

Steel 301

Chapter 301: Pre-emptive Strike

While Berengar's armies were marching towards the Swiss and Italian borders that Austria shared with the two realms, his Navy was on a more important mission, one that Berengar had learned from the Imperial Japanese Navy in his previous life.

In Berengar's previous life, Pearl Harbor was a term that every American citizen knew by the time they were out of elementary school; it was a degree of defeat and humiliation that the United States had never suffered before on its homefront.

As such, Berengar fully intended to learn from the Pre-emptive strike the Japanese had taken against their rivals and utilize the same tactics to eradicate the fleets of his enemies. The young Austrian King who had yet to be coronated? fully intended to take advantage of the time it took for the Holy Roman Emperor to receive his declaration of Independence by striking at the heart of their Naval support.

With this in mind, Berengar had tasked his Admiral to immediately sail the fleet to the Italian coast, where Berengar intended to attack the Venetian and Genoan fleets while they were docked in the harbor.

Admiral Emmerich was at the helm of the SMS Berengar, the first in the class of the 75 fifth-rate frigates constructed over the last year. By now, the Grand Austrian Navy had a total of 40,000 men among its ranks. Among these men, 33,750 were on board the ships as sailors, officers, or marines.

The Armada of 75 frigates had a total of 3,300 twenty-four-pound cannons capable of launching explosives shells. The sheer degree of firepower that these ships possessed was unfathomable for this day and age.

As such, Admiral Emmerich had split the fleet into two groups; the main fleet would comprise 38 frigates that would sail to the coast of Venice. The other group would consist of 37 vessels that would sail around the Italian Peninsula and strike at Genoa's harbors.

After nearly 14 hours of sailing at a speed of 13 knots, the main fleet had arrived at the Venetian Coastline in the dead of night. Undercover of darkness, the Austrian fleet had snuck its way into the Venetian Harbor without incident.

At the moment, Emmerich was standing upon the helm of his ship, giving out a brief overview of the operation details to his Officers. Every officer within the fleet was already aware of the attack plan, and as such, this was just a quick summary while the enlisted men got to work making preparations.

"We will set anchor here, 2,000 yards away from the coastline. Now that we are within range of the enemy's harbors, we will load our cannons and fire upon them, devastating the ships within the city. After annihilating both civilian and military vessels, we will turn our shells onto the harbor itself, destroying Venice's ability to receive and deploy ships.

After we have destroyed the harbor, our guns will target the shipyards, making Venice utterly incapable of producing new vessels for the war effort. When the arsenal is in ruins, we will turn our cannons onto the Castle itself, wiping out the command structure of the city.

Any remaining shells will be fired into the industrial district of Venice. I want the Venetians to remember the price of conspiring against Austria. Let this forever be known as the day Austria struck first!"

With that said, the officers responded in the affirmative after they had received their orders.

"Aye, Admiral!"

After this, they quickly set about their tasks and began to load the 836 cannons facing the city of Venice. After all of the cannons were loaded among the 38 vessels, Emmerich grinned wickedly as he gave the order by shouting to the crew members of his ship.

"Fire!"

With those words, the cannons on the ship's side pointing towards the harbor immediately erupted as the explosive shells were sent from thousands of

yards away onto the ports where most of the Venetian naval vessels were currently docked.

The moment the SMS Berengar began to fire its cannons, the 37 other ships nearby unloaded their barrage onto the same target. Because the Venetians' vessels were treated with tar on their planks and ropes to preserve the materials, they were highly susceptible to fire.

As such, when the explosive shells impacted the hundreds of ships docked in the harbor, the fires rapidly spread from the affected vessels to every ship in the port. Civilian and military vessels alike were lit ablaze, and those unfortunate enough to be on those vessels were either engulfed in the explosive blast or were burnt alive by the rapidly spreading flames.

However, the bombardment did not stop with a single barrage as the cannons were rapidly reloaded and fired a second barrage onto the harbor; not only did Emmerich plan to eradicate every single vessel docked at Venice, but he also planned outright to devastate the very foundations of the port itself.

Thus the City bells began to ring as another barrage of cannon fire drowned out its tone with their thunderous echoes. It was as if hell itself had reared its ugly head upon the Venetians as the residents of the city of Venice gazed in horror at their mighty harbor, and the arsenal used to construct their fleet became engulfed in fire explosions.

Because the Swiss agent who was sent to deliver the message to the Holy Roman Emperor was not granted a horse and had to travel on foot to the capital of the Empire, Berengar had struck first and eradicated the majority of the Venetian Navy.

However, that was not the greatest insult to the Venetians; the fact that Berengar's Naval forces had continued their bombardment onto the port, the shipyards, and the factories; the sea-faring city was in an absolute state of humiliation the like they had never suffered.

Despite this, Emmerich commanded the sailors to load the cannons and fire their barrages onto the city. While doing so, the Admiral laughed like a maniac as he roared along with the thunderous echoes that resounded from the hundreds of guns.

"Henceforth, this shall be my anthem!"

Despite his bold words, they went completely unnoticed by his crew as they were completely drowned out by the sound of the guns firing onto the city.

While Emmerich was immersed in the sight of the attack, the Venetian citizens who had survived the onslaught scrambled to put out the flames that had spread across their city. Despite their best efforts, the flames continued to spread, consuming life and property in the process.

The sheer level of destruction that Emmerich had unleashed upon the city of Venice and its population was enough to be tried as a war criminal in Berengar's previous life; Despite this, Berengar would not punish the man; in fact, he might even give the man a commendation for his actions here on this night.

It was only after half of the city was a smoldering ruin did the fleet finally run out of shells, and as such, they reeled in their anchors and set sail into the rising dawn back to the coast of Austria. Within a single night, Berengar's most significant rival on the Mediterranean had been brought to ruin.

A year's worth of progress in building the largest Armada in the world was blasted to the depths of the Adriatic sea overnight. It would take decades for the Venetians to recover from this humiliation, and they would never forget what the Austrians had done this day.

Though not all of the Venetian Navy's ships were present during the attack, the overwhelming majority of them were, thus significantly leveling the playing field in the number of vessels Austria would have to fight at sea.

Though Venice was not the only target of the Austrian Navy, after all, Genoa would soon suffer a similar fate. With hundreds of ships at the Holy Roman Emperor's command destroyed in a matter of days, the Empire would quickly find its most significant advantage against Austria snuffed out of existence before the war had even officially begun.

As such, the first battle of the War for Austrian Independence was a rousing success. By the time Emperor Balsamo Corsini heard of this news, he would

be severely weakened in his ability to wage war against the Kingdom of Austria.

Chapter 302: Daily life in Austria

As the War for Austrian independence began and the soldiers marched to war, the overwhelming majority of Austrians were relatively unphased by the conflict at their borders. They were confident enough in their new King and his Armies to defend their lands; after all, he had driven Bavaria's previous incursion from Austria's borders so rapidly.

Now Berengar's army was more significant than ever, and the last few years of peace saw a massive military buildup in internal fortifications and garrisons. Despite Austria's neighbors being at war, it had never made its way into the citizens' daily lives, at least not since Berengar rose to power.

As such, in the district of Kufstein, one man, in particular, was enjoying his daily life. The farming innovations that he had helped Berengar implement early on had paid off in the long run. His farm was now fully mechanized by Berengar's machinery, and it was among the first to do so.

As such, he and his large family could operate thousands of acres of farmland by themselves. Gunther had used the wealth he gained from Berengar's innovations to purchase more and more farmland. To the point where he was not only growing agricultural products but also a large amount of hemp.

Hemp had become an essential resource in Berengar's newly established Kingdom of Austria; it was a versatile material that could be used in many aspects of daily life, including building resources and paper.

Due to environmental concerns over implementing the Industrial Revolutions several centuries earlier than in his previous life, Berengar had begun to slowly implement sustainable materials, such as hemp concrete, hemp paper, hemp clothing, and many other innovative uses for the fibrous material.

As far as hemp wood goes, Berengar would have to wait until he had access to soybeans, as the material used an eco-friendly soy-based adhesive to glue the plant fibers together in the form of hardwood. Otherwise, he would have already begun experimenting with the wood-alternative in the form of sailing vessels.

Due to the demand for the fibrous material, Gunther had become quite wealthy, and he was currently within the City of Kufstein's new expanded industrial district negotiating with a representative of Berengar's government for the right to lease a plot of land in Kufstein owned by Berengar for the purpose of opening a hemp-based paper factory.

With the King away at war, the task fell to a knight's son known as Ingbert, who Berengar had previously used to establish a case against Lambert after the boy had attempted to assassinate Berengar on multiple occasions.

