

Steel 411

Chapter 411: Angels are Falling!

Berengar gazed into the distance, where he saw the rear lines of the Austro-Granadan trench system. Since the First Division had arrived, they had seized most of the territory that would one day become known as Andalusia. Even the grand city of Cordoba was retaken in the name of Granada.

Since the territory had been reclaimed, the Austrians and their Granadan allies had begun fortifying their defenses with an intricate trench system, not unlike what would have been seen in the Great War of Berengar's past life.

There was simply one problem, a complete and total lack of machine guns. Because of this, Berengar's Army would have to rely heavily on artillery barrages and the mass employment of needle rifles.

Thus Berengar and his Second Division entered the Trenchline where they were swiftly dispatched to various sectors to enlarge the defensive perimeter. As Berengar entered into the muddy trenches, he was greeted by both of his Generals whom he had placed in the field.

Generals Arnulf and Adelbrand were quick to greet their King as they saw him and his soldiers enter the massive trench system dug into the Andalusian border. The two men immediately saluted their King and Reichsmarschall before welcoming him to the front line.

"Your Majesty, we were not expecting your arrival so soon! I must say it is good to have some reinforcements!"

Berengar returned their salute before gazing off into the distance. Far north of the front lines, an army was on the march, displaying multiple banners that Berengar did not recognize. Upon seeing their leader's interest, General Arnulf handed him a pair of binoculars to gaze at the oncoming forces. He caught the young monarch up to the situation at hand as he did so.

"The enemy approaches; they have split into a total of five armies consisting of nearly a hundred thousand men each. A prominent Iberian Nobleman leads each Army; the forces consist of Iberian Catholics, Crusaders, and foreign

volunteers. Their objective is to crash against our lines of defense, hoping to break through our thinly spread forces.

With the arrival of the Second Division and the soldiers of the Bohemian Army, we will now have 140 of the 7.5cm FK 22 guns in place along our defensive perimeter. The rest of the artillery pieces will be from Bohemia and Granada, so a mixture of about 100 1lb Falconets and surplus 1417 12 lb Field Guns. I'm not sure how many rifled musketeers and arquebusiers we have, but it is definitely in the tens of thousands."

Berengar immediately began to speak of his plan as he spoke to his Generals with a voice filled with determination.

"My plan is simple, the bulk of our Army will hold the line until our Byzantine Allies arrive. At the same time, I will lead the Cavalry, Mounted Infantry, and a single Artillery Battery to pierce through the enemy lines and lay siege to their capital cities. Once I have their monarchs and their families in my hands, I will demand the Catholic Forces to withdraw from Granada and the land they have seized in this conflict or face the execution of the royal families."

Arnulf and Adelbrand looked at Berengar with a worried gaze; the plan was risky, to say the least; it could easily result in his capture or death. As the ever-loyal subjects of the King, Generals Adelbrand and Arnulf immediately began to protest Berengar's current strategy.

"Your Majesty, such action is reckless beyond measure; we should hold the ground we have until our reinforcements arrive and do our best to slaughter as many of the enemies as possible!"

Berengar immediately frowned upon hearing this before speaking about the reality the Austro-Granadan Alliance was about to face.

"Half a million men will be marching upon the Emirate of Granada, they will come in waves, and we lack the firepower to cut them all down effectively. Some of them will make it into these trenches, where you and your men will be forced to fight them in melee combat with your bayonets and your spades.

Allow me to clarify the situation further, you currently have 75,000 men at the most, spread out across the entire Granadan border! If I do not force the

enemy to capitulate by some unconventional means, then we are in for a hell of a fight! I will not concede defeat simply because my enemies outnumber me!

If the Catholics do not surrender when I capture their royal families, I will slaughter them down to the last child! If they do not capitulate when I seize their capitals, I will massacre every living being who dwells within them. If they do not concede defeat when I have taken their fields and infrastructure, I will burn them to the ground!

If they do not kneel before me and wave the white flag when they die of disease and starvation in the trenches, I will rain poison gas upon their position! I will destroy this entire god-forsaken peninsula in a fit of fire and fury if I must!"

Adelbrand and Arnulf stood there in silence; this was not the usual behavior of King Berengar. Something must have happened to invoke his ire severely. Various ideas formed within their minds as they thought about what could have made Berengar so enraged. They would never guess that he was venting his frustration about Henrietta's confession onto the Iberian people.

