

## Steel 281

### *Chapter 281: War of Attrition*

Eckhard gazed upon the remains of the battlefield; corpses littered the valley, belonging to both sides of the conflict in the thousands. Hussites and Catholics alike lie dead for the sake of their religious convictions. The battle was bloody and brutal, yet in the end, the Hussites had won.

During this last year of conflict, the violence that had occurred in Bohemia was on a scale truly fitting of a religious civil war. Eckhard as the chief military advisor tasked with providing support to the Hussites, had witnessed the cruelty of man at its full scale, and for what? Minor religious differences? The sheer level of savagery committed by both sides of the conflict was enough for a man to question his faith.

Did God genuinely desire such death and destruction in his name? Probably not, but if the idea of such actions reviled him, why did he permit it? These were thoughts going through the field marshal's head as he stood by his lonesome, observing the despair that resulted from the chaotic battle. Eckhard sighed heavily as he voiced his innermost thoughts on the issue.

"I have seen enough of death and destruction in my lifetime..."

Despite saying this, the veteran Field Marshal would continue his duties serving as Berengar's lead General, for war was an inevitable result of man's actions. It was also the only thing the man was any good at.

After praying for the souls of the fallen, Eckhard returned to the other officers of the Grand Army of Austria who had accompanied him during the Hussite campaign. Berengar's strategy had been to stall the conflict for as long as possible and dragged as many Catholics to their deaths to delay the upcoming crusade against the Berengar Heresy.

Eckhard did not disappoint on this matter; he advised the Hussites to slow down their forces and consolidate their gains over the past year. As such, the Hussites had less land than they could have seized. However, these lands were well fortified and defended.

Several months ago, the pope declared a Crusade against the Hussites because they were becoming increasingly close to overall victory. As such, the Crusading Orders of the world had gathered what few men they could spare to put down the Hussite Heresy before they could cause any further damage.

Among these Catholic military orders was the Bohemian Order of the Dragon, which had made a name for itself for the sheer acts of brutality they engaged in against the Hussites, and especially the people who supported them.

At the moment, the banner of the Order lay tattered and broken alongside the thousands of corpses of their fallen soldiers. The Hussite force had thoroughly crushed the latter under the guidance of Eckhard and his military advisors.

Eckhard gazed upon the once proud banner of the Chivalric Order who had lost their lives in battle, particularly that of the Grand Master whose lifeless eyes gazed towards the heavens as blood dripped from his mouth onto his beard.

In this single battle, the main force of the Order of the Dragon was crushed, snuffed out before they could make a name for themselves like the outstanding orders established centuries ago. Despite this, Eckhard knew this would not be the end of Bohemian Knights.

The Order of the Dragon was not to be confused with the Welsh Order of the Red Dragon, which the Vatican recently established to counteract the Berengar Heresy. This was a much older Chivalric Order found in Bohemia, Hungary, and Wallachia.

They would return in time with more significant numbers to attack the Hussites; Eckhard was sure of this. After taking one last glance at the blood and bile that filled the field, Eckhard shifted his attention to his officers nearby before speaking to them with a voice filled with determination.

"This is just one of many battles that await us; this war will not end any time soon. Steel yourselves, for we have much work to do."

After saying that, Eckhard approached the command tent where Alexej and the other Hussite leaders were gathered. Having stepped inside the dwelling,

the Hussite leaders glanced over at Eckhard. They held much respect for the Austrian Field Marshal; after all, if not for him and his officers, they could have suffered substantially more casualties throughout this war.

The leaders of the Hussites who were standing in the tent were encircled around a table filled with a map of Bohemia and the forces that represented both sides. Under Eckhard's guidance, the Hussites had taken a firm defensive stance, and as such, mainly was engaging in battles within their provinces.

At the moment, the Hussites held four out of seven provinces of the Kingdom of Bohemia. Through their best efforts and the advice of Eckhard, the Hussites had gained significant ground. This battle that had just occurred was fought in the fields of Plzeň, where the Hussites had defeated an army of Catholic soldiers.

Plzeň was a region owned by one of the Hussite factions, and the Kasparians had responded to their aid after a Catholic army was spotted in their lands. Through much hardship, a victory was achieved defending the ground, but it came at high costs.

Ultimately, the Kasparian armies arrived and drove their enemies out, slaughtering all who dared to attack the peasants of Plzeň and their farms. Alexej, who had personally led his forces into the fray, was currently displaying the latest report from his scouts about the enemy's movements.

"The main force of the Order of the Dragon has been defeated; they will probably crawl back to Hungary to lick their wounds until they can fight once more. However, news from the other side of the world is troublesome. The Hospitallers have cut off support from the Byzantine armies in Egypt and Libya.

They have withdrawn from their Crusade in North Africa and pledged support to the Catholics in Bohemia. As such, tens of thousands of crusaders now march towards our lands. The army is meant for a single purpose, to destroy our movement and massacre every man, woman, and child they deem to be a heretic!"

Eckhard observed the map closely, with the Hospitaller Knights entering the fray; this meant things would become difficult. They were a large and prestigious order and were also battle-hardened from the decades of warfare in North Africa. He would have to readjust his strategy if such a quantity of Crusaders were to pour into the war.

The veteran field Marshal approached the map and began to shift the pieces around without permission from the others. He moved several wooden pieces that represented Hussite troops into positions near the borders and the various fortifications that guarded them. After doing so, he spoke with determination and authority.

"The Hospitallers have entered Bohemia, which means we will be fighting thousands if not tens of thousands of more men. To put it simply, gaining any further ground is unlikely; what we need to do is defend our borders to the best of our ability and wear down the Catholic's numbers through attrition.

As of now, we are fighting a defensive war! Our best course of action is to maintain the ground we have gained while sending operatives into the enemy territory to sabotage their fields and food stockpiles. It may take months or even years, but sooner or later, the enemy will break their backs against our defenses and starve into submission!"

There was not a single voice of disagreement at the conference. The Hussite commanders were all well aware that the arrival of the hospitallers represented a shift in the balance of power, and as such, fighting on these terms was their best solution.

The war in Bohemia began to take a turn for the worse; the Hussites decided to engage in a series of protracted sieges while meeting the enemy in the fields of their territory to protect their citizens. The Catholics, overzealous and eager for vengeance, would slowly use their newfound strength to push into Hussite lands.

When this war of attrition waged, the Hussites would further import weapons, munitions, and food from Austria, racking up an enormous debt. The larger the debt, the more land Berengar would demand as a form of repayment.

The silver mines of Bohemia were a valuable resource, and as Berengar's economy grew, it also began to stagnate due to a lack of currency. Thus, he needed the mines in Bohemia to stimulate his Nation's growth until he could start his colonization of the new world and Africa.

Unknowingly the Hussites had begun to trap themselves in debt to Austria, in doing so sealing their fates. Berengar had not only sent his advisors to aid the Hussites but to ensure that the Hussites incurred more significant debt, One that could only be repaid with valuable land.

If the Hussites refused to surrender Bohemia to Austria after the war, Berengar would use the debt as a valid *casus belli* to take what he wanted. To him, the war in Bohemia was of great importance to funding his future campaigns to unify the German people.

#### *Chapter 282: Reuniting with an Old Friend*

Since Honoria's escape from Constantinople, Melissa had been staying in Antioch under the name of Vistula Melodia. Throughout this entire time, the Byzantine Royal family was unable to determine her real identity or that she had aided Honoria in her escape.

As such, she made a life for herself in Antioch. Having been given a second chance at life, Melissa did not go back to whoring herself out for a living. Instead, she eventually found herself married to a hardworking carpenter in the city.

Initially, she had spent her days in bliss, her marriage was a happy one at first, and she loved the man who had taken her in when she was down on her luck. However, happiness never truly lasts, and as such, Melissa's husband soon found himself drafted into the armed forces to fight in North Africa.

The meager pay that the man earned in the armies of the Byzantine Empire was sent back to Melissa in Antioch; however, this stipend was barely enough to survive. As such, her life was filled with hardship as she struggled to maintain her lifestyle.

Things turned for the worse as the young woman finally received news that her husband had died in battle; in return, she received nothing other than a body to bury, and with her little savings, she could not afford a proper funeral.

Thus in the act of desperation, she had taken out a loan from some unsavory merchants and used it to cover her husband's funeral expenses. Before long, the loan sharks had come to claim the debt she owed, and when they found out that she could not pay it, they attempted to force her into prostitution once more to clear the debt that she owed.