Since the Kitzbühel Border War, Ingbert has taken a step back from military affairs and focused on financial matters regarding Berengar's government. After being captured by the Baron of Kitzbühel and fearing for his life, the cowardly knight's son decided to return to civil affairs.

Though his talent as an engineer was garbage, his knowledge of financial affairs proved to be the proper place for him in life, and as such, Berengar tasked him with leasing portions of his land to would-be business owners.

At the moment, Ingbert and Gunther were meeting at the plot of land that Gunther wished to lease from Berengar. The two men were gazing around the large tract of land that was sufficient to fit a 5,000 sq ft warehouse.

After inspecting the plot for some time, Gunther smiled and nodded at Ingbert, who observed his actions; as he did so, he boldly declared his intent.

"I will take it; how much is the rent?"

Ingbert calculated the value based on the square feet of the property and then smiled before revealing five fingers. When he did so, Gunther was surprised at first and had to confirm his thoughts.

"five Thalers?"

Ingbert began to laugh; he continued doing so for several minutes before shaking his head and responding with a stoic expression.

"five Guldens."

Gunther gasped as he heard this news, five Guldens was no small sum for monthly rent, but when he thought about the prime real estate and the fact that it was one of the few plots left in Kufstein that could accommodate the factory that he desired to build, the farmer ultimately agreed to the price stated.

"Deal."

With this, Gunther reached into a pouch he had brought with him and pulled out five golden coins, each one of them bearing the visage of Berengar on one side, with his coat of arms on the other. With this transaction completed, Ingbert smiled before informing Gunther of the terms for his lease.

"Fees are due on the first of the month; since you are leasing industrial territory, the factory has to fulfill environmental regulations; during its construction process, a government advisor will be assigned to you at your expense to make sure everything is up to code.

After everything checks out, you will be permitted to purchase the land at a discount after five years of successful development. Are these terms acceptable?"

Gunther was already aware of the terms for leasing the property from Berengar. As such, he nodded his head in approval; afterward, Ingbert handed over a ledger before confirming the agreement.

"Sign here, and you will be able to begin construction of your factory immediately."

As such, Gunther read over the lease conditions thoroughly before he took ahold of the quill and ink provided to him and wrote down his signature. As an educated man in Kufstein and a member of the House of Representatives, he was more than capable of reading and writing.

After he finished doing so, he handed the ledger back to Ingbert, who gave Gunther a small seal before explaining its function.

"This seal proves you are a factory owner here in the Industrial district; present this to the guards upon entry, and they will give you priority for

entering the area. Other than that, if you don't have any questions for me, our business here is concluded. I hope that you can achieve success with this lot."

With that said, Ingbert walked off the lot, leaving Gunther alone to stare at the vacant property. He was well prepared for the cost it would take to build a solid factory here on this plot of land, knowing after he had done so that he would make an even greater fortune for his family.

Though he may not be nobility, one day soon he might become wealthier than all of the snobbish noblemen who had looked down upon him his entire life, and he only had one man to thank for such an opportunity; King Berengar von Kufstein, without the young monarch's political and economic reforms a man born a lowly peasant like Gunther would be forced to work the fields his entire life.

Never in his wildest dreams did he believe that such change would come to Kufstein within his lifetime, let alone the whole of Austria. Because of the heights he had risen to, he had grown quite popular among the common people of Kufstein. Thus he was chosen as a representative for the government due to this rising popularity.

He hoped to work hard in the future, as a politician, as a farmer, as a factory owner, and as a father for the benefit of all people within the City of Kufstein and Austria as a whole. As such, the journey of this once lowly peasant was far from over; how far he would climb into this brave new world that Berengar was forging, only time would tell.

Chapter 303: Forward March!

The light of dawn shone upon the southern border of Austria, within the alps of Tyrol, in the Viscounty of Trent, Berengar stood upon a hill observing his army that was gathered below. A total of 50,000 men, armed in the unique quenched and hardened high carbon blackened steel half-plate armor, stood in the valley overlooked by their King.

Under the King's orders, the army had been split into two components, the Italian Invasion Force, which consisted of 50,000 men, while the Swiss Invasion Force consisted of 25,000 men. Berengar intended to use this war as an excuse to annex the Swiss Confederation. As such, he left the invasion of the Swiss Confederation to a competent General among his ranks.

At the moment, Berengar wore his signature gilded three quarter's plate armor with a cavalier style cloak made from dalmatian fur draped across his left shoulder. The troops gathered below gazed upon his immaculate visage as he began to give his speech.

"Men of Austria! The Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire has engaged in attempted sabotage of our factories; in doing so, he has violated the rights bestowed upon us as vassals. Thus I, King Berengar, first of my name, have formally declared our independence from the Holy Roman Empire.

Today you stand as the Royal Army of Austria as we march into the lands of the oppressor who has sought to hamper our progress towards the new dawn! I will not lie to you, the road will be bloody, but in the end, our people shall be free to pursue their destiny, as a great power in Europe!

God with us!"

The moment Berengar said his battle cry while saluting the 50,000 men standing below his plateau, all they began to chant the words in unison, echoing into the dawn while returning the salute to their King.

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

Such was the sight on the Austro-Italian border as Berengar's men prepared for an invasion into their enemy's homeland. Afterward, Berengar gave the order to his troops.

"Forward March!"

It had been some time since Berengar's Declaration of Independence reached the Emperor, and even longer since his pre-emptive strike on Venice and Genoa, as such war was inevitable. Berengar had mustered his forces at his enemy's border far quicker than the Italians could rally their own troops.

Thus, the Austrians entered Italy without confrontation. As the soldiers began to march, Berengar mounted his trusty steed and soon found himself marching at the front of his army. The sight of 50,000 men entering northern Italy would be terrifying to anyone who witnessed such a thing.

Such a massive army was rare in Europe during this time frame, especially considering how well equipped and trained the Royal Austrian Army was. The Austrians marched for some time before they encountered any form of resistance.

The first target of Berengar's campaign against the Holy Roman Empire would be the city of Verona; after all, it was the nearest major city to the Trent border. It took a few days for Berengar to reach the ancient town; however, when they did, they noticed that the walls were well manned.

The local nobleman had been preparing for Berengar's arrival by fortifying the city and abandoning the towns and villages to Austrian cruelty, utterly unaware that Berengar did not need to ransack such locations.

After all, his logistical network spread to every corner of Austria. When considering the small distance between Trent and Verona, Berengar left the villagers in between the two cities untouched by the savagery of war.

When the Royal Austrian Army arrived at the gates of Verona, they instantly began constructing a proper siege camp. With the introduction of Schmidt guns, Berengar chose to mount them on the trench lines that he established outside his base with the intent to effectively use the rapid-firing firearms, capable of utilizing canister shots to repel anyone suicidal enough to charge at his defenses.

Aside from the Schmidt guns acting as defense of the encampment, 1417 12-pounder cannons were also placed under the protection of the trench line while raised in an elevation necessary to fire over it. With this elevation, the cannons would still be able to efficiently target the city's walls.

The beauty of the M1857 12-pounder Napoleon that Berengar had based his artillery off of was that it was versatile enough to act as both a field gun and a howitzer; it was more than capable enough to successfully fire arced shots at his enemy's defenses.

However, Berengar did not immediately begin his bombardment; in fact, he wanted to wait until the next day to start his assault; after all, he had all the time in the world and would prefer that his soldiers received some proper rest before engaging in a siege.

Instead, after the siege camp was effectively set up, Berengar began distributing rations, which as per usual, was a wheat porridge-based dish, it was filled with beef, onions, and mushrooms. It was not much, but it was enough to feed the soldiers and was relatively easy to prepare.

After eating alongside his soldiers, Berengar retired to his tent, where he began to strip his armor before climbing into bed; as he did so, a particular memory flashed in his head. It was the moment he said goodbye to his two lovers and his children, as well as his younger sister.

Berengar was clad in his armor as he hugged his young son Hans; though the boy was only three years old, he gazed at Berengar with an understanding expression. The only words the boy said to his father as he prepared to march to war were

"Be safe, father."

As for Helga, she was still too young to speak and was in Linde's arms, who once more had a worried expression on her face; as Berengar kissed his infant daughter on her forehead, Linde spoke the words on her mind.

"I will pray for you!"

For some reason, Berengar found this funny and chuckled lightly as he dragged the beautiful young woman into his arms. Linde was far from devout; however, if there was one time she prayed to the Lord God almighty with any sense of sincerity, it was when her man went off to war. After he embraced his lover, he kissed her passionately before saying his departing words.

"I love you."

Linde responded in kind before letting go of Berengar's grasp.

"I love you too!"