Having thoroughly discussed their plans Berengar and his soldiers decided to rest in the trenches for the time being. Hours passed and eventually, the sun fell from the sky, in its place the clouds blocked out any form of illumination that would normally be provided by the moon and stars.

Seeing that they were completely lacking in illumination Berengar decided it was about time to use one of the inventions he had put in place before arriving in Granada, thus he pulled out an exciting new device. It was a short-barreled flare gun based on Leuchtpistole 34 from his previous life. The primary difference was that it was made entirely of steel since Berengar had yet to invent aluminum.

After opening the breech and sliding in a flare, he closed it before raising the flare pistol into the air and firing it into the sky. As his flare gun went off, so too did dozens of others in the hands of various Austrian troops, creating a bright illumination as if stars were falling from the sky.

By now, the advance force of the enemy Army was unknowingly camped within range of the Austrian Artillery. They gazed upon this sight with horror as they mistook the scene for angels falling from the heavens. Immediately, the Catholic soldiers dropped to their knees and began to make the cross sign as they said their prayers.

In the next moment, the thunderous echos of hundreds of 7.5cm FK 22 field guns resounded through the illuminated night sky; then, the shells landed on the targets. Tens of thousands of men were caught unaware as the Austrian munitions landed upon their encampments, blasting everything contained within to shreds.

Bodies exploded as the shells landed nearby, and limbs were hewn apart by the shrapnel. Blood splattered the dirt as the men accepted their fate in fear of further invoking the wrath of the heavens. In the distance from the advance force, the Castilian Commander gazed in horror at the scene. Angels fell from the sky, and death was wrought upon his men with their descent. There was no mistaking it, this was a sign of the apocalypse!

Frightened out of his wits, Duke Lorenzo de Benavente, who was tasked with leading the Castilian Army, trembled in trepidation as he witnessed the fantastic scene. His lips wavered as he struggled to find the words to issue a full retreat. After several moments he began to scream to his forces in a hysteric voice.

"Retreat! Angels are Falling! Retreat!"

He had no way of knowing that the disaster thrust upon his advance force was solely the doing of modern science, not superstitious belief. However, how could medieval noblemen know of the existance of flares or rifled breechloaders firing high explosive shells? He genuinely believed that Angels were falling from the sky above Granada and onto their men resulting in massive explosions.

The Castilian army, which consisted of many foreign volunteers, immediately abandoned their camp and supplies as they fled from the chaotic battle scene in the dead of night. Berengar, who was in the rearmost trench, gazed upon the stage with a wicked grin upon his face. Did these fools believe he would allow so many of them to flee alive?

With the blowing of a whistle, the Cavalry who were on standby immediately began to charge after the routing Catholics; for them, there would be no mercy on this night. Only those blessed by the heavens would manage to escape the Austrians' wrath!

Berengar himself hopped upon his mount and charged towards the direction of the cowardly Iberians. He supposed now was as good as a time as any to enact his plan for this war. With this in mind, ten thousand Cavalry of various forms, alongside Mounted Infantry and an Artillery Battery, marched off to fight as they chased down the frightened Iberians numbering in the tens of thousands. For Berengar, the War for Iberia had just begun!

Chapter 412: Next Generation Weapons Part II

While Berengar had begun his campaign in the Iberian Peninsula, rule over the Kingdom of Austria, and the efforts to oversee its industrialization were taken over by his father-in-law Chancellor Otto von Graz. At the moment, the man was sitting at his study within his chateau inside the upper-class district of Kufstein. He was staring at a series of weapons blueprints that would be vital to Berengar's future conflict with the church.

These blueprints were designed to operate alongside the previous weapons he had already begun testing for use in his special forces. The first design was a water-cooled machine gun chambered in 7.92x57mm LP, Berengar's version of the 7.92x57mm Mauser cartridge.

Unlike the Germans of his previous life, Berengar did not have to worry about the patents of the Vickers Machine Gun. Thus he decided to use such a magnificent weapon as his primary heavy machine gun for the time being.

The Vickers Machine gun was, in all honesty, just an improved Maxim Machine Gun with its action flipped upside down; this allowed it to save substantial size and weight. The Germans were unable to outfit themselves with this improved version of their machine gun due to business disputes, such as patent infringement.