However, Melissa had promised that she would never degrade herself in such a manner ever again; as such, she packed up what little belongings she could take and made her way out of Antioch, heading to the one place where she knew anyone who could remotely help her.

After months of traveling, Melissa had finally arrived in Kufstein. The moment she entered the city's gates, the woman was astounded that such a magnificent city had been developed in the middle of Austria. A place that was not long ago considered a backwater by the Byzantines.

She could hardly believe her eyes as she walked through the city with her pack slung around her back. The City of Kufstein was unlike anything she thought it would be; it even could be said to rival some of the cities of the Empire.

After searching around some of the local shops in the trade district Melissa spotted the location where she intended to visit. Luckily for her, she could immediately tell her destination because the castle was built upon a hill overlooking the city. After traveling through the city's streets observing all kinds of exciting sights, Melissa finally arrived at the castle's gates.

However, when she finally reached her destination, she was blocked by the Castle Garrison, who prevented her entry into the mighty fortress where the Duke Resided.

"Hold it right there! The Duke is currently not seeing any visitors, so unless you have an invitation, you are not allowed into the castle!"

The moment Melissa heard this, she began to frown; she had been through so much and traveled so far that she felt it was a bit anti-climatic to be denied entry just like this. However, she could not easily get past the garrison, and as such, she began to sigh before turning around. Maybe if she were lucky, she could run into Honoria on the street someday.

Whether it was divine intervention or just random chance, Honoria had been out in the city meeting with her newest acquisitions to her crew and had just begun to return to the castle. The last time Honoria saw the woman known as melissa, she wore a wig and extensive makeup, despite this, the princess could easily identify the woman as they walked past each other

As such, Honoria stopped in her tracks and grabbed ahold of the woman's wrist, scaring her in the process, yet the next moment when Honoria called out her name, the woman realized who it was who had grabbed her and began to calm herself.

"Melissa, is that you? What are you doing here in Kufstein?"

After saying that, Honoria brought the woman into a friendly hug before releasing her. Melissa was quite shocked that she had managed to run into Honoria out of pure chance and struggled to gain her composure. Eventually, she calmed herself down before voicing her concerns to the young Princess she had helped run away from home.

"Honoria, I need your help..."

Seeing the troubled look in Melissa's eyes, Honoria became worried and grabbed ahold of the woman's hand before dragging her towards the castle with a pretty smile on her face.

"Whatever kind of trouble you are in, I am sure that Berengar can help you!"

When the guards saw the girl return, they were about to lower their rifles in a threatening gesture; however, they immediately pounded their chests in salute to the Duke's lover when they noticed Honoria was by her side.

"Lady Valeria, I am sorry we did not know this woman was your friend! I apologize on behalf of myself and my subordinates for any rudeness we might have shown her..."

Honoria paid no mind to the guard's statements; in her eyes, they were doing their job, keeping away the rabble and threats to the safety of those who dwelled within. As such, she smiled when responding to the men who guarded the castle's gates.

"Think nothing of it! I am certain you were fulfilling the task his grace has given you!"

Seeing the cheery smile on the Princess's face was enough to melt even the most stoic man's icy heart. If there was one thing the guards in Kufstein castle liked to chat about, it was the competition between the two goddesses who stayed by Berengar's side and which of the two women were better.

As such, the guards were just happy to have a conversation with such an angelic beauty and merely nodded their heads in silence, allowing Honoria and Melissa to enter the castle's gates. After entering the structure, Honoria took Melissa to the dining hall, where she ordered the kitchen staff to prepare something for the woman to eat and drink.

The two women sat in silence for some time before the food arrived, and they finally began to discuss the issue at hand. After taking a few bites of the delicious food, Melissa began to break out into tears as she confessed her faults to the Princess.

"I am sorry, Honoria, I just had nowhere else to go!"

Honoria instantly began to comfort the woman by rubbing her back; the two of them discussed the events that Melissa had been through in the past year in length for some time. Afterward, Honoria responded to Melissa with a gentle tone.

"If you need a place to stay, I am sure I can get Berengar to arrange a place for you; if you need a job, there is plenty of work available here in Kufstein! If you need the training to fulfill the job of your desires, that can be provided to you as well. You do not need to worry anymore; here in Kufstein, even women can work if they need to!"

What Honoria had said was true; Women were able to work in Kufstein. However, they were encouraged to get married, stay home, and raise families. The reason for this was simple, Berengar needed massive population growth if he intended to colonize the new world and Africa. There were only so many people in all German-Speaking regions; the number was likely less than 10 million in total.



However, Berengar recognized that there were women in situations where they too needed to work to provide for their families or themselves. As such, Berengar had allowed women to work in various fields, albeit segregated from the male workforce.

When Melissa heard this, she stopped crying and looked at Honoria with a careful gaze. She could hardly believe it. However, the earnest look in Honoria's mint green eyes told the woman all she needed to know about this, and as such, she hugged Honoria before thanking her.

"Thank you! I will appreciate any help you can provide!"

Honoria had reunited with an old friend, and Melissa would begin working in Kufstein soon enough, in a career that did not degrade her, which was all she ever wanted. The two women continued to chat for some time, as Honoria told Melissa all about what had happened during her stay in Kufstein and how she had fallen in love with Berengar.

Melissa was happy to see that life had worked out well for Honoria, and thus the two women became closer; despite this being the second time they had met, they already felt as if they had been friends for life.

### *Chapter 283: Fertility Incentives*

Once more, Berengar was in his study, which was where he spent most of his waking hours when he was at home. He was drafting a piece of legislation designed to encourage fertility among the Austrian population. The reason for him doing so was because he was looking toward's the future.

Within the upcoming decades, Berengar had intended to conquer and colonize large swaths of land across the world and inhabit it with German citizens. However, the German population at this time was low, it was at most between ten to fifteen million people, and due to the ongoing conflict, those numbers dwindled by the day.

As such, Berengar had established several laws designed to create strong families that could raise multiple children. First and foremost, Bernegar established both paid paternity and maternity leave. To Berengar, the physical and mental health of the next generation was a critical concern. Berengar had

based several laws on the Scandinavian countries from his past life, who had some of the best welfare laws on the books.

Parents of a child were entitled to up to 480 days of paid leave to raise a newborn child. Of course, this was the maximum based on specific requirements; a typical two-parent household was likely to get 240 days of paid leave.

Berengar's other laws to help raise fertility rates included a monthly stipend for every child a family had to help with childcare costs and what Berengar liked to refer to as a child starter pack. This starter pack was based upon what the Finnish government provided expecting mothers in his previous life.

The state provided this child starter pack to every expecting mother, which included a crib with a mattress, clothes, diapers, hygiene products, a sleeping bag, and outdoor gear. It also had a few small toys and a propaganda book for the parents to read to the children, which contained whitewashed children's stories of Berengar's conquests and goals.

Several sanitary measures were required by law that was put into place during childbirth, especially regarding washing one's hands and sterilizing tools used in the process. Berengar wanted to lower the child mortality rate to the best of his ability and had devised laws and procedures to achieve this goal.

After this comprehensive reform was signed into law under his executive powers, Berengar decided to relax for the time being. He already had two children, a son and a daughter with Linde, and it would not be long before Honoria came around to the idea of having children.

However, Berengar wanted to prevent that until after he married Adela and had a child with her. He felt terrible for the girl always coming in last place among his women, and as such, was willing to wait for some time with Honoria.

Another reason for this was a matter of legitimacy; until Berengar married Adela as his first wife, he could not enact polygamy for himself as the ruler of his realm and therefore could not marry either Linde or Adela as his other wives.

Thus at the moment, Linde's children were nothing more than bastards; Berengar would have to wait another year before he married their mother and legitimized them. Reflecting upon this Berengar decided to pour himself a glass of fortified wine, immediately drinking its contents before pouring himself another.

As he did so, he heard a knock on his door and knew it could only be one of two people; as such, he sighed heavily before responding.

"It's open!"

After the door opened, Honoria revealed herself, and in tow was a woman Berengar had not met before. However, at first glance, the two women appeared to be close. The moment Honoria entered the room, she put on a pleading expression as she asked her lover for a favor.

"Berengar, this is Melissa; she helped me escape from Constantinople and has fallen on some rough times. She has recently arrived in Kufstein and has no place to stay, nor any currency leftover from her journey. Could you help her out?"