With that said, Berengar turned to Henrietta, where he patted her on the head. The girl instantly hugged him. Over the past few years, she had begun to grow into a beautiful young adolescent girl. Berengar would soon have to think

about finding her a fiancé. However, such thoughts were interrupted as the girl began to cry into Berengar's steel-plated chest.

"Be safe, dearest brother!"

In response to this, Berengar hugged his little sister before replying to her.

"I promise I will return safe and sound."

After a few moments, Berengar forced himself out of Henrietta's grasp as he walked over to Honoria and grasped ahold of her hand before walking out the door of the building. He said his goodbyes to her as they approached the river port of Kufstein. Honoria had a far more critical job while Berengar was at war, leading her crew of salty wenches as they raided the Italian shipping vessels.

As such, Berengar kissed her goodbye at the entrance to her ship in front of all her crew members, Elfrun in particular looked away in disgust as she saw Honoria fall for such a playboy once more. After making out with the gorgeous young princess, Berengar said the exact words that he left Linde with.

"I Love you, Honoria."

In return, Honoria put on a smug smile before responding to Berengar's words with a snarky remark.

"I know!"

After saying that, Honoria hopped out of Berengar's arms and onto her sloop of war, where she immediately began to depart; as the ship started to sail down the river Inn Berengar called out to her one last time.

"Be careful!"

In response, Honoria smiled and blew a kiss to Berengar; it was only after the ship was out of sight that Berengar reunited with his army and departed for war. After reflecting upon the recent past, Berengar soon found himself asleep with a broad smile on his face.

He would not awaken until the dawn of the next day, and when he did, it was to the sound of an artillery barrage going off. With such a thunderous noise acting as his alarm clock, Berengar knew that the Siege of Verona had begun.

Chapter 304: Gaining a Foothold in the Swiss Confederation

With the invasion of Italy underway, Berengar's efforts to conquer and annex the Swiss Confederation in his war for Independence had also begun. Under the command of General Adelbrand von Salzburg, the Austrian armies had marched into the lands of their enemies with a total of 25,000 men.

Adelbrand was promoted to the rank of General in the last few years of Austria's peacetime and military expansion. He had proven a competent commander during the defense of Salzburg from the Bavarian Occupation of Austria.

He also was loosely related to Berengar as the brother-in-law of Berengar's cousin Ava. After Berengar had liberated Austria from the Bavarians, the man immediately enlisted in the Austrian Army during Berengar's brief regency over Austria.

He had eventually gone through officer school and risen in the ranks quickly due to his natural talent as a military commander. This was his first major campaign as he marched the 25,000 man army into the Swiss Confederation with the intent of conquest.

At the moment, the artillery was in the process of being set up, as Adelbrand's soldiers loaded their weapons with quick loading tubes. Upon their invasion, they swiftly met a force of swiss soldiers within the mountainous terrain.

However, as the Austrians were preparing for battle, Adelbrand was surprised to see a white flag being flown by a representative of the Swiss forces flying the banner of the local noblemen within the province of Chur.

Chur had long since been a home of the German Reformist movement. When they saw the Austrian banners flying with the invasion force, the Count of Chur immediately began to negotiate his defection.

If Berengar was fighting a war for Independence against the Holy Roman Emperor, it was his duty as a devout reformist to aid that rebellion in any way

he could. The Count of Chur, who only recently gained his position from the Arch-Bishop of Chur, who had vacated after converting to the Reformist religion, approached Adelbrand with his visor risen and a smile on his face.

The man rode on horseback where he met Adelbrand in front of his Army, utterly fearless of what the Austrians might do to him; The Count of Chur quickly declared his intentions as he greeted the Austrian General.

"I am Count Rayner von Chur, ruler of this territory. As a devout Reformist, I hereby surrender the County of Chur to Austria in the name of God and King Berengar! You are free to use my County as a base of operations for your war effort!"

When Adelbrand heard this, he was instantly shocked; he was not a devout Reformist, nor did he have any loyalty to the Catholic Church; he respected military might, which was why he followed Berengar so passionately.

To see a Count so willingly surrender in the name of religious similarities was astonishing. As such, it took General Adelbrand several moments to find the words to speak. Eventually, he smiled before reaching his hand out as a friendly gesture.

"I, General Adelbrand von Salzburg, formally accept your surrender. If your Army would disarm yourselves, it would be most appreciated."

Quite honestly, Adelbrand found the whole scenario hard to believe, and as such, he refused to fall into any trap. To his surprise Count, Rayner rode back to his Army and gave them the orders he had received from Adelbrand, where the entire Army threw their arms away and stripped their armor.

After doing so, they knelt before the Austrian overlords as a sign of their submission. The Austrian soldiers were just as shocked as Adelbrand as they witnessed such a sight. Either this was the most elaborate ruse they had ever seen, or these Swiss soldiers were seriously devout Reformists.

With these two options in mind, Adelbrand proceeded with caution as he addressed the disarmed swiss soldiers.

"I accept your surrender and henceforth announce the annexation of the County of Chur into the Kingdom of Austria on behalf of His Majesty King Berengar von Kufstein. If you serve your new monarch honorably, I can assure you that the nobles among you may maintain your status within your new lives!"

As Wolfgang said this, the Swiss soldiers stood up in unison and saluted as they utilized the Austrian Battle Cry in response as an affirmation of their submission.

"God with us!"

With that said, the Chur soldiers led the Austrians towards their fortresses, where they immediately came under the occupation of the Royal Austrian Army. As the armies settled in, Adelbrand gathered intelligence of the Swiss Confederation and its military capabilities from Count Rayner.

"So tell me, what is the strength of the Swiss Armies? How many men will we be facing? Where are they located? What tactics will they be utilizing?"

With this said, Count Rayner led the Austrian General into the war room, where he immediately pointed out the positions on the map of the Swiss Armies.

"Aside from us in Chur, the Swiss Confederation has roughly 25,000 men at their disposal. These are mostly men at arms and knights that are similarly equipped to the mercenaries that Berengar defeated during the brief rebellion, those treacherous noblemen raised against him.

Most of the armies are currently being gathered in Zurich up here; when they have rallied together, they will march on our position; my suggestion is to wait patiently and crush the main Army in defense of Chur. Then after they are utterly decimated, you will have free reign to conquer the small garrisons that litter the various major cities across the realm.

Once those swiss cities are defeated, the rest of the land will surrender with a simple show of force. What do you think?"

Although Adelbrand thought the plan was a good idea, he could not fully trust the Count of Chur and his men, who had fully surrendered; as such, he shook his head before coming up with a different attack plan.

"You and your men will stay here and guard the border to Austria; I will lead my army to attack the enemy directly."

Count Rayner could immediately tell that Adelbrand did not trust him, and he did not blame him. Surrendering to annexation without a fight was unheard of. However, he was a true believer in the reformist cause.

Rayner believed that an independent homeland should be established for the movement, and as such, the man was more than happy to join his neighbors in Austria with who he shared a border as part of this envisioned Reformist Homeland.

Thus he sighed heavily before agreeing to Adelbrand's plan; trust could not be built overnight; all he could do was loyally abide by his commands and protect the Austrian Border. With that said, the Austrian troops began to rest before they would depart the next day.

Ever the cautious commander, Adelbrand left his troops on watch over the region and had given them specific instructions to be on the lookout for the Chur soldiers' potential treachery. Despite expecting such a thing, it never manifested, and the Austrian soldiers were allowed a reprieve.

With this, Austria had gained a foothold in the Swiss Confederation without firing a single shot. When the news finally spread to the Swiss Confederation about Chur's betrayal, it would be far too late, as the Austrians would already be at their doorsteps.

Chapter 305: A New Era of Naval Warfare

While Berengar was invading Northern Italy and laying siege to Verona, Adelbrand was marching his soldiers towards Zurich, where the Swiss army gathered. As for Honoria, she had already set sail from Kufstein and entered the Mediterranean via the black sea.

She and her crew of salty wenches were prepared for their first encounter of Naval Warfare, their target? Any sailing vessels that were flying the banners

of a Holy Roman Empire state. Coincidentally enough, the moment they sailed into the Aegean sea, they saw a ship flying the flag of Venice.

While most of the Venetian Naval and Merchant fleets were decimated within the pre-emptive strike Emmerich had engaged in; there were still vessels already at sea that were spared their destruction. This merchant caravel which had recently departed from Constantinople was one of those ships.

The 18 lb long guns featured on the Sloop of War known as "Honorias Revenge" were not equipped with explosive shells; the reason for this was simple, such weapons were far too effective on wooden ships and would sink any form of loot to the depths of the sea.

As such, Honorias cannons were supplied with 18 lb cannonballs and chain shots, designed to take out the masts of any sea-faring vessel and cripple their ability to sail, and this was precisely the munitions Honorias ordered her crew to load into the cannons.