A Water-cooled machine gun was exactly what it sounded like; it was essentially a heavy belt-fed machine gun that had a barrel shroud that contained water. As the barrel heated up, the water would cool it down; while this made for virtually unlimited volumes of fire, it also made the gun

exceptionally heavy to the point where it would need to be used as a static weapon.

In fact, during Berengar's previous life, when the British Army retired this weapon from service, a crew of armorers tested a single Vickers Gun to its limits by firing roughly five million rounds of ammunition over seven days without stopping the gun. By the time they were finished, they had taken the gun apart and gauged its pieces, only to find that the weapon was still within functioning parameters.

Because Berengar currently lacked the technology to mechanize his forces, static defensive tactics would inevitably play a large part in waging war against his enemies. Thus there was no weapon suited to the task better than the Vickers Machine Gun.

The primary difference between this machine gun, and the Vickers used by the British in Berengar's past life, was that it was chambered in this world's equivalent of 7.92x57mm Mauser and utilized a metallic belt much like seen in use by the Russian M1910 Maxim Guns during both world wars of Berengar's previous life. Ultimately Berengar decided to designate this variant of the Vickers as the MG-22.

Otto looked over the document and stamped his seal of approval to begin production and testing in the armed forces; if what the notes Berengar left behind were true, they would need to build as many of these weapons as possible over the next few years.

After approving this design for manufacture and testing, Otto looked over the next blueprint; this was another machine gun from Berengar's past life. However, it was neither a heavy machine gun nor a belt-fed machine gun.

This was a magazine-fed light machine gun based on the Czech ZB-30 Machine Gun. The MG-22(H), as it would become known by in this timeline, was a Machine Gun that was considered by many in Berengar's past life to be the pinnacle of the Interwar era Light machine Guns. It had a rate of fire up to 650 rounds per minute and was the weapon used as the basis for many Light Machine guns across the world, including the British BREN Gun and the Japanese Type 99 Light Machine Gun.

The Waffen-SS used the weapon in WWII; due to the competitive nature of the Wehrmacht and the various branches of the Third Reich's armed forces and political factions. The Waffen-SS was excluded from the primary supply chains that the Wehrmacht had access to. Thus they had to source guns from some unconventional manufacturers such as occupied countries like Belgium and Czechoslovakia.

The Only real difference between this gun and the ones issued to the Waffen-SS in Berengar's past life was instead of a 20 Round Box Magazine, Berengar designed it for use with a 30 Round Box Magazine. The use of a Light machine gun among his soldiers was not only necessary it was a requirement. Since a single man could not carry a Vickers Machine Gun into battle, he needed his Squads in the future to have some form of automatic fire readily available on a unit basis, and the MG-22(H) filled that role perfectly.

Otto could not believe how Berengar had come up with such intricate designs. Still, with the industrialization of Kufstein and Austria as a whole, they now had the precision manufacturing equipment to make such advanced weapons. Thus he stamped his approval on this design and would later have it sent over to the National Armory to produce prototype samples and extensive testing.

Finally, there was one other weapon design in Otto's hands, and he looked over it carefully as he decided whether or not to approve of its use as well. This weapon was a sub-machine gun chambered in 9x19mm Parabellum, the same round that was undergoing testing with the Prototype P-22, which was based upon a later design of the Mauser C96 From Berengar's past life.

This Sub-Machine Gun was based upon the Steyr-Solothurn MP-34 from the interwar period. The history behind this weapon was complicated. It was manufactured by the Rheinmetall company via proxies in Switzerland and Austria to avoid the limitations placed upon them from the Treaty of Versailles.

As far as most were concerned, it was the best machine gun designed and manufactured in the Interwar period; in fact, the only reason it ceased production in 1940 was that it was too costly to manufacture during the German War effort.

The MP-34, or MP-22 as it was known in this timeline, was a side-feeding sub-machine gun with a 32 round double-stack magazine. It was capable of

semi-automatic or automatic fire via a selector switch on the left side of the weapon. The automatic setting was capable of a firing rate of 600 rounds per minute.

After looking over these weapons, Otto approved them all, only to find a list of squad-based tactics that Berengar had left behind so that his soldiers who were equipped with such weapons could train with them appropriately.