After hearing this, Berengar took a sip from his skull chalice once more before reaching into his desk and pulling out a token, where he proceeded to hand it over to Honoria. This token had the new ducal arms of Berengar's house carved into it and symbolized his authority. After handing this token over to his lover, Berengar sighed before responding to her request.

"Show that to the landlord of whatever tenement she desires to move into, and also to whatever employer she seeks to work for. The treasury will pay out any costs accrued during her moving expenses. It is the least I can do for a friend of yours who aided you on your journey."

Melissa was shocked when she heard this. However, Honoria's actions startled her even more as the princess ran up to Berengar and hugged him before planting a kiss on his lips. Afterward, she responded in an affectionate tone.

"Thanks, Daddy!"

Berengar cringed when he heard this; for whatever reason, Honoria had begun to call him this after they started dating. It was pretty embarrassing for Berengar, but he supposed it was not too inaccurate. In a way, he provided for Honoria and looked after her as a father figure that she could look up to over this last year.

Of course, the moment Honoria realized she had called Berengar by his pet name in front of Melissa, she began to flush with embarrassment. She had forgotten entirely that Melissa was present and said something shameful in front of her friend.

If Linde called Berengar by the title "Master" in private, and Honoria referred to him as "Daddy," then Berengar dreaded the idea of what embarrassing pet name Adela would give him after they were finally married.

Berengar did not show it upon his face; as a ruler, he had to be dignified in all situations, and since they were not alone, he had a stoic expression on his face as he flicked Honoria on the forehead before chastising her.

"Behave yourself while we have company!"

When Honoria heard this, she bowed her head, too embarrassed to look her lover or her friend in the eyes. After a few moments of silence, Berengar gave Honoria an order.

"You've taken up enough of my time; go find your friend a place to stay and a job so that she can sustain herself! While you are at it, find yourself the rest of your crew members."

Honoria nodded before thanking Berengar one final time with a kiss on the cheek; afterward, she left with Melissa in tow, leaving Berengar by his lonesome. Though not for long, as Linde appeared shortly after and began to mock him.

"Daddy? Wow, I did not know you were into that kind of thing..."

She had been hiding in the shadows outside the door to his study the entire time, and as such, heard the conversation. Berengar smiled before grabbing ahold of his other lover and pulling her into his lap.

"Funny, I don't remember giving you permission to mock me?"

When Linde heard this, her training took over, and she instantly bowed her head in remorse before playing along to Berengar's games.

"I am sorry, Master, please forgive this rude slave for not knowing her place..."

As Berengar heard this, he began to chuckle before pushing Linde off of his lap, he knew what she wanted, but he was far too busy to entertain her desires. As such, he slapped her on her perfect behind before giving her a command.

"I am far too busy to entertain you right now; go play with yourself; I promise that tonight you can have me as much as you want!"

In response to this, Linde began to pout, but she did not make a fuss. Instead, she smiled before commenting on Berengar's remarks.

"I am going to hold you to that!"

With that said, she disappeared from Berengar's sight, leaving him alone in his study with nothing but a mountain of paperwork to get through. Gazing upon the large stack of paperwork in front of him, Berengar sighed heavily before pulling another document from the pile and beginning to read through it. He sighed to himself as he voiced his discontent with his current lot in life.

"Some people say peace is a desirable state, and for the people, I assume it is; to me, it is nothing but paperwork, and paperwork is dreadfully boring!"

As such, Berengar continued to fulfill his daily work well into the night, burning the midnight oil as per usual. It was well past midnight by the time he was able to fulfill his promise to Linde. Luckily for him, he had the stamina of a horse and could perform as long as Linde needed.

By morning Berengar was dreadfully exhausted and decided for once in his life to sleep in. As such, it would not be until past noon when he finally awoke from his slumber and was forced to resume his work.

#### *Chapter 284: Appointing an Admiral*

The sun shined down upon the Adriatic sea; off the coast of Trieste, there were a total of ten frigates lined up. These ships were among the largest available in Europe, and each held forty-four 24 lb cannons onboard. These ships were none other than the Berengar-Class Frigates that had been manufactured since the shipyards had finished construction.

These ships were crewed by hundreds if not thousands of men; among them were various officers. Many of whom had shown a tacit understanding of naval doctrine and tactics since the establishment of the Navy.

Berengar had spared no expense in raising sailors, marines, and officers alike in the construction of his Navy. He had even begun construction of a Naval Academy in Trieste. Though for the time being the Officers underwent the same crash course of warfare and doctrine that their counterparts in the army went over. The difference was that the curriculum was specially tailored for the Navy.

Among the ranks of these fine officers was a minor Austrian nobleman by the name of Emmerich von L?tzing. This man had proven time and again his capability in learning and employing naval doctrine. So much so that he had caught Berengar's eye.

The Duchy of Austria held a relatively large territory, and as such, there were plenty of talented individuals within the realm; some of them had potential in areas that had yet to be established. Emmerich was one of these men.

Until recently, there was no such thing as an Austrian Navy, and as such, the man had no idea the degree of natural talent he had for Naval Warfare. However, after enlisting in the Austrian Navy and going through basic training as well as Officer school, none stood out as much as Emmerich had.

One could say that Emmerich had the same level of potential in the field of Naval Warfare that Eckhard had on the land. The difference was that Emmerich was considerably younger than Eckhard and less experienced.

Berengar gazed at the sailors and officers gathered for this occasion and smiled upon them. These men were the first among his Naval personnel, and as such, they would form the backbone of his vision for a Grand Armada. As he stood there smiling before his soldiers, Berengar began to clear his throat before addressing the men in uniform.

"I stand before each, and every one of you humbled as I admire the spirit that has driven you to the lengths you have achieved this day. These few vessels that have been constructed are just the beginning of your journey as members of the Austrian Navy.

In the upcoming years, we will expand the number of vessels under our control and the size of them as well. These Frigates are just a sample of the advancements in Naval technology that have come to be under my reign.

Before long, there will be no force on this great Earth that can stand against you! The amount of firepower you all have available to you at the moment pales in comparison to what you will wield in the future!

Today is a joyous occasion as it marks the establishment of the First Austrian Fleet that will be stationed here in Trieste. With the establishment of the First Fleet, there needs to be a man to command it, and though all of the officers among your ranks have proven yourselves capable in your own right. Ultimately the position of Admiral has fallen to one man in particular.

Emmerich von Lützing, step forward!"

The moment Berengar made this decree, the man in question did as he was ordered and stood before Berengar. He was dressed in the typical uniform afforded to an officer in Berengar's Navy. The colors, in particular, were black, charcoal and gold.

When compared to Eckhard, he was considerably younger; Emmerich was in his early thirties; he was a tall and fit man with a robust bone structure that showed itself in his face. He had short brown hair and a matching beard.

The man stood at attention, saluting Berengar as he waited for the Duke to convey his thoughts. As such, Berengar began to express his reasoning for selecting Emmerich as the Admiral of his Navy.

"Emmerich von Lützing, out of all of my Naval Officers, you have stood out as the most exceptional. Your talent for Naval Warfare and your understanding of the tactics I have presented in your learning material has shocked me.

I believe it is no exaggeration to say that you command the respect of the sailors and officers alike, and as such, I see no reason not to present you with the rank of Admiral."

After saying this, Berengar presented the man with a ceremonial sword. This ceremonial sword was also functional and had been designed around the sword that his army used. The hilt was protected by the same intricate guard based upon the British 1788 Heavy Cavalry sword from his previous life.

However, there was one considerable difference; the blade was based upon the US 1860 Naval Cutlass from Berengar's past life. Unlike the sword utilized by the army, this weapon had a single-edged, curved blade.

This blade was made out of Damascus steel imported from the east, while the hilt was constructed of black leather, wrapped in a gold wire; the guard itself was made from brass. This sword was the symbol of the Admiral's authority, and as such, the man unsheathed the blade and inspected it in front of his sailors.

After doing so, a round of applause erupted, with Berengar himself congratulating the man on his rise to such a prominent position. Berengar placed his hand on the man's shoulder after sheathed the sword and stowed it away. With a gentle smile on his face, Berengar spoke to the man in a soothing tone.

"I expect great things from you, Emmerich. The world is vast and filled with unfathomable depths. It is your job to conquer the oceans in the name of Austria. The road ahead is a difficult one, but with my backing, I am certain that you will rise to the occasion and make our Nation proud!

Having heard this, Emmerich nodded his head with a stoic expression and expressed his thanks.

"Thank you, your grace. I shall remember the kindness you have shown me this day."