"Load the chain shot and prepare to fire upon the target when we get in range; I want as many of the sailors taken alive as possible!"

The Sloop of war traveling roughly twice the speed of the Caravel quickly closed the distance. Judging by the Austrian flag that was being flown on its back, the Venetian sailors knew that their luck had run out.

With this in mind, the crew began to pray to God as they began to load their bows and crossbows. However, Honorias vessel was far from the range of such primitive weapons, and she quickly pulled up to the Caravel's port side, where she gave a command to her cannoneers.

"Open fire!"

With that said, the ten cannons on the port side opened fire as the linked cannonballs twirled through the air targeting the small Caravel. Even though some of the chained shots missed their targets, more than enough had successfully hit the masts and, in doing so, crippled the vessel's sailing capability, leaving the Venetian Caravel and its crew stranded in the water.

Upon seeing this, Honoria's crewmates quickly began to load their 1421 Repeating Rifled Flintlocks as they aimed the weapons in the direction of the Venetian sailors. The moment the Sloop approached the derelict Caravel, the Venetians began to fire their bows and crossbows upon Honoria and her crew.

Seeing the bolts and arrows fly in her direction Honoria who was currently equipped in a half-plate breastplate and with Heraclius perched on her shoulder, gave the command to her crew to engage the enemy.

"Open fire!"

with this command, the wenches aboard Honoria's ship aimed their rifles, cocked back the actions, and fired their first shots. There were roughly twenty-five Venetian sailors on board the Caravel. On the other hand, Honoria had over double that amount, who unleashed their fury on the hostile Venetians.

A volley of lead bullets flew into the Venetian sailors and penetrated their flesh, spilling blood across the ship and into the sea below. More than one of these men fell lifeless into the depths of the Aegean sea as the projectiles ripped through their hearts and skulls.

After the first volley had taken place, the Venetians immediately dropped their weapons and surrendered; as such, the girls among Honoria's crew re-cocked their weapons before cautiously boarding the Venetian vessel. As they did so, they immediately bound the Venetian sailors; their Captain began to spew profanities at Honoria as she crossed over to the ship.

"You fucking bitches! Do you have any idea who you are messing with? When the Doge finds out that you have attacked our ship, he will send the might of the Venetian Navy after you! You will not be able to escape the wrath of Venice!"

The moment he said this, the women who now held these men captive began to laugh; they were already aware of the fate of the Venetian fleet before they even set sail, as for the Venetian Captain, he had been at sea for too long. He was completely unaware of what had transpired; as such, he and his crew looked confused as they saw the women mocking them.

Honorio backhanded the man fiercely before kneeling before him and explaining what the women found so funny.

"The Venetian Navy is lying at the depths of the Adriatic sea. The Royal Austrian Navy sunk it along with half of your precious city weeks ago. All that's left are a few stragglers, and before long, they too will be mopped up. As for you and all the other merchant ships like you, you are fair game!"

The moment she said this, the Captain spat on her pretty face and responded with another insult.

"You're a fucking lying cunt! There's no way the Grand Armada of Venice could be destroyed so easily!"

In response to this insult to her integrity, Honorio coldly pulled out her pistol, cocked back the hammer, and shot the Captain in the head. Maybe it was because of Berengar's influence, but the young Byzantine princess did not hesitate in the slightest to murder this man who had done nothing more than insulting her.

Heraclius stared at Honorio with a look that conveyed his thoughts, which could be surmised with the phrase.

"Was that necessary?"

Honorio ignored the eagle's glare; as she did so, she wiped the spit from her face with her glove and kicked the corpse of the Venetian Captain into the sea. After this was done, another hostage could not prevent himself from cursing the young princess.

"Fucking pirates!"

When Honorio heard this, she gazed fiercely at the man, instantly shutting him up. As she did so, she reached into her pocket and pulled out a paper signed by the Berengar. She had a smug smile on her face as she educated the man about his ignorance.

"Privateer actually, this here is a letter of marque and reprisal from King Berengar von Kufstein of Austria, signifying that my crew and I can attack enemy shipping and naval vessels. In doing so, we are allowed to keep any loot we might come across.

As for the rest of you, you are hostages; we will take you back to Trieste where you will be ransomed off, to whatever remains of your precious Venetian Republic..."

With that said, Honoria snapped at her compatriots as she bellowed her orders.

"Lock them up in the brig, and transfer whatever treasure this vessel carries onto our own. We're going hunting!"

With this said, the privateers got to work. While all of this was going on, Elfrun had carried on a small crate filled with sticks of dynamite; as she placed it down on the deck, Honoria looked at her curiously before asking the question on her mind.

"Elfrun, what are you doing?"

To this, the young teenage girl smiled brightly before picking up one of the sticks of dynamite and holding a lighter that had been manufactured in Austria next to it.

"I'm going to blow this ship up!"

The cute and excited expression on the girl's face did not match the violent words she had uttered; as such, Honoria was quite taken aback at first; however, after a few moments, Honoria began to break out in laughter; this caused Elfrun to pout in response.

After calming herself down, Honoria walked over and hugged Elfrun tightly before responding to her claim.

"Just make sure to do it after we have safely exited the vessel!"

Elfrun began to blush at the affectionate display. However, eventually, she embraced Honoria's gesture and closed her eyes while enjoying the moment. After a few seconds had passed, Honoria let go when she noticed Melissa had arrived.

Melissa did not bother to question the scene in front of her and instead reported the crew's findings to Honoria.

"We hit the jackpot, aside from some chests filled with hyperpyrons! We've got purple dye, loads of silk and cotton too! We also got some Indian spices and some rare animal skins; evidently, they were on their way back from trading with Constantinople!"

When Honoria heard this, a pretty smile curved upon her luscious pink lips, she was delighted to know that their first take was so bountiful. As such, she asked the question on her mind.

"Is everything transferred over?"

In response to this, Melissa nodded silently; as such, Honoria commanded her crew.

"Everyone! Please get back to the ship; we are departing; after everyone was safely aboard and the vessel had begun to leave, Honoria tapped Elfrun's shoulder and smiled as she nodded silently; this was the queue the girl needed to start the fireworks.

With a cruel smile on the girl's cute face, the pyromaniac lit the stick of TNT in her hands before tossing it onboard the freshly ransacked Caravel; the explosive compound landed perfectly in the stack of dynamite, where the fuse slowly began to consume itself.

After Honoria's Revenge had made its way to a safe distance, the stick of TNT detonated, causing a chain reaction with the other explosives, effectively blowing the small Caravel to smithereens.

As the explosion blasted the Caravel apart amid the Aegean sea, the crew of pirates gazed upon their victory with awe. They could hardly believe what they

had just done; this crew of wenches had ushered in a new era of naval warfare.

There was only one person to thank for such a thing, and that was King Berengar von Kufstein of Austria; without his support to Honoria, these young women would never be able to feel the rush of adrenaline they had felt this day, nor would they ever see such wealth in their hands.

Chapter 306: Cat Fight III

While Berengar was away at war, one man was in Kufstein working exceptionally hard to cover for the King's absence; this man was Chancellor Otto von Graz. After the debacle with Liutbert, Berengar had selected someone else to act as Chancellor.

However, this man had utterly failed to live up to the task. Thus when Berengar promoted his Uncle and soon-to-be father-in-law to Marquess, he also gave him the position of Chancellor, which in Berengar's Kingdom was equivalent to the Vice President.

Otto had been working at home in Graz during his tenure as Chancellor until now; after all, there was not much work that needed to be done in such a position. Now that Berengar was off at war, it was the Chancellor's job to rule in his stead.

Thus Otto had traveled to Kufstein with Adela in tow and was currently living within a chateau built within the city. Every day Adela would visit the Castle of Kufstein, where she would interact with her rival Linde. She also played with her dear friend and cousin Henrietta, who had just begun to enter into her teenage years.

At the moment Adela was in a meeting with Linde, the two young women were having a serious discussion now that they were alone for the first time in a long time. Adela had a calm expression on her face as she began to chastise Linde for her behavior that resulted in another child before Adela herself could marry her fiance.

"You couldn't help yourself, could you? You just had to convince Berengar into giving you another child so soon, even though you knew there were still some years before he and I got married.

That's selfish of you; you know that, right? I still have months before I can marry my fiance, and in the meantime, he has given you his lover two children. Do you have any idea how envious that makes me?

How long will this war last? What if he doesn't come home for a year or two? If that is the case, then by the time I get married to him, your children will already be five and three. How is that fair to me?"