Berengar practically followed the same route of the Wehrmacht's Squad Tactics from his past life. The Squad Leader would be issued the Submachine Gun, while one member of the Squad would be given the Light Machine Gun, as for the rest, they would be issued the Bolt Action Rifles. When it came to a platoon-sized unit, one Squad would be dedicated to using the Heavy Machine Gun.

As such, Otto sent these documents over to the proper departments. With these weapons, by the time the Crusaders Arrived in their lands, they would have the means to defend against many times their army's numbers.

After approving these documents, Otto sighed heavily before hearing a knock on his door. A familiar voice resounded from the other side as they asked for permission to come in. The very presence of this voice greatly shocked Otto as he was not expecting her visit.

"Can I come in?"

Otto immediately rested his forehead in the palm of his hand before collecting himself; after doing so, he allowed the entry of his uninvited guest.

"It is open!"

After saying this, a buxom beauty entered the scene; she had long golden hair and blue eyes like much of her family. This young woman was none other than Adela's eldest sister, Ava. She had a pouting expression on her face as she entered her father's study. Seeing his most mischievous daughter enter the room, Otto quickly concealed the documents on his desk; if such knowledge were to be seen by the woman, he had no idea what she would do with it. Ava immediately broke out into an outcry as she saw her father.

"Daddy! Little Adela won't let me into the Royal Palace! I have come all this way to see how she is doing now that she is pregnant and the bitch won't even let me in! Can't you convince her to let me stay in the Palace!"

Otto immediately frowned when he heard this, his eldest and youngest daughters had never gotten along, and he knew whatever brought Ava to Kufstein was nothing good. As such, he shook his head and sighed before declining his daughter's request.

"Adela is the High Queen; if she does not want you in her home, then that is something I can't change. At most I can speak with her when I next see her, however, she is dreadfully busy introducing cultural reforms at the moment. The people seem to love her, and her efforts! If only you were more like your sister, I wouldn't have to look. However, and your family these days!"

Upon hearing this Ava wanted to throw a fit, but she knew better than to do so in the presence of her father, who now held a powerful position in the new Kingdom of Austria. Ava regretted more than anything that she had not established an affair with Berengar when she had the chance. If she knew what she knew now, she would have invited him into her bath and taken advantage of his inexperience to make him her own.

However, she now no longer had such options. Thus she had decided to do everything she could to mend the relationship between her and her youngest sister; after all, if Adela put in a good word for Ava and her husband, then they would thrive much like the rest of her family. Thus she put on a distressed facade as she once more tried to convince her father to aid her in her efforts.

"Daddy, please! I know I messed up, but Adela is my sister, and I want to fix our relationship. Please help me get in touch with my darling little sister!"

Seeing his daughters' sad expression, Otto sighed once more before acquiescing to her demands; maybe it was because he spoiled Ava so much that she turned out this way. However, there was not much he could do about that now, and he hated seeing his two Daughters at each other's throats. With a heavy heart, he begrudgingly accepted Ava's request.

"The most I can do is set a time and place for you two to discuss your differences. However, if you screw this up, your sister will likely never want to

speak to you again, so be sure to mind your manners. Adela is no longer the little girl you used to bully, she is the High Queen of Austria!"

Upon hearing this, Ava immediately smiled once more and hugged her father before thanking him for his efforts.

"Thanks, daddy!"

After saying this, she left the room; leaving the older man in his seat with a confused expression. He had no idea how he was going to pull this off.

Chapter 413: Senseless Slaughter

In the dead of night, the Cavalry of the First and Second Divisions of the Austrian Army rode out through no man's land into the fray as the Iberian forces and their foreign volunteers fled from the field of battle after witnessing the supposed fall angels from the heavens.

In reality, this chaotic sight was nothing more than Austrian flares illuminating the Iberian positions and artillery fire falling upon them. However, the superstitious medieval people of Iberia had no way of knowing of such military advancements in the hands of their enemies.

Despite this, the Iberian Catholics were so frightened from the horror they witnessed that they began to abandon their encampments and supplies as they fled for their lives, turning their backs to the Austro-Granadan alliance.

Berengar ordered his Cavalry to run down the survivors in response to this. Thus he charged into the fray once more, with a revolver in one hand and a saber in the other; he began to fire upon the fleeing Catholics as he neared their position.

A loud bang went off as the 1422 Service Revolver fired its .38 SPC projectile down range and into the back of an unsuspecting Iberian Crusader; his white surcoat was immediately stained with his blood as the projectile blasted through his armor and into his chest, reaping his soul in the process.