However, Berengar responded unexpectedly as he shook his head and lectured the man.

"Don't thank me, thank your effort and your God-given talent. You have earned this!"

After saying this, a band began to play the song "Kameraden auf See." It was a German Naval song from his previous life and had a relatively upbeat sound; as such, Berengar thought it was perfect for this occasion and had given the sheet music to the Naval band to play at the ceremony.

As the band played the song, a small parade began to celebrate the occasion. As such, Berengar stood next to Emmerich as the two men watched the display of festivities. Emmerich had no idea that Berengar had prepared such an excessive event for what he thought was just a minor occasion.

Berengar had a flair for extravagance, and a Naval Parade could very quickly be used as a propaganda piece. As such, he had decided to make proper use of this occasion to display the brilliance of the Austrian Navy.

The Austrian Banners and Flag that Berengar had created were being waved in the parade, and the people of Trieste had gathered to witness the event. Sailors, Soldiers, and Citizens alike had begun to watch on the sides as the Austrian Naval personnel celebrated the occasion.

At the head of the parade watching over the event were Berengar and Emmerich. Despite the festivities and the loud sounds it produced, Berengar managed to lean over and whisper to his new Admiral.

"Magnificent, isn't it? Just wait until you see what I have in store for the future of the Navy."

While Emmerich knew that Berengar intended to expand the Navy substantially, he had no idea that Berengar intended to become the world's supreme Naval Power, much like Britain had managed to accomplish in his past life.

To Berengar, his future German Empire would need a powerful Navy to maintain control over its many colonies. As such, he intended to create the

largest and most powerful Navy in the world. Besides, with his current technological capabilities, it would be generations before the rest of the world caught up to the present might of his vessels.

By then, the German Navy could be filled with ironclads; whether or not Bernegar would be able to live long enough to see such a future was another story. After all, producing an industrial society powered by steam engines was a far-off goal and was not easily achieved in a single lifetime.

Thus Berengar watched on with a broad smile as the Naval parade continued, envisioning the future of his Grand Armada within his mind and the dominance he believed it would have over the world. He had learned from his previous life's history. He knew for Germany to become the pre-eminent global power, it would need the ability to project force around the globe, and the only way to do that was with a powerful Navy!

#### *Chapter 285: Advancing into Southern Egypt*

Arethas stood on a hilltop above his army. He had achieved much in his campaign to reconquer North Africa for the Byzantine Empire throughout the last year. With the overwhelming support the Empire's forces had received from Austria in the form of material aid, the Byzantine soldiers were now a significant force, armed in the era of pike shot.

The Falconet cannons proved exceptionally effective against the enemy fortifications. However, it took longer to bring down a castle wall with the 1 pound cannonballs compared to the 12 lb explosive shells that Berengar utilized. If repeatedly fired at a concentrated area, it was still enough to bring down a wall far quicker than the traditional methods available.

With the Northernmost regions of Egypt and Lybia captured from the Mamluke Sultanate, Arethas had taken a defensive stance while waiting for reinforcements from the Empire. The reason for this was simple; he wanted more men by his side as he pushed into the fertile lands of the Nile and conquered the remainder of Egypt.

Egypt was once the breadbasket of the Roman Empire; because of this, it was a strategic location, and whoever controlled it was sure to see significant prosperity. Arethas was ordered not to return to Constantinople until all of Egypt and Lybia had been reclaimed.

Today was the day his reinforcements had arrived, clad in mirror-pattern armor, and armed with pikes and firearms; they presented a significant threat to the Mamluke Sultanate, who had failed to counter the new tactics devised by Berengar and given to the Empire.

Arethas had achieved endless victories against his enemies in Egypt. He was confident that with the arrival of thousands of new soldiers, he could push into the rest of Egypt and seize it in its entirety within the following year.

He was currently observing his armies beginning to march south; in total, there were 25,000 men in his army. This was the largest army that the Byzantines had fielded in the last twenty years, and there was only one man to thank for this.

Duke Berengar von Kufstein, without his support, these troops would be nothing more than peasant levies with little to no armor, and at best, spears in their hands. However, thanks to Berengar's material aid, and military advisors, the Byzantine Army had rapidly expanded into a professional force, armed with weapons and armor second only to the Grand Austrian Army.

Though Arethas knew the rising debt that the Empire had owed to the man in question, it was to a startling degree and was beginning to weigh on his conscience. Though they could afford to repay it with the recapture of Egypt and Lybia, it would undoubtedly cost them a large chunk of their spoils.

Arethas sighed heavily as he regretted his life decisions; if only he had attempted to convince the Emperor to marry Honoria off to Berengar, things might not have ended this way. The Byzantine Royal family had given up searching for Honoria, declaring the lost princess dead, and holding a massive state funeral for the girl.

Arethas was forced to stay in North Africa and thus could not even attend the funeral of his goddaughter. Because of this, he had been desperate to achieve results in the shortest timespan possible so that he could return to Constantinople and pay his respects to the missing princess.

However, now he did not have time to think about that. Instead, he climbed onto his mount and rode off towards his army, whose presence was growing distant as they marched into the sands of Egypt.

Before long, Arethas caught up with his soldiers, who had marched for some time; after doing so, he spoke with his officers. However, shortly after that, a rider came forth and reported the situation ahead.

"The Mamlukes have blocked the way ahead! We must prepare for battle!"

With this, Arethas sighed before nodding his head. As such, he began to give out orders for the Byzantine forces to prepare their ranks. By now, the Byzantine soldiers, for the most part, were veterans, and the recruits were merged into the ranks of the veteran soldiers so that they would have the proper support they needed to be effective in combat.

After forming their lines, the Byzantines began to advance into the fray while in formation. The army marched for a few more miles before the Byzantine forces came across the armies of the Mamluke sultanate. Despite being defeated at every turn, the Mamlukes still bravely fought on.

Though their Empire existed further westward, Egypt and Lybia were the core of their nation; without it, they would quickly become a shadow of their former power. As such, they had begun using any means necessary to combat the growing tide of the Byzantine forces.

The Falconet cannons were set up in the background and began to pelt the Mamluke army with their 1 lb cannonballs. Though they were nonexplosive, the fact that these solid metal balls rained down upon them, and tore their way through the mamluke torsos caused a great deal of panic, and confusion among the ranks of the Mamluke Army.

Under the cover of cannon fire and without fear in their eyes, the Byzantine soldiers moved forward until they could see the whites in their enemy's eyes. While marching arrows rained down upon them, and yet they did not falter while being pelted by the projectiles.

For the most part, their vitals were protected by the armor provided by Austria, and as such, few deaths occurred as they kept marching under their orders. Any greenhorn soldier who began to panic was quickly deterred from doing anything stupid by the veterans in their ranks.

Eventually, the Byzantines were close enough to fire off effective shots; as such, they lowered their arkebuses and aimed before firing off a volley into the ranks of the Mamluke sultanate, who charged at them in an attempt to break their line of fire.

In doing so, the Mamluke forces ran headfirst into a field of lead balls, smashing through their defenses and penetrating their bodies, sending blood, bone, and sinew in every direction. The moment the arkebusiers fired their shots, they began to reload, whereas the nearby pikeman began to advance and deter the Mamluke soldiers.

Even though the Mamlukes had gathered every man and boy that could bear arms within a hundred-mile radius, the vast majority of their troops were simply peasants conscripted into fighting; the moment the first volley was fired, these levies began to break ranks and flee.

Only a few thousand Mamluke veterans remained behind; however, compared to the 25,000 byzantine solid armies, their might was laughable. This was not the first time the mamlukes had gotten desperate and gathered everyone they possibly could to act as a meat shield to soak up the projectiles used by the Byzantine Arkebusiers.

The Byzantines needed little more than another volley to shred the remaining Mamluke forces to pieces. After all, they were vastly outnumbered and outgunned by the Byzantine Army. The battle was already over before it could reach its zenith, with the mamlukes suffering another humiliating defeat. Seeing yet another victory Arethas gazed upon the death and destruction and gave his troops an order.

"Tend to the wounded and prepare to march within three hours!"

Aside from superficial arrow wounds and a few unlucky souls who had been caught in the throat with Mamluke projectiles, the majority of the Byzantine forces were unscathed in this battle. Mainly because they were fighting against a small number of Mamluke troops, most of them were just conscripts given at best a spear and thrown into the meat grinder.