In response to this line of questioning, Linde held her head high; she was exceptionally proud of her relationship with Berengar and felt no guilt for her actions. Seeing the smug grin on Linde's exquisite face, Adela sighed in defeat before placing her forehead in the palm of her hand; she sounded exhausted as she admitted defeat.

"Whatever, that's in the past; what I need to worry about now is Honoria; just how much have the two of them been sleeping together? Do I need to worry about another bastard child being born before my own?"

The term bastard greatly pained Linde; however, she kept it to herself. Instead, a wicked smile curved itself upon the angelic beauty's lips as she thought of the question Adela asked; as such, Linde decided to punish the little fiancee for her cruel remarks.

This did not go unnoticed by the shrewd girl, who confused Linde's smug expression as a sign that she knew something important. As such, a cold gaze spread across Adela's sapphire blue eyes as she glared at Linde with a stern expression.

"What aren't you telling me?"

Linde was aware of how many nights Berengar had spent with Honoria. Since his birthday nearly half a year ago, the man had been demanding that his two women share his bed with him at the same time; as such, there was not an intimate moment between Berengar and Honoria that the veteran spymaster was unaware of, at least in recent history.

With this in mind, Linde decided to play with Berengar's fiancee, who she thought of as nothing more than a naive little girl, seeing Adela's reaction to

the debauchery that Berengar engaged in with his two lovers every night would at the very least be entertaining to the young woman.

"I wouldn't worry about that if I were you, Berengar hasn't done anything that could get the girl pregnant."

This answer confused Adela, as she was still young and innocent and was unaware that three people could share a bed, or how one could have sex without the risk of pregnancy. All she knew about procreation was the small details her parents had informed her of, which was nothing more than basic biology.

As such, the young fiancée asked the question on her mind in a fit of fury.

"How could you possibly know that?!"

Upon hearing this, Linde simply smiled before approaching the girl and whispering in her ear the grotesque details about how she and Honoria would service Berengar every night. Before long, Adela's cute face was flushed red with embarrassment. No matter how much Linde said, she could not pull herself away out of curiosity.

After Linde had spent a few minutes explaining her usual nightly play with her master, she broke away from the girl with a satisfied expression. The Embarrassed and shocked appearance of Adela was too cute, and Linde intended to enjoy every second of it.

It took Adela a few moments to find the words to rebuke Linde. At first, she stammered over herself before gradually forming the words to chastise the vixen in front of her.

"y... y... you pervert! You're sick; there's no way Berengar would do such a thing! You have to be lying!"

However, Linde giggled in response to Adela's innocent reactions; to her, this was the best form of revenge for what the little girl had said about her children earlier. As such, she responded to Adela in an amorous tone.

"I am sure that after your wedding night, he will pressure you into joining the fun; I can't wait until I see the day, little sister..."

The moment Adela heard those words, she began to pout and reject Linde's statement; there was no way she could ever conceive of the idea of sleeping with Berengar along with his two lovers. It was simply out of the question!

"I will never do such a thing, even if Berengar asks it of me! That's just wrong; for so many reasons, how can you possibly live so sinfully? Are you not afraid that God will punish you? To think you would drag Berengar down into such filth with you!"

This comment only made Linde laugh even more; this statement was just too funny to her; as such, she laughed so hard that she nearly collapsed. After over thirty seconds of laughing, the young woman finally began to calm down and wiped the tears from her eyes.

Adela, of course, was furious at this response and had grit her teeth while curling her fists as she struggled to contain her inner wrath when she asked about Linde's outrageous reaction.

"What's so funny?"

To this, Linde sighed before informing Adela of the reality.

"It was not me who suggested such a thing, to begin with..."

Adela found this shocking; if it was not Linde, it could only be Honoria. However, Adela did not immediately pin the blame on the young princess. Instead, she asked the identity of the pervert who first thought up such wicked behavior.

"Then who was it?"

Linde struggled to contain her laughter as she anticipated Adela's expression when she heard this next piece of information.

"Well, Berengar had joked around about the idea a few times to me, but it was ultimately Honoria who came up with the plan to give him such a birthday gift.

I had my reservations at first, but it was quite an enjoyable experience. I am sure you will join us soon enough. After all, I can tell that you are curious no matter how much you protest."

After saying that, Linde walked past Adela, tapping her on the shoulder before leaving the room in silence. In doing so, she left Adela alone with nothing but her imagination about such a situation where she, Linde, Honoria, and Berengar all embraced one another.

The more Adela thought about it, the more her mind went numb until she finally shook herself out of her stupor. At that moment, the little fiancée made a solemn vow to herself as she cursed Linde beneath her breath.

"I will never allow such a thing to happen; just you watch bitch!"

After saying this, Adela too left the room; however, unlike Linde, who had left in style, Adela had gone out in a tantrum; she could not believe Berengar had fallen to such depravity. As such, she made it her mission to bring Berengar back into the light. Whether she would teach the man, she loved the error of his ways or fall to the depravity she resented was yet to be seen.

Chapter 307: Excessive Plunder

After having successfully raided the Venetian merchant vessel, Honoria and her crew had begun to set sail for Trieste. Austria did not have much coastline at the moment, and Trieste had formed the central trading hub.

It was also the city with the largest harbor, as it held Austria's most significant shipyard. The haul that the crew of Honoria's Revenge had achieved was substantial. Not only did they manage to loot the wealth the merchants had gained from their recent trade with Byzantine Merchants, but they also got ahold of the expensive items they were bringing back to Venice.

On top of this, they got several prisoners to ransom back to Venice. If Venice refused to pay for their ransom, they would sell them to slavers within Constantinople for profit. Either way, there was money to be made with the captives.

At the moment, Honoria was enjoying the beer Berengar had given to her; it was the standard drink prepared onboard the Vessel. In the middle of her

Captain's quarters, she was lying on her plushy feather mattress, which was covered with silk sheets.

She immensely enjoyed the freedom of the seas, and she could not thank Berengar enough for fulfilling her dreams. The only thing she regretted was that her lover was off at war while she returned to his borders. If not for that, she might stop by Kufstein to engage in some fun with Berengar and Linde.

However, Honoria's thoughts did not last long as she overheard a knock on her door; as such, she rose from her bed and walked over to the door. After opening it, she saw that Elfrun was standing at the entrance with an excited expression on her face. Before Honoria could inquire about it, Elfrun blurted out her news.

"Captain, we have spotted a Genoan Vessel! It appears to be a Carrack! What are your orders?"

Hearing that such a large merchant vessel was nearby brought a smile to Honoria's face as she immediately placed her beer upon her cupboard and grabbed ahold of her baldric, which contained her pistols and her sword.

After slinging it over her shoulder, Honoria put on the cavalier hat Berengar had given her and smiled before giving her orders.

"We're going to pillage it, of course!"

With this, Elfrun's excitement grew even further as she grabbed ahold of two grenades from her belt and rubbed them with anticipation.

"I can't wait to use these bad boys!"

Seeing such a cute expression on the young adolescent girl's face as she talked about violence brought a smile to Honoria's own immaculate visage. As such, she grabbed ahold of the girl and stuffed her into her bosom before exclaiming.

"Oh, my sweet little Elfrun, you are just too adorable!"

Elfrun did not deny the hug and nuzzled against Honoria's chest like a cute little kitten with a smile on her face. After a few moments, Honoria released the girl before dragging her up to the ship's deck as she began to shout her orders to her crew of salty wenches.

"Prepare for battle! We are taking this Carrack!"

With that said, the girls onboard began to cheer as they loaded their weapons. Before long, the Sloop of War that was Honorai's privateering Vessel caught up with the Genoan Carrack. With this in mind, Honoria immediately gave the order when they had successfully entered the firing range.

"Fire at will!"

The moment Honoria gave this command, the 18 lb long guns opened fire on the carrack with their solid shot. They did not intend to cripple or blow up this ship, a carrack was a mighty vessel capable of journeying from the Mediterranean to the Baltic, and as such, it was worth a fortune. If they could capture the Vessel and repair it, they could sell it to the Byzantines or Granadans for a substantial sum.

With this in mind, the cannons fired their solid cannonballs into the enemy vessel. Before the Genoans could even react, they found themselves being blasted apart. After the first volley of 10 cannonballs was propelled at the target, Honoria's crew rapidly began to reload the guns before once more firing the projectiles.

With each cannonball, a bit more of the carrack was chipped away, and the Genoan sailors were forced to bilge the rising water within their Vessel. This was an issue Honoria's ship did not have due to the water-tight seal created from the galvanized steel-plated hull.

The Carrack was nearly defenseless from the cannon fire forced upon it by Honoria's Vessel; after all, it utterly lacked in offensive weapons, aside from a few crossbows utilized by the sailors.