Immediately following this shot, Berengar's mighty steed strolled past another routing soldier where he cut down his saber and into the man's unarmored neck, where the head flung off his shoulders in a merciless decapitation.

By the King of Austria's side were the veteran forces of his Royal Guard, as well as the Austrian Hussars who unleashed their advanced weapons upon their foes as they charged forth on horseback. Those who did not use revolvers were issued with needle carbines specifically intended for Cavalry use.

The overwhelming volume of fire from the 10,000 strong cavalry forces as they advanced upon the tens of thousands of fleeing Iberians was enough to cut them into ribbons. Bodies fell into the muddied terrain where they either bled out or were crushed by the weight of the Warhorses' hooves.

To the Castilian Duke who had just recently engaged in conflict against a brutal guerilla campaign waged by the Granadan Royal Guard, it was as if hell itself had ascended from the depths and swallowed the Iberian peninsula. As he fled on foot from the Austrian Cavalry, a member of the Royal Guard rapidly caught up to his position, where he noticed the tabard on the man's torso.

Realizing that the cowardly man fleeing before him was none other than Duke Lorenzo de Benavente, the Cuirassier quickly pulled out his pistol and aimed for the man's leg, where he fired a shot. The first shot missed entirely, but the Cuirassier remained undeterred; he quickly fired another shot which once more missed.

It was not until the fifth bang had resounded from the revolver's muzzle that the bullet penetrated through the Duke's shin, fracturing the bone in the process and crippling the man. Lorenzo immediately fell into a pool of mud as the Cuirassier dismounted his horse and arrived before the once proud Duke.

As the Cuirassier approached, Lorenzo surrendered his arms and admitted defeat; as a nobleman, he was afforded the privilege of ransom. No matter how advanced the Austrian army may have become, he was sure that his feudal rights as a nobleman would be respected.

The Cuirassier bound the nobleman in ropes before dragging him off to the Trenchline. As for Berengar and the other members of his Cavalry, those who managed to escape were fortunate enough to have seized a horse from the encampment before withdrawing. The others were killed in battle or captured, much like their previous commander.

Over tens of thousands of men from the Iberian Army were disarmed and led back to the Trenchline, where they were destined to become captives of the Austro-Granadan alliance. After arriving at the trench line, the Cuirassier laid the Duke down before Berengar and his Generals, who gazed upon the man who had tormented Arnulf and the Granadan Royal Guard for some time.? Arnulf was so thoroughly enraged at the losses he had suffered over the past few months that he immediately backhanded the Castillian Duke, who had a smug expression on his face.

"You bastard, what is so funny!?!"

Lorenzo chuckled before announcing his perceived immunity.

"I am a Duke and am afforded ransom by the laws of men! You can not harm me!"

Berengar's lips curled into a wicked smile as he heard this claim before pulling out his revolver, which was now reloaded and pressing it against the man's skull. What remained of Lorenzo's army gazed in horror as they witnessed their liege's rights be violated. The young Austrian King pulled back the hammer of his weapon and began to mock the man, who immediately lost all confidence in his smug statement.

"Is that so?"

Berengar laid his finger upon the trigger as he slightly pulled it back, however before the gun could go off, Berengar grabbed ahold of the hammer and slowly laid it back down to a double-action position, where he looked upon the Duke a kind gaze as he lowered the firearm.

"You are right; you are afforded ransom..."

Duke Lorenzo sighed in relief as he witnessed Berengar's smile and merciful words, whereas Arnulf immediately began to protest this course of action. However, Berengar immediately raised his hand, silencing him in the process where his warm expression shifted to that of a demonic gaze.

"Let's play a game, shall we?"

The moment Lorenzo heard these words, he immediately felt as if his soul had been plunged into the depths of hell; his lips began to waver as he struggled to find the words in his mind.

"What... What do you intend to do to us!?!"

Berengar began to stride back and forth with confidence as he began to express his evil plan.

"It is quite simple; I will cut you and your army loose, where you shall be allowed to run north, back to your homes. However, when you have reached a certain distance, I will order my artillery to open fire on you all. If God is truly on your side, then you will survive the barrage and make your way to freedom; if not, well then may the Lord have mercy on your soul."

