where he began to house his troops within his enemies' borders. The vast majority of the soldiers occupied the cities, towns, and ports where Berengar intended to use these forces to instantly squash any rebellion that might take place.

When the Counts of Southern Austria realized that Conrad was dead, they would already be fully occupied by a large armed force—preventing them from revolting against Berengar's rule. Of course, Berengar had other plans in mind for those who resisted his authority, and while the Brigand Act was underway, Berengar began to plot against those who would resist his ascension to power.