The roughly 50 sailors aboard the Genoan Vessel fired their crossbows at the enemy, but Honoria and her girls were well protected by the cover the ship's

hull provided. As such, the Women onboard Honoria's Revenge fired their repeating flintlocks at the enemy sailors.

The rate of fire, the effective range, and the damage these weapons were capable of was vastly superior to the crossbows used by the Genoan sailors. Before long, half of the Genoan sailors were dead, and they had begun to raise the white flag.

After this action was completed, they disarmed themselves, and Honoria's crew lowered the planks, where they quickly boarded the Vessel. After doing so they began to restrain the surviving Genoan sailors. The crew of the Carrack was surprised to see that the pirates who attacked them were all women.

As such, the Captain of the Vessel began to bark at the lasses who had attacked his ship.

"Which one of you bitches in charge?"

The moment he said this, Honoria appeared before him with a cruel smirk on her face. She kicked the man in the gut in response to his statement before informing him of her status.

"I am Captain Valeria Zonara, Privateer licensed by the Kingdom of Austria to combat the enemies of his Majesty King Berengar; you will show me some respect!"

The man had just begun to recover from the violent reaction when he spat on the ground before further cursing the woman.

"Fucking Austrians! They've now got women doing their dirty work; you fucking barbarians should learn your place!"

Honoria glared viciously at the Captain of the Genoan Vessel, these sailors had no respect for women or Berengar's people, and as such, they needed to be taught a lesson; thus, a devilish idea formed in the princess's mind as she barked her orders.

"Elfrun!"

With this, the little girl immediately jumped up from her spot and saluted Honoria.

"Yes, Captain?"

A wicked grin formed across Honoria's immaculate visage as she asked Elfrun the question on her mind.

"Do you think you have a grenade that can fit in this man's mouth?"

Elfrun went from shock to a state of excitement as she matched Honoria's malicious smile before fumbling in her pockets. As she did so, she found a small steel ball filled with explosive powder and a fuse.

The moment she pulled out the small explosive device, the little girl leaped with joy as she walked? over to the Genoan Captain and forced the grenade in his mouth with the fuse sticking out.? After doing so, she gazed at Honoria, who nodded at her in response. Upon seeing this, Elfrun lit the fuse with her lighter before backing off from the blast zone.

The Captain's eyes opened wide as he tried to scream for help, but it was no use, the grenade was lodged between his jaw, and he could not quickly spit it out, nor could his cries for help reach the ears of his compatriots who were bound nearby. Witnessing such a horrific sight, the Genoan sailors began to scream for Honoria to stop

"Mercy! Show him mercy, please!"

Luckily the fuse was a slow-lit match. Otherwise, the man's head would have exploded by now; as such, Honoria glanced over at Elfrun before asking the question on her mind.

"What do you think? Should we show mercy?"

With this, the little girl began to pout; she wanted to see the sight of the man's head explode, purely for scientific reasons, of course. However, after thinking

about it, the girl thought it might be a bit too cruel and pulled the grenade out of the man's mouth before tossing it into the sea.

After doing so, Elfrun realized that the man had quite literally pissed his pants in fear, and as such, the girl was disgusted before walking back to Honoria's side. It took the Genoan Captain a few moments to come back to his senses before he gazed up at Honoria as if she were the devil.

As he stared at the foreign beauty, a malicious smile spread across her visage before she leaned in and whispered to him.

"Call me a bitch again, and I promise you the next time I will go through with it, do you understand?"

The Genoan Captain had shivers down his spine as he nodded silently towards the demonic woman in front of him. Afterward, Honoria called out to her crew.

"You know the drill, put them in the brig, and plunder the vessel, whatever we can't take leave on the ship, after all, we're sailing this baby to port!"

With that said, the girls quickly got to work, locking up the prisoners and distributing the goods; before long, the two ships were sailed side by side by Honoria's crew on their journey to Trieste. The gains they made on this day were substantial; one thing was sure, Honoria and her crew would be eating well tonight.

Chapter 308: The Holy Roman Empire Responds

Within the city of Florence, the Doges of Venice and Genoa were kneeling before the Holy Roman Emperor. Emperor Balsamo Corsini was beyond livid after the pre-emptive strike Berengar had engaged in on his two most powerful vassals.

The destruction of the majority of the Genoan and Venetian navies was a massive blow to Imperial power, not just in the war against Austria but across the Mediterranean as a whole. Besides this, Berengar had openly licensed pirates, or privateers as he referred to them to attack what little shipping remained of Empire.

With this in mind, the Emperor had called his two subordinates to the current capital of the Empire with the intent of seeing how this crisis they were suffering could be salvaged. The Venetian Doge was the first to speak his mind.

"Three-fourths of my Navy was destroyed in the attack on my harbor, along with well over half of my merchant fleet! The attack has laid waste to the pier itself; as such, Venice can no longer accept trade by sea without a port!

If that were not bad enough, our shipyards were annihilated, and our factories have been reduced to rubble. Because of this, we cannot build new ships for God knows how long!"

The Venetian Doge's face was flushed with anger, and his fists were curled as he shouted these words at the Emperor. The attack was swift and unexpected; Berengar had purposely sent the swiss agent without a horse to deliver the news of Austria's Independence to the Emperor.

With the time it took the man to reach Florence, Berengar had engaged in pre-emptive strikes on Venice and Genoa and amassed an army at the Italian borders. The aftermath of these attacks had severely reduced the Empire's ability to fight on the seas.

The Genoan Doge was not in any better condition; despite this, unlike his Venetian counterpart, he remained calm and collected as he informed the Emperor of Genoa's losses.

"We are in a similar situation; eighty percent of our Armada now lies at the bottom of the Ligurian Sea, our harbor is non-existent, and our ability to manufacture new ships has been crippled. We don't even possess the ability to repair the ships that remain. I must say, your Majesty, we are poorly equipped to face the Austrian Navy at sea."

The Emperor frowned as he heard this and tapped his armrest repeatedly as the noise echoed in the otherwise silent throne room. He could not believe that such an attack had occurred; not only that, but the Austrians were now laying siege to Verona as he spoke to his Vassals. Eventually, the Emperor collected his thoughts before asking the question on his mind.

"How many ships do we still have?"

The Genoan and Venetian Doges looked at one another before the Genoan Doge answered the Emperor's question.

"Less than three hundred, your majesty..."

The Emperor sighed when he heard this; if this was the case, then the Empire as a whole had between three hundred and four hundred ships left available for combat. The losses they had suffered in Berengar's sneak attacks were an unmitigated disaster. As such, the Emperor asked the following question on his mind

"How many ships do the Austrians have at their disposal?"

The Venetian Doge was the one to speak as he gave a rough estimate of the Austrian Naval Power.

"In their Navy? About seventy-five. However, there also appears to be a half-dozen of these so-called privateers attacking any Imperial merchant vessel they can get their hands on. So it is closer to 80 in total. The problem is the Austrian ships are larger and carry far more cannons on board; we don't know the exact number, but they should have thousands of cannons on their eighty or so ships."

The Emperor gripped his armrest tightly when he heard this report; he gritted his teeth as he struggled to contain his inner fury. Eventually, he calmed himself down before inquiring about information on the firepower that their remaining fleet possessed.

"And pray tell, how many cannons do we have onboard our vessels?"

The Venetian and Genoan Doges looked at one another with fear in their eyes, the two men were terrified to answer the question; ultimately, the Genoan Doge mustered the courage to reveal the truth of the matter to the already agitated Emperor.

"Less than 1500 in total. The Austrians may have fewer vessels than we do, but their firepower and speed are vastly superior to ours. To engage them in direct conflict is suicidal."

This was not the news the Emperor wanted to hear. However, it was real, and he was forced to deal with it; as such, the Emperor sighed heavily as he placed his face in the palm of his hands while struggling to come up with a solution for the crisis they were facing.

"What are the odds of us being able to attack their shipping? If we can return the favor and cripple their economy, then surely we might be able to turn the tides of war around?"

In response to this question, the Venetian Doge was far from calm on this matter as he immediately objected to the notion's feasibility.

"Impossible! The Austrian merchant vessels travel at an incredible speed; they are capable of close to three times the speed of our ships. There is no feasible method that we can use to pursue them effectively."

When Balsamo heard this, he began to grind his teeth in discontent; it appeared as if he were out of options at this point. However, he outright refused to abandon the Naval aspect of warfare with the Austrians, and as such, he began to ask for suggestions from the two Naval experts in the room.

"Tell me then, how do you suggest we most effectively utilize our remaining naval power?"

With this said, the Genoan Doge immediately presented what he believed to be the most efficient use of their ships.