The fact that the mamlukes had begun to resort to such tactics was proof that this war would not last much longer. The majority of the Mamluke's troops

were crushed in the early battles; now, they could only rely on human wave tactics in an attempt to overrun the Byzantine lines.

With this small victory, the path towards Southern Egypt was wide open, and Arethas intended to take full advantage of this. As such, his forces had spent three hours resting before they were back on the march.

Berengar would later receive word of Arethas' efforts in North Africa. The rapid rate that the Byzantine General conquered his enemies' lands was shocking to Berengar. As such, he would have to readjust his timeframe for independence. If the Byzantines won the war before declaring themselves King, they would undoubtedly repay the debt they owed him with the spoils gained from their conquests.

If this were to happen, Bernegar would lose his opportunity to coerce them into giving him Honoria's hand in marriage. If there was one thing Berengar needed, it was a long-term alliance with the Byzantines, and the only way he could achieve this was through marriage. Though the Byzantines had no way of knowing this, their actions in North Africa would soon have a significant effect on European politics as a whole.

#### *Chapter 286: Anti-Piracy Operations*

Emmerich was in the process of taking out the Austrian First Fleet for its maiden voyage. This fleet comprised of ten Berengar-Class Frigates, these frigates had a crew complement of 450 men each, as well as 55 marines on board. Needless to say, it was among the finest fleets in existence, and would soon be playing a pivotal role in the establishment of Austrian power in the Mediterranean.

It was supposed to be a standard patrol mission off the coastline of the Duchy of Austria. However, the moment these ships set sail, they quickly noticed a peculiar scene. A clipper waving the flag of Austria was in the process of being pursued by three caravels. Though the clipper was far faster than the caravels chasing after it and would eventually escape, it did not mean that the Admiral would leave such lawlessness unpunished.

Assuming that this was the act of pirates, Admiral Emmerich gave the command to pursue the pirates and end their actions. As such, the ten frigates began to sail at an exceptional speed of 13 knots, when compared to the 8

knots that the Caravels were traveling at, the frigates quickly caught up to the would-be pirates.

The massive forty-four gun frigates formed into a line and presented their broadside cannons at the pirates, who had nearly shat their pants in fear of the gigantic vessels that had appeared before them so suddenly.

During this era, broadside cannons were nonexistent on European vessels, as such Berengar's ships held an enormous advantage in terms of firepower. At best, these small caravels had two guns, one in the fore and the other in the ship's aft. As such, the vessel desperately tried to turn their boats around to fire onto the ten frigates that had surrounded them on both sides.

However, the next moment the SMS Berengar, the first of its class, and the current flagship of Admiral Emmerich opened fire with the guns on its starboard side, the Pirates' hopes vanished. The thunder of the guns echoed into the air as the shells fired out of the massive steel cannons, exploding upon impact, and blasting the Caravel to smithereens, along with the crew on board.

Explosive shells were deadly weapons to a wooden ship, which is the main reason why ironclads were developed in Berengar's previous life, specifically to counteract the existence of cannons capable of firing explosive shells from the 1850s onward.

Seeing one of their allies taken out in a single barrage from a single ship, the deckhand of the other caravels immediately tried to raise the white flag. Still, a few other vessels unleashed a barrage of their guns before they could do so, blasting the small 75 foot long caravels into pieces.

Whatever was on board these pirates' ships were either blown apart or sunk to the depths of the Adriatic sea. Little did Emmerich know that the Venetian Republic secretly hired these pirates to harass Berengar's shipping. However, they had achieved virtually no success.

The clippers were too fast for the caravels to compete. A Caravel was capable of at most 8 knots of speed, whereas the clipper's top rate maxed out over 22 knots. There was simply no way for the vessels of the era to catch Berengar's merchant ships.

While Emmerich continued his patrol, a nearby Venetian vessel and its crew that had observed the display of prowess by the ten frigates were stunned into silence. The Captain on board the vessel watching the swift destruction of the pirates was at a loss for words. Cold sweat poured from the man's brow as he thought back to the near-instant destruction the Austrian vessels had caused to the small pirate fleet.

It was only after several minutes did someone finally voice a thought on the matter. It was one of the officers under the Captain's command.

"Captain... What do we do about this?"

The Captain had an urge to strip off his uniform and jump into the Adriatic sea. Knowing that the Doge wanted to go to war against such terrifying power and that the Austrians were pumping out ships like this every week stripped away any semblance of bravery the man thought he had.

Within a year, the Austrians would potentially have hundreds of these vessels. Hell, even if they only managed to create 50 of those damned things, the Venetian Navy would be in for a world of hurt. Not only was there a significant speed advantage that the Frigates held, but the firepower on a single one of the Austrian ships was more than enough to take on a fleet of their own.

As such, the Captain swallowed his saliva and took a deep breath in an attempt to calm himself down before responding to the officer's question.

"Set a course for Venice, we must alert the Admiralty of this news as soon as possible."

With that said the Venetian Naval vessel immediately changed course and began to head back to Venice. When they finally arrived the Head Admiral was already in the middle of a conversation with a Doge, rather than wait around for the head of state, and the foremost Admiral to finish their discussion, the Captain decided to risk his position and barged into the door after arguing with the secretary.

The moment the Captain entered the room, the Doge and Admiral glared at him with fury, the Venetian head of state immediately began to chastise the Captain.



"What do you think you are doing barging into the middle of my office? Who permitted you to do such a thing!"

However, the Captain could not care less about proper etiquette at this moment and instantly began to inform the two men of the terrifying sight he had witnessed.

"Your serenity, Admiral, I apologize for the intrusion, but I have urgent news from the Adriatic sea that you must be aware of; it has to do with the pirates we have hired to attack Austrian shipping!"

The Doge began to curse under his breath as he heard this

"Useless fucking pirates! What the hell am I paying them for!?! Go on, spit it out!"

Not willing to waste a second, the Captain immediately reported what he and his crew had witnessed and the overwhelming destructive power of a single frigate used by the Austrian Navy. After a lengthy discussion, the Captain was dismissed, leaving the Head Admiral and the Doge with grim expressions as they stood in silence by themselves.

They had a hard time believing the Captain's reports and had even questioned the man's sanity as he told the horrific tale of the Pirates' untimely demise. Ultimately the Doge posed a question to the Admiral.

"Do you think he was telling the truth?"

The Admiral scratched his chin for a bit before sighing

"I believe that he believes that he was telling the truth..."

The Doge looked at the Admiral with a questioning gaze as he heard this and asked for clarification.

"meaning?"

After careful consideration, the Admiral laid out what he believed to be a more likely scenario.

"What the Captain says is too unrealistic. Even with the alleged industrial prowess of Austria, to make ten ships, each armed with dozens of cannons, that is capable of firing projectiles that explode upon impact is unlikely.

I mean, I have heard reports of his army using such technology, but this is mostly from second-hand information and is probably just a propaganda tactic the Austrians are using to mislead us about their actual military capabilities.

I don't doubt that the Pirate ships were destroyed, but by a single vessel with a single bombardment? Preposterous! Unless I can personally witness such a thing, I refuse to believe in such a fantasy.

No, I think it is far more likely that the Austrians have constructed a new kind of vessel capable of having cannons on the broadside, and all ten of the ships opened fire on the three pirate vessels simultaneously.

At most, they have five cannons on each side, which is not something we need to worry about; after all, we planned for unexpected circumstances such as this, and we are producing a new warship every day.

Assuming Bernegar isn't foolish enough to attack us, we will have our thousand ships in under three years. By then, it does not matter how many of these ships the Austrians have; they will be outnumbered!"

After hearing this estimation, the Doge began to calm down and think about the circumstances more rationally. The Admiral was right; such firepower on a vessel was not just outrageous; it was downright otherworldly.

Unless Berengar had received divine inspiration from the Lord Almighty himself, there was no way he could design such monstrous vessels. As such, the valuable intelligence that the Captain reported was disregarded as the rantings of a coward.

Little did the Venetian Admiralty realize that every word the Captain had spoken was complete and utter truth because the Doge and Head Admiral had disregarded the Captains testimony, they would be in for a world of hurt the day they were unfortunate enough to enter a war with Austria, and the Tyrant of Steel.

### *Chapter 287: Troubles at the Vatican*

Deep within the Vatican, a meeting was held between the Holy Father and the Holy Roman Emperor. Pope Julius and Emperor Balsamo discussed their difficulties over the past year and how to proceed forward. Emperor Balsamo was the first to voice his discontent with the rapid growth that Austria had been blessed with since Berengar had seized control of the Duchy.