"We should use our remaining naval vessels as escorts to our merchant ships. With such a large number of warships protecting our trading fleet, the Austrian pirates will have to think twice about attacking them."

Having heard this, the Venetian Doge nodded as he voiced support for the proposed plan.

"If we can not protect our merchants, then our economy will crumble, and we will not be able to sustain the war effort against Austria. I support my Genoan counterpart's plan of action."

It was quite possibly the first time these two men had agreed on anything, and as such, the Emperor was quite surprised. Thus, he sighed heavily before making a decision.

"We will do as you suggest then; I would like to see how daring these privateers are when a naval escort protects our merchant fleet!"

After this was said, the two Doges nodded their heads in firm resolve; they would immediately relay the orders to their remaining warships to protect merchant convoys at all costs. As such, the Emperor dismissed his two Vassals so they could make the appropriate preparations.

As for the Emperor, he sighed heavily as he thought about the numerous problems with the war for Austrian Independence. While he was sulking in his thoughts, a General came into the fray and handed the Emperor a report from the battlefield in the Swiss Confederation.

The moment the Emperor finished reading the report, he tore it apart in a fit of rage as he chastised his General heavily.

"The County of Chur has surrendered without a fight? What lunacy is this!?"

The General bowed his head respectfully as he tried to appease the enraged Emperor.

"Your Majesty, the County of Chur is a hotbed of reformist thought; it does not surprise me in the least that they would defect to Berengar's cause. If this is the case in Chur, it could prove to be a potential reality in other parts of the Empire that have begun to embrace the German Reformation."

The Emperor struggled to maintain his dignity as he heard this observation and ultimately failed to do so as he lashed out at his General.

"These damned Heretics! The fact that you refer to them as Reformists shows where your loyalties truly lie! Get out of my sight before I have you executed!"

The General was shocked to see the Emperor behave in such a manner; he was utterly unaware of the conversation that had just taken place and had no way of knowing that the poor news he brought to the Emperor was just the icing on the cake.

Despite his reservations over his mistreatment, he merely bowed respectfully in response to the Emperor's request. With his departure, the General left behind the words.

"As you command, your majesty..."

In the end, the Emperor was left alone, seething in his enraged state, as his world began to collapse around him. The truth of the matter was, with half of the Empire already embroiled in a state of conflict, the Emperor was not ready to fight a war with Austria.

The Italians had yet to muster their army in its entirety, and 50,000 Austrians were already laying siege to Verona. By the time the Italians could rally their forces to combat the threat, half of Northern Italy was likely to be taken by the Royal Austrian Army.

The Emperor may be quick to anger, but he knew well enough that if he met the Austrians in the field, only death awaited him and his men. With this in mind, the Emperor began to construct a plot to slow down the Austrian advance and buy him the time necessary to build an army large enough to counter the Austrian invasion of Italy.

Chapter 309: For King and Fatherland!

Berengar awoke to the thunderous echos of cannon fire from among his encampment. The weapons went off the moment the sun rose in the sky above the city of Verona. In his army of 50,000 men, Berengar had three entire brigades dedicated to Artillery that was a total of 12,000 men and 210 field guns.

If one were to take his entire army into consideration, Berengar had a total of five Artillery Brigades, two of which were currently located in the Swiss Confederation along with Adelbrand and the rest of his forces. Out of 75,000 men, 20,000 of them were dedicated to artillery. With the remaining 55,000 being a mix of infantry and cavalry.

That meant that Berengar had a total of 350 artillery pieces in his entire army, most of these being 1417 12 lb Cannons. With these 210 cannons fielded in Berengar's current army, which had a rate of fire of 1 round per minute, he was capable of bombarding a region with 12,600 explosive shells in an hour.

As such, the city walls of Verona fell before the population dwelling within had even consumed breakfast. As the northern wall crumbled to the ground from the hellish bombardment, Berengar stood among his forces, clad in his gilded black three quarter's plate armor. He held his burgonet under his arm as he addressed his soldiers gathered in the field.

"Men of Austria! We have many goals, here in Italy, and that is not simply to force the Emperor to recognize the Independence of the fatherland! With this war, we have been granted an opportunity, for the expansion of our people's wealth and prosperity.

In this city, and every city like it here in Northern Italy, lies a trove of wealth, that few countries have ever amassed. There is gold, there is silver, and we will take it all! Now my rules of war still apply, to each and every one of you.

However, what I ask of you, here today, in Verona, is to plunder every item of value from this city, and bring it back to Austria! We will smelt the silver, and gold, into our currency, and stimulate the growth of our economy, which has already begun to stagnate!

Anyone who tries to stop you in your actions is to be considered an adversary, and should be treated as such! God with us!"

The moment Berengar finished his passionate speech the army of 50,000 soldiers gathered around him began chanting their warcry.

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

After saying this Berengar placed his burgonet on his head and unsheathed his sword before leading the charge into the rubble that once was the city's Northern Wall. As he charged into the fray, he noticed the few thousand defenders gathered among the rubble, preparing to lay down their lives in defense of the city, and the people within it.

As such Berengar halted and allowed his soldiers to form ranks, where a battalion of Grenadiers fired their shots into the crowd. The moment they did so the lead projectiles found their way downrange and into the men who had gathered before them, piercing through their iron armor as if it were a knife passing through butter, and with it turning their armor into bloody sieves.

For good measure, the Grenadiers followed the volley by lobbing their grenades at the enemy, after 1000 grenades went of those were left standing were either blown apart along with their fallen comrades or rendered in a condition unfit for battle.

In a matter of seconds, the only thing that stood in the Austrians way was sorely defeated. In response to this the battalion who had fired their shots reloaded their weapons, as the other infantry battalions rushed into the fray.

Berengar stood back among his grenadiers as he allowed them to reload their weapons in a matter of seconds with their quick loading tubes. After doing so they advanced over the piles of mutilated corpses and into the City of Verona where the chaotic scene displayed itself.

While Bernegar's troops were disciplined thoroughly, to the point where killing or raping civilians was strictly off-limits, they had been ordered to ransack the city, and as such, they behaved like a horde of barbarians.

Kicking down doors, and tearing the houses apart looking for anything of value. Those few citizens who dared to resist found themselves gunned down, or ran through with a bayonet. in this chaotic time, the denizens of Verona found themselves gazing in horror as their city was torn apart by a horde of Austrian soldiers.

Berengar personally led his troops to the area he knew to be stashed with the most significant amount of wealth, and that was the city's cathedral. When he kicked down the door to the church, the priests and citizens who had taken refuge inside gazed upon the Austrians with horror, as if they were the same barbarians who tore Rome apparent centuries ago.

The priest immediately approached Berengar and got in his path as he entered the building, holding a cross in his face and proclaiming the cathedral to be unassailable.

"This is holy ground, you devils can not be here, turn back or face the wrath of God!"

Upon this priests' neck was a golden crucifix worth a substantial sum and as such Berengar gazed at the men with a wicked smile before grabbing ahold of him by the necklace. As he did so he stared into the priest's eyes before mocking him.

"Relax, I'm not here for your worthless lives, only the wealth you church hordes away."

With this said Berengar ripped the golden crucifix from the Priests neck before knocking him out with a solid punch. The steel gauntlet on Berengar's hand aided in the desired effect. As the priest tumbled to the ground Berengar caught ahold of him, to make sure he did not crack his skull on the wooden pews, and gently laid him to the ground.

As he did so the crowd of civilians shrieked in horror, however, Berengar simply ignored them before commanding his grenadiers to strip the Cathedral of its wealth.

"Take everything of value, and leave the people be unless they make an attempt on your life do no harm unto them."

With this said the Austrian soldiers began to tear down the crucifixes, stash away the chalices, and even tore down the golden statue of christ himself, before carrying it away. After everything of value from the church had been seized, Berengar and his troops left the cathedral in a bare state, with the civilians inside bawling like children.

It did not take an army of 50,000 men long to ransack everything of worth within the city of Verona, and they had turned the city upside down in the process. After acquiring every small piece of gold and silver, and transferring it into a giant pile outside the city Berengar stood before his troops and gazed upon the wealth that Verona had stashed away.

An avaricious smirk was spread upon the young monarch's face as he witnessed the spoils of war. Yet, it was not enough, the true prize was in the

city of Florence, for there lay an exceptionally wealthy family of bankers, who had the fortune to rival even Berengar.

This family was not yet nobility, and yet they held enough wealth to finance Berengar's enemies, that being the entirety of the Catholic Church. Berengar's true goal in this war was not something as simple as independence, it was to strip away every bit of gold and silver the Medici had stashed away, and cripple the Vatican's ability to finance a crusade against him.

Austrian Independence and the establishment of a separate Northern Italian Kingdom as a Protectorate beneath his suzerainty was secondary to acquiring the vast fortune of the Medicis. However, those were plans for the near future, for now, Berengar had other thoughts in mind.

As such he gave yet another impassioned speech to his troops as they gazed upon the wealth they had acquired from Venice with greed.

"Any man among you who has through a moment of weakness stashed away some spoils gained in this battle step forward and add it to the pile, and I will grant you impunity! I know the hearts of men, I too have the instinct to hoard this pile of gold away in some corner of Austria, never allowing it to see the light of day!

Yet, I am strong enough in my conviction to utilize every speck of wealth we have gained here on this day, and in our future campaign in Italy for one single purpose! The minting of currency! I will not lie to you, our Kingdom faces economic stagnation, there is not enough gold and silver to go around, to fill the pockets of the people of Austria who work every day for a better future!

This wealth is intended not for my personal fortune, but for the prosperity of all Austrians! So, those among you who have stashed away some of the gains you have found within this city, I implore you once more to step forward, and add it to the pile if not for yourselves, than for the good of Kingdom!"

There was silence for some time until one man, in particular, walked forward. This man was Captain Arnwald, he was a man respected by the soldiers under his command, as Berengar had said in a moment of weakness he had stashed away a small pouch filled with gold coins within his belt's containers.

After the man had emptied the pouch of coins into the vast pile, it did not take long before more men followed suit, and emptied their hidden wealth onto the pile, before long over half the army had done so until not a single missing piece of treasure remained in the hands of his soldiers.

As Berengar saw this, he nodded his head and smiled upon his men, in doing so he made them a solemn vow.

"For your loyalty, and faith in your fatherland, I will make you a promise here on this day, every single piece of this treasure shall be used to invest in the future of the Kingdom of Austria, with it you, and your families shall see greater heights of prosperity, make no mistake, you all shall see your fair share of the spoils we gain in this war!"

After saying this Arnwald saluted Berengar and voiced his chant.

"For King and Fatherland!"

After saying so, the entire army repeated these words in unison.

After this speech was over, Berengar had every piece of treasure that was pooled in the pile recorded, and then sent a convoy of 5,000 men to ensure its safe return to the Royal Treasury of Austria.

Berengar would stay true to his vow, and use the vast stockpile of gold and silver, by smelting it down into the pure currency he had established.? In doing so he was able to temporarily stall the stagnation issues his economy was currently facing, and do so bring greater prosperity to all of Austria.

Chapter 310: Selling Stolen Goods

After Honoria and her Crew had attacked and ransacked two Imperial vessels, they immediately made their way to the port of Trieste. Trieste quickly became a significant trading hub within Austria, as it was the realm's largest harbor.

After several days of sailing, Honoria and her Crew finally arrived within the city, where they intended to sell the goods they had captured for a fair price. As such, Honoria, with Melissa and Elfrun by her side, stepped off of the vessel and began to search the marketplace for an appropriate buyer.

The rest of her Crew were waiting onboard the vessels guarding the prisoners and waiting for their pay so that they could get in a little R&R. After strolling through the markets of Trieste for some time, Honoria came across a textile trader.

The Granadan merchant was stunned to see a group of women dressed in pants and clad with weapon belts walking around in the Trieste market. His first instinct was to ignore the three women, fortunately for him, they began to approach the merchant, and as such, he let out a sigh before putting on a friendly facade.

"How can I help you?"

With this in mind, Honoria took out two shipping manifests that she had captured from the Imperial vessels.

"We have these goods to sell; I am sure you might be interested in our wares."

The Merchant looked through the items listed on the manifests. Initially, he had a dull expression however when he gazed across their contents his dark eyes quickly shined with avarice. The goods on this manifest were of the highest quality of Byzantine Silk and Indian Cotton.

It was not easy for a merchant from Granadan like him to get ahold of such items, and as such, he was greatly interested in bringing the materials back to the Emirate to sell for a profit. Of course, silk and cotton were not the only things that caught his interest; the purple dye was the most attractive of all the goods that the women had to offer.

After thinking about it for a few moments, the Merchant began to inquire about the origins of such fine materials.

"Where did you get such exquisite items?"

If these goods were stolen, it could cause quite some difficulty to the man, and judging by the attire these women were dressed in, they likely weren't merchants. However, to the man's surprise, Honoria pulled out a letter and handed it to the man.

This piece of parchment was the letter of marque and reprisal that Berengar had signed, permitting Honoria to engage in piracy against the Kingdom of Austria's enemies. By now, the term "Privateer" had become quite notorious among the merchants of the Mediterranean. Berengar's introduction of Privateering was an action heavily criticized by various states who had coastlines within the region.

Despite these protests, many merchants were willing to purchase such wares as they could be resold at a substantially higher rate in their home countries. As such, the Merchant was far from reluctant to buy the goods; if anything, it was in his favor that these women had found him to fence their ill-gotten gains. After thinking about it for some time, the man raised two fingers to name his price for the goods.

"I will pay ten thousand Austrian Thalers for the Cotton and Silk, as for the purple dye, I am greatly interested in it, but the cost is negotiable."

Upon hearing the Merchant's offer, Honoria discussed the costs with her crew members.

"I think it is a good deal, that is a substantial sum, and is slightly below market value. After all, the Merchant has to resell the goods to make a profit. As for the purple dye, we have five pounds of the substance, and the dye is worth three times its weight in gold; as such, we should demand Gulden in exchange for it!"

Melissa nodded her head in agreement, the Gulden was used for large transactions such as this, and they highly doubted the Merchant had 107,143 Austrian Thalers lying around. As such, she quickly agreed to Honoria's proposal.

"I agree, the Gulden is better to trade with; the amount of dye we have is worth roughly 1,530 Austrian Gulden! This is a fortune! We should ask for 1500, so he can still make a decent profit!"

Elfrun was primarily left out of the conversation; as such, Honoria and Melissa agreed to pose their offer to the Granadan Merchant. Honoria put on a confident facade as she did so.

"My offer is 1,500 Guildens! If you don't like it, I am sure that other Merchants would kill for the opportunity to buy such a stockpile of purple dye for the price I have offered!"

The Merchant knew the market value of such a precious substance, and it could be sold for an even greater price in Granada than here in Austria; after all relations between Granada and Byzantium were complicated to say the least, as such trade between the two Nations had suffered greatly over the years.

"Very well, if you would transfer the materials to my vessel, I will meet you there with the promised sum. It is a pleasure doing business with you girls."

After saying this, the man gave them the information on the location to meet up, and Honoria and the others returned to their ship, where they began to gather the resources for the trade.

Just by selling the textiles and dye, they had gained a substantial profit. If deposited into the National Bank of Austria, they could withdraw the amount of value from the Austrian Guildens in their Thaler equivalent, roughly 490 Austrian Thalers per Austrian Gulden.

Before long, the members of Honoria's Crew handed over the goods in exchange for several chests filled with Austrian Thalers and Guildens. After carefully calculating the goods and checking to see if there were any counterfeits, Honoria accepted the transaction.

After returning to the Sloop of War known as Honoria's revenge, the Crew gathered around the multiple chests filled with the large silver and gold coins. They could not believe their eyes, as they gazed upon the pile of wealth.

The wealth sitting before them was enough to buy a manor for several of the crew members and retire peacefully. However, greed was a natural human instinct. After seeing how much fortune they had gained without suffering any casualties, not a single woman among Honoria's Crew desired to retire after a mere two battles.

Silver and gold had an unnatural effect on the human mind; men and women alike would be willing to stab their siblings in the back for more of the

substance. However, rather than turn on each other, these women desired to raid the merchants of the Holy Roman Empire. Reflecting upon her own internal desire to do so, Honoria decided to give a speech to her crew.

"We will be distributing the wealth we have gained to each member of the crew in equal shares. We are all one family onboard Honoria's Revenge, and thus we will share our fortune equally!

You may do what you wish when it comes to your wealth. However, I will be depositing my share into the National Bank of Austria under an account in my name, and I advise you to do the same. It is far safer under the protection of the Austrian Crown than it is hidden away in some far corner of the world!"

After saying this, not a single woman among the gathered crew members could disagree with Honoria's words. They were privateers licensed by the Austrian Crown and afforded legal protection in that regard. They were no mere pirates; thus they did not have to worry about their assets being seized by the government.

Before long, Honoria and her Crew had sold all of their goods, including the Carrack they had gained from the Genoan Merchants, amassing a substantial fortune on their first run. With this in mind, Honoria kept her word and divided the shares equally among her crew members. This was the result of the first of many pillages that the wenches of Honoria's Revenge would engage in during the Austrian War for Independence.