"Berengar's power grows by the day; I have received concerning reports about a visit to Granada. Supposedly the heretic is consulting with the Moorish Sultan, we do not know what objective Berengar had or what form of agreement the two men came to, but there is little doubt in my mind that it does not bode well for our faith."

When Pope Julius heard this, he sneered in disdain as he cursed Berengar for his actions.

"Fucking heretic! Of course, he would lie with the Moorish dogs! May Berengar's soul be cast into the furthest pit of hell for his treason against Christendom!"

While Julius continued to throw out profanity regarding Berengar's association with the Emirate of Granada, Balsamo had more pressing concerns about the issue and interrupted the Pope and his vile behavior.

"Your Holiness, we have bigger concerns. If Austria and Granada are to ally, it threatens the Church's position in Iberia. If Berengar chooses to arm the Moors like he has done the Byzantines, it means we might see a new Caliphate form in Iberia; the rebirth of Al-Andalus is not something we can afford, not after the progress we have made over the centuries!"

This notion immediately snapped Julius from his rant and calmed his senses; he gazed at Emperor Balsamo with a vicious glare in his eyes as he coldly stated his intentions regarding Iberia.

"I will contact the Iberian Kings and pressure them into unifying against the Moorish Menace. Suppose the Emirate of Granada is to receive military aid by Bernegar the Accursed and his Grand Austrian Army. In that case, it means that Reconquista is going to become very bloody real soon."

After hearing this, Balsamo nodded at the Pope's statement. It was certainly in Portugal, Castille, and Aragon's best interest to unite against the new threat that had presented itself. As such, not only would the pope pressure Iberian unification but so too would the Holy Roman Emperor.

As for the other issues the Church was facing, Balsamo began to complain about what was transpiring within his borders.

"Your Holiness, the Berengar Heresy has spread from Southern Germany into the Rhineland and the East German states. The heretic known as Ludolf has personally taken up a mission to convert the locals of the Rhineland, and he has fallen under the protection of the local lords who tolerate his beliefs.

If left unchecked, Germany as a whole will soon fall to the Berengar Heresy, and we will see ourselves without one of the pillars of the Catholic world!"

Pope Julius frowned when he heard this news. Whether it was Iberia or Germany, things were looking grim for the Catholic faith in those regions, and as such, the Pope decided to intervene on this matter.

"I will send in the inquisition to exterminate these heretics. I don't care if entire villages have to be massacred; the situation in Germany is now beyond redemption. As for you, as Emperor, you need to declare the Berengar Heresy unlawful and that all adherents will face the penalty of death upon discovery. Use your forces to suppress them if need be!"

Upon hearing this, the Holy Roman Emperor smiled wickedly before responding; there was a murderous glint in his eye as he did so.

"Yes, your holiness! The blood of every last Heretic in Germany shall be spilled in the name of God!"

With the plans established to deal with the difficulties the Church was facing in both Iberia and Germany, another critical issue had begun to surface as Julius started to discuss how to deal with the Hussites.

"The Hussites have entrenched themselves in their territory; they are no longer fighting an offensive war. Instead, they seek to defend what they have gained and desire to drag out this conflict as long as possible. Despite the

intervention of the Hospitallers, the war has only become more bloody, and our side continues to suffer casualties.

Though we can't prove that Berengar is providing the Hussites with their weapons, it is becoming increasingly apparent that Austria is supporting them. There is not much we can do to cut Austrian support since the Hussites and the Austrians share a border.

In response to this, I intend to rally support from Hungary and the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. I will send word to the Hungarian and Polish Kings and request their assistance in the war for Bohemia. We have to end this war quickly; the more time we spend fighting in Bohemia, the more Berengar has time to prepare himself for the upcoming crusade against him!"

Balsamo immediately began to interject on this matter and voice his concerns.

"The Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth is currently engaged in a war with the Teutonic-State, though the Teutonic Order is on the verge of collapse, they aren't likely to send aid to our forces in Bohemia so long as the Teutonic Order still draws breath."

When the Pope heard this, he sighed heavily before voicing his opinion.

"You are right, but it does not hurt to ask for their aid. At the very least, they can provide material support to the Bohemian Crown!"

After the two men thoroughly discussed this matter, they turned their attention to something of greater importance: the growing divide with the Eastern World. Despite abandoning the Teutonic Order in their time of need, the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Vatican worsened.

Part of this was due to Berengar's interference. The Byzantine Emperor was growing more and more reliant on Austrian support when it came to his war for the reconquest of Egypt and Lybia. As such, the Orthodox Church had been crippled in terms of showing any form of support to their Catholic brothers to the west when it came to the subject of the Berengar Heresy.

Because of this lack of support, more than a few cardinals of the Catholic Church were condemning the Patriarch of Constantinople for doing nothing as

the Berengar Heresy had begun to spread like wildfire across Germany. With the arrival of the Hussite Wars in Bohemia, Catholic influence began to wane across Europe.

There were even rumors of an English reformist movement starting to appear within the British Isles. Without the support of the other major branch of Christianity, the Catholics had grown bitter and had begun to lash out verbally at their Orthodox counterparts.

With this in mind, the Orthodox Church had sent a letter to Pope Julius requesting that he condemn his Cardinals and Bishops, who had begun referring to the Orthodox Church as the "devil's minions." This put Julius in a bind. If he condemned his supporters for criticizing the Orthodox's weak stance on the Berengar Heresy, he would only be furthering discontent in his ranks.

As such, the Pope wanted an opinion from the Holy Roman Emperor on the matter and thus asked the question on his mind.

"What should be done about the Orthodox Church?"

Balsamo was by no means a fan of the Orthodox Church or the Byzantine Empire for that matter. Since the formation of the Holy Roman Empire, the two Empires had fought for legitimacy in terms of who was the actual successor of ancient Rome.

Now that he had a chance to destabilize the relationship between the Byzantine Emperor and the Orthodox Church, the Holy Roman Emperor intended to take full advantage of it. As such, a cruel smirk appeared on the corners of his lips as he offered his advice to deal with the situation.

"The Patriarch of Constantinople is a coward who bows to the Byzantine Emperor, and the Emperor is a man already influenced by Berengar's wicked ways. You should never condemn the faithful for pointing out that our eastern brothers are tainted! There is only one reasonable response to the current predicament.

You must force the Patriarch of Constantinople to condemn the Byzantine Emperor for aiding and abetting a condemned Heretic! Inform them that they

are committing a grave sin by sitting by and allowing the Byzantine Royal family to associate themselves with the Devil's personal representative on this Earth! If they refuse to do so, condemn the Patriarch as a Heretic as well!

After hearing this, the Pope thought about Balsamo's words for some time before he ultimately agreed with them.

"Very well, I will pressure the Patriarch of Constantinople to denounce the Byzantine Emperor for his crimes. If they refuse to do so, I will not hold back my discontent. Berengar's strength relies on his trade with the East; if the Byzantines continue engaging in such heresy, they must be condemned!"

With this said, the relations between the Catholic and Orthodox churches were about to take a turn for the worse, all because of Berengar's influence. Despite sticking together for centuries longer than in Berengar's previous life, the two pillars of the Christian world were on the edge of a full-scale schism.

After all, was said and done, the Vatican had come up with several ways to counteract Berengar's activities in Europe. It would not be long before more proxy wars between the Catholic Church, Berengar began to appear. The Hussite wars were just the beginning.

### *Chapter 288: Reforming the Granadan Army*

The sun held high in the clear blue sky above the Andalusian Hills. In the valley between the mounds was an army standing and drilling within the formation. These were the men of the Granadan Royal Army, and excited expressions were on their faces as they donned their new attire and wielded their most recent acquisition.

Like the Byzantine Army, the Granadan Army was now equipped with mirror pattern armor, arkebuse firearms, and pikes. If anything, the Granadan forces with their newest armor began to resemble the Ottoman forces from the 16th century of Berengar's previous life.

Within the Ranks of the Granadan troops were a series of Officers dressed in the black and gold attire afforded to the Grand Army of Austria. These men were instructing the Granadan troops on the knowledge and tactics of how to wield their new weapons with efficiency.

Standing on the hilltop above, under the protection of an awning, stood Sultan Hasan Al-Fadl and Viscount Arnulf von Thiersee. Since Berengar's rise to the position of Duke, Arnulf, Berengar's other most capable General, had been rewarded with the position of the Viscount of Trent.

With Berengar overseeing the Duchy of Austria, the loyal nobleman and General of Berengar's Grand Army had been sent to supervise the training of the Granadan Royal Army. While entertaining his guest, Hasan poured himself a glass of the fortified wine that he had purchased in bulk from Berengar's wineries. As he did so, he poured another for Arnulf. However, the man declined it with a stern expression.

"Apologies, Sultan, but I am on duty, and it is forbidden to drink while in such a position."

Hearing this, Hasan smiled bitterly; the level of discipline that Berengar's troops held was to a degree he had never seen before, and as such, his respect for Berengar raised even more. After hearing this, the young Sultan took a sip from his glass before responding to Arnulf.

"Tell me, General, how is his Grace Berengar at the moment?"

Arnulf did not break his focus as he observed the Granadan troops form ranks before firing their arkebuses at the targets. While keeping the soldiers' actions below, he answered the Sultan's question with a bit of annoyance in his voice.

"He's busy. The Duke works harder than anyone I know; I swear if it weren't for his beautiful lovers who take care of his stress every night, he probably would have blown his brains out by now..."

Hasan laughed when he heard this and merely sipped from his drink with a smug grin on his face. He too knew the pleasures of being surrounded by beautiful wives, and though Berengar had yet to marry his women, the young Sultan did not doubt that the man would eventually do so. As such, he sighed with desperation before responding to Arnulf's claims.

"I offered to marry my beautiful older sister off to him, but he declined. His wives appear to be the jealous type. By that little blonde girl's expression, I could tell that she was far from willing to allow such a thing. It is a pity, my



dear Yasmin is already twenty-five, and yet I still have not found a man for her to marry.

Though I have not given up on Berengar, it is clear to me that he intends to engage in polygamy, and I greatly desire to be brothers with the man! Besides, he only has three wives so far, right? In my country, a man is allowed up to four wives, so there is still hope for the two of them!"

Arnulf shook his head in silence when he heard this; after one visit to a Muslim country, Berengar had practically gone native. It was one thing for him to have one wife and several mistresses, but to entertain the idea of polygamy as a Christian? That was asking for trouble, and for whatever reason, Berengar enjoyed antagonizing those around him.

As such, Arnulf returned his attention to the Granadan troops below. The pikeman had begun to take the place of the arkebusiers who reloaded their weapons. Due to the technological limitations of the matchlock design, these Arkebuse firearms took up to a minute to prepare the next volley; compared to the Austrian flintlocks with quick loading tubes, the difference in reload speed was quite vast.

In Berengar's previous life, it took weeks to train pikemen and arquebusiers; however, Berengar had a higher standard than the early modern armies. As such, he taught his troops for much longer.

As for his allies, Berengar expected the same discipline level; as such, he had his officers train them according to his standards. It would not be long before the Granadans could field a much larger and well-trained force than their enemies nearby.

Part of the reason why firearms were destined to replace the traditional bows and crossbows was due to the short amount of time it took to train someone in their use effectively. At the same time, one would have to spend their whole lives to master a bow effectively.

Learning how to wield a firearm within formation took weeks of training. The same could be said about pikes when compared to more traditional melee weapons. Even though the Arkebuse had limited range compared to Austria's Rifled Muskets, or even the bows of the era, the number of

arquebusiers that could be trained in a short period greatly outnumbered the alternative.

With this in mind, Arnulf watched the Granadans undergo their training and could witness the results within a short time frame. After just a few weeks, they were beginning to resemble a proper army, at least in accordance with the stringent standards of Austria.

As for Hasan, he was greatly impressed by the weapons wielded by his troops and now understood why Berengar was able to rise to power so rapidly. These weapons were revolutionary and could undoubtedly change the tides of war.

With Berengar's support, the rise of a new Al-Andalus was highly likely, and Hasan had grand ambitions for the Iberian Peninsula. Seeing that the dreams of his forefathers now had the potential to become a reality, the Sultan asked the question he was most concerned about.

"How long until they are ready for combat? When my neighbors find out about the aid you have provided me, they will without question invade my lands."

Arnulf scratched his chin and rolled his head to the side as he thought about the question; The only sound that could be overheard was the echo of the falconet cannons firing in the distance. After several moments of ambiance, Arnulf lifted two fingers as he addressed the Sultan's concerns.

"Two weeks, and your troops will be prepared to face whatever challenges the Catholic armies will throw at them. As long as your commanders are competent in the tactics we have provided them, the Iberian Kings will be kneeling before you, begging for mercy in a matter of years."

Upon hearing this, Hasan lifted his chalice and took a swig from it, smiling as he did so. After drinking from his goblet, he stared at his troops mustered below with a grin curved upon his lips, releasing the thoughts held deep within his mind.

"This is just the beginning, soon I will have a Grand Army of my own, and it is all thanks to Berengar..."

With that said, the troops continued to train in the field below while the Austrian advisers corrected any faults in their efforts; when the new wave of Reconquista found itself at Granada's gates, they would be more than prepared to handle such a frightful event.

In doing so, Berengar would find the pressure he faced from the Catholic Church alleviated as the Moors and Iberians began a new wave of warfare that would consume the peninsula in fire and blood. Who would remain at the end of such a brutal conflict? Only time will tell.

### *Chapter 289: Formation of the Iberian Union*

While Granada was preparing for the inevitable war with its neighbors, the Iberian Catholic Monarchs had been summoned to a meeting at the Vatican. The Pope had purposely asked for their attendance, and as exceptional members of the faith, they had not disobeyed his commands.

The Kings of Portugal, Castile, and Aragon were gathered in a room with the Pope. It had been some time since these men had been in the same room, and they had a feeling they knew what this was about. As such, Pope Julius was the first to speak as he addressed the men who had gathered.

"My children, I must thank you for traveling all of this way to the Holy See, we find ourselves in grave times, and it is with a heavy heart that I must request something important of every one of you."

The three Iberian Kings nodded their heads in silence as they waited for the Pope to speak his peace; after doing so, the Pope sighed heavily before revealing the Holy Roman Empire's intelligence about Berengar's actions in Iberia.

"You should all be aware of the heretic known as Berengar the Accursed. We do not know what evil intentions he has, but the man visited Granada and met with the Sultan. We fear he may be plotting to arm the Moors with his demonic devices! If we do not act now, then your Kingdoms are in grave danger of being overrun! I implore the three of you to join together and fight against the Moorish menace!"

This news came as a shock to the three Kings of Iberia; they were not aware that Berengar had met with the Sultan of Granada, nor that he was in the

process of arming and training them for war. However, if such a thing was true, it did indeed threaten the stability of the region; as such, the three men began to bicker among themselves for the best course of action.

As the King of the most extensive Kingdom of Iberia, King Francisco de Trastámara of the Kingdom of Castile was the first to voice his support for the Pope's words.

"I agree with His Holiness; if we do not join together to fight against the Moors, then we will be opening ourselves up to future troubles. This must end now! For too long, the Muslim filth has occupied our lands!"

King Felipe de Trastámara of the Kingdom of Aragon was the next to speak on the matter, as such he cleared his throat before speaking in an authoritative tone.

"And who will lead this supposed alliance of ours? I do not know about you, but I do not trust King Francisco not to stab me in the back when this is all over!"

The two Kings were cousins, and as such, had a bitter rivalry as they both intended to take over each other's kingdoms. Thus, without an outside enemy's interference, it was unlikely for the two men to come together and unify their forces. The moment Felipe made this claim, Francisco nearly jumped out of his chair as he raised his voice at his cousin.

"How dare you claim such a thing about my character! I'll have you know that my honor is renowned across the globe! To insinuate that I would betray you if anything resembles your character greater than my own!"

Before the two Kings could lunge at each other over the words that had been spoken, the Pope interrupted by clearing his throat. The moment he did so, the two men shrank back into their seats as if they were schoolchildren being scolded by their teacher.

"We have greater concerns than your petty squabbles. I suggest the two of you look at the big picture. If the Granadans are armed and trained by the Austrians, then only by coming together and uniting your armies against them

do you stand a chance of survival! Look at yourselves closely, and ask yourselves if your disputes are worth the destruction of your kingdom!?!"

After saying this, the two Kings glanced at one another before quickly looking away. As for the King of Portugal, he enjoyed the sight of the two men bickering; it was not every day that he could witness such a spectacular sight.

King Luiz de Avis was the current Monarch of Portugal and had sustained his territory despite the ongoing conflicts with his neighbors. One of the ways he had managed to do this was by playing the Castilian and Aragonian thrones against one another so that the focus was off of his realm.

Though he did not desire to see a union between Castile and Aragon, he had to admit that the threat that an Austro-Granadan alliance posed was significant, especially since he had become aware of the swift vessels known as clippers Berengar had used to transport goods across the Mediterranean rapidly.

If Austrian Naval vessels were half as fast as his merchant fleet, they posed a significant threat in warfare. As such, the Portuguese King was much more open to the idea of cooperation against the Austro-Granadan alliance.? Thus the man spoke with some civility as he began to discuss the potential, albeit temporary union of their three countries.

"Without a doubt, if we leave the Austro-Granadan alliance to its own devices, they will eventually attack us. We should strike swiftly while the Granadan troops are still unprepared for the event of war. A temporary alliance between our three countries is the most efficient means to achieve victory.

If you two have a problem with the potential of each other leading said alliance, then why don't I take the position? Compared to the two of you, I have no interest in either of your realms and if one of you were to betray the other, I could support the wronged party. These terms are fair, are they not?"

Hearing this, the other two monarchs frowned; though they knew what Luiz said was reasonable, they were having troubles coming to terms with such an arrangement. Portugal was an outsider; though they were Iberian, they had begun to split from the Castilians and Aragonians culturally.

However, at the same time, it was because they were an outsider that the Portuguese might be the fittest to lead the alliance of the three countries. As such, Francisco was the first to agree to these terms.

"Very well, though I want you to know that this alliance is temporary; as soon as the Granadans are defeated, I will immediately withdraw my support!"

Upon hearing this, Felipe became outraged and immediately threw his support behind the Portuguese, not wanting his cousin to gain the upper hand.

"I, too, support this alliance under the same terms and conditions as Castile!"

With that said, the three Iberian Kings had come to an arrangement, and Pope Julius smiled amicably at the result. Truthfully he did not care which of these fools led the alliance, only that it was formed to deal with the Granadans, and by extension, the Austrians with them. After seeing the results, the Pope declared what would shock the Catholic World when it was released to Europe at large.

"Very well, then it is under these terms that I announce the formation of the Iberian Union, led by the Crown of Portugal. Until the Moorish menace is defeated and driven from the Iberian peninsula, you three Kings will do your best to eliminate them! God wills it!"

Immediately the three Iberian Kings chanted back the Pope's words.

"God Wills It!"

With that said, the Iberian Union was formed and would face off in a proxy war against the Granadans. In doing so, the conflict between Austria and the Papacy had begun to take a more sinister turn. The winner of the fight for Iberia would determine the future of the world in many ways.

#### *Chapter 290: Preparing to Visit the Kalmar Union*

As the war for Iberia began to erupt between Granada and the newly established Iberian Union, Berengar sat back and expanded his naval forces. At the moment, the most critical area he was lacking in was Naval Power, and as such, he had further focused his efforts in that regard.

With the expansion of his naval might, the increase in demand for Oak became a reality as such, Berengar had begun to rely on imports from the Kalmar Union to sustain his growth. With the rise in trade between the Duchy of Austria and the Kalmar Union, the beliefs of the German Reformation began to spread to Scandinavia, in particular Sweden.

In its own form, a new Reformist movement had begun to appear in the region. With it, calls for aid to Austria were made by many Reformist noblemen within the Kingdom. As such, Berengar, who was sitting on his Ducal throne, began to read a letter with the seal of the Scandinavian Monarch embossed upon it.

The letter expressed interest in Reformist views and a willingness to discuss matters of importance between the two leaders. Berengar read the letter with a complicated expression on his face. Though Sweden was a major component of the Protestant revolution in his previous life, it was still a century too early for them to accept such beliefs.

Yet, due to his intervention, not only Sweden but all of Scandinavia had begun to be affected by Reformist thought. Unlike in Germany or Bohemia, the Reformist movement appeared to be peaceful in the North. Truthfully Berengar was in awe over such results, and as such, he was pretty cautious in the way he decided to handle this information.

After all, unlike the Byzantine Empire and the Emirate of Granada, one day, if all went as planned, then Berengar would share a border with the Scandinavians, and the idea of the conflicts resulting because of this was not a slim possibility.

As such, Berengar began to tap his armrest repeatedly as he thought about how to proceed with this invitation. While doing so, Honoria came into the room and spotted Berengar deep in thought. On her shoulder was her trusty eagle Heraclius who, as usual, gazed at Berengar with a watchful eye.

Heraclius was no fool, he knew that Berengar and Honoria were now in a relationship, and because of that, he was exceptionally cautious around the man; the eagle's job was to protect his master, and as such, he refused to allow a playboy like Berengar to break Honoria's heart.

Thus when Honoria approached Bernegar with a happy face, the eagle screeched at Berengar with hostility. Upon doing so, Berengar simply stared down the bird with a smile on his face. Ever since he had first bedded the princess, the eagle had become quite aggressive with him.

Nevertheless, Berengar did not think much of it and smiled amicably at the girl and her companion as she leaped into his arms and greeted him.

"Berengar! What are you doing here sitting on your throne by your lonesome?"

Upon hearing this, Bernegar sighed and handed the letter over to Honoria, allowing her to see the invitation in his hands after she read through the contents of the letter, a shocked expression formed on her lips.

The fact that a monarch of a powerful region like the Kalmar Union had invited him to stay in its capital and discuss matters of religion and trade was a big step forward; as such, she was delighted to see that Berengar was finally making friends.

"I'm impressed! First the Granadans, now the Scandinavians! You are beginning to make some allies!"

Upon hearing this, Berengar nodded his head and sighed before expressing the thoughts on his mind.

"So, do you want to sail with me up to Copenhagen?"

Upon hearing this, a broad smile formed across Honoria's lips as she grabbed ahold of Berengar and hugged him once more.

"Of course!"

After Berengar had missed their trip last year, Honoria fell into a deep depression; even though they finally became a couple, Berengar had taken Adela with him to his diplomatic visit to Granada shortly after, which had considerably gotten on her nerves.



Now that she could finally have some alone time with Berengar, she would not miss the opportunity; as such, she immediately released her hold over Berengar and scurried off while informing him of her intentions.

"I'll go pack right away!"

With that said, the young princess ran off to her room where she would begin to pack for her journey; as she did so, Heraclius' gaze never left Berengar's sight until he exited the room while perched upon Honoria's shoulder.

After the two of them disappeared, Berengar chuckled to himself as he began to drink from his skull chalice. While doing so, Linde appeared before him with a scowl on her face.

"You're leaving so soon? Didn't you visit Granada a few months ago?"

In response, Berengar raised from his seat and grabbed ahold of his woman before dragging her into his embrace. As he did so, he fondled large breasts and well her plump bottom while kissing her passionately in the process.

Linde was incredibly excited by these actions and began to flush with embarrassment. Seeing this, Berengar grabbed ahold of her hand and led her over to his throne, where he sat down and positioned his lover on top of him.

Linde looked around the room nervously, fearing being caught in the act, but as she did so, Berengar grabbed ahold of her chin and redirected her gaze into his deep sapphire eyes before speaking his mind.

"I will only be gone for a few weeks, and I need you to look after the kids. When I get back, I promise I won't leave your side for at least a week; you can have me all to yourself!"

Upon Hearing this, Linde began to lick her lover's fingers as she moved the flaps of her dress aside and positioned herself above Berengar's crotch. She was so excited that she no longer cared if she was seen, and as such, she allowed Berengar to enter inside of her.

As Linde began to make love to her man upon his throne, she moaned in pleasure while grasping ahold of Berengar's large hand. After a few moments,

she expressed her thoughts to the young Duke of Austria. However, all she could get out between her moans were two words.

"Swear it!"

Berengar began to chuckle as he reversed their positions before answering the young woman's request while staring into her beautiful sky blue eyes.

"I swear to God that what I say is true when I return from Scandinavia; you can have me all to yourself for as much as you can handle!"

After saying this, the couple enjoyed themselves for some time; luckily for Linde, nobody had decided to intrude upon their shameless actions, and before long, Berengar was ready to depart with Honoria by his side.

After saying goodbye to his lover, and his children Berengar, Honoria, and Heraclius departed for Denmark to meet with the King of the Kalmar Union. Throughout the entire journey, Berengar would similarly treat Honoria to how he had just treated Linde in his throne room.

After all, what was the point of having two women if you could not enjoy them both?