Arnulf gazed upon Berengar's back with a look of shock as he heard these words, whereas Adelbrand had a cruel smile etched upon his face. He felt that this "game" of Berengar's would be genuinely entertaining. As for Lorenzo, he could not fathom what he was hearing; he had personally witnessed the destructive display of the Austrian artillery and immediately began to shiver in fear.

"And... if we refuse?"

Upon hearing this, Berengar kneeled in front of Lorenzo, so he was at eye level and spoke with a chilling tone.

"Then my army shall execute you all!"

After saying this, Berengar stood up and turned around so that he was facing his troops; after a few seconds of hesitation, Lorenzo swallowed the saliva pooled up within his mouth with an audible gulp before nodding his head in affirmation.

"Alright, we will do it!"

After hearing this, Berengar turned around with a smile on his face as he began to speak in a cheerful tone.

"Wonderful! Remember, not one step back, or I will shoot you myself!"

After saying this, Berengar turned back towards his army, giving them their orders.

"Release the prisoners!"

Those who had not heard Berengar's plans gazed upon him with shock, but they refused to disobey; as such, they cut the Iberians loose, where they marched forward on foot towards Castile. Two of his underlings supported Lorenzo as they helped the crippled Duke march along.

After the army of prisoners was out of earshot, Berengar immediately issued an order to his artillery brigades.

"Load the guns and prepare to fire once they have reached a safe distance, do not stop firing until every last man has been obliterated! We will see who God truly favors in this conflict!"

After hearing the King's words, the Austrian artillery began to make range adjustments before loading their field guns with the 75x200mmR shells. Only after the Iberian prisoners had reached a distance of over 600m, the thunder of the field guns echoed in the air.

The moment the familiar sound of the sound barrier-breaking crackled in the sky, the prisoners gazed in horror as they began to panic and sprint north as fast as they could muster. Lorenzo had not informed them of their fate, for it was far too cruel to say. The first shell to land upon the Catholics directly fell upon Lorenzo as he made the sign of the cross and said one final prayer; in the next moment, he was blasted to bits.

Berengar looked upon the army in the distance through his binoculars as the shells continued to fall upon them; by the end of the barrage, not a single man remained standing. In his cruelty, Berengar had wiped out an army of tens of thousands of men who had already surrendered. As for those who managed to escape the senseless slaughter, made up but a fraction of the force that initially consisted of a hundred thousand strong.

With this victory, 1/5th of the Iberian Forces had been slaughtered; if not for their fear of the flares, and artillery they may have managed to put up a better fight. Yet, Berengar's military technology was so far advanced over his enemies that they believed it to be an act of demonic sorcery; the very thought that Berengar had caused Angels to fall from heaven was enough to force their retreat before they had even begun to fight.

As for the remainder of the Iberian Armies, they would come to know of this change in a few weeks, as the survivors of this conflict would report everything they had witnessed to their superiors, and thus the Catholics would be prepared for such unfathomable sights. The war for Iberia had only just begun.

Chapter 414: Conference of the German Dukes

As the war in Iberia continued, an important meeting was taking place in the Scandinavian city of Oslo. The various Dukes and Margraves of Germany had temporarily called a ceasefire and gathered in the neighboring realm, which was neutral ground with the purpose to discuss the greatest threat to their continued existence.

There was one German Duke who had declared himself King and had risen to his position through sheer overwhelming force. Every day Austria advanced with new, Faustian technology that caused many to believe that its King had sold his soul to the devil in exchange for limitless knowledge.

Though the Catholic Church refused to recognize the legitimacy of Berengar's claim to be a King, many of his neighbors used such a title out of respect for his power, for if he were to be called a Duke, then what exactly did that make them? Duke Dietger of Bavaria spoke of their southern neighbor, whose power and rapid expansion had become a significant threat.

"The Pope has declared a Crusade against Austria and its so-called German Reformation, which has now spread to every corner of our lands. It is not just Austria who will suffer in this conflict; our lands will burn in the flames of fanatics who want nothing more than to appease the Papacy!

Meanwhile, Berengar further invokes the ire of the Church as he has dispatched tens of thousands of men into Iberia to prop up the Emirate of

Granada as a puppet State. My spies can not even infiltrate Austria without being discovered!

I have little doubt in my mind that this proxy war of his will become a disaster for the Catholic World. Nearly half a million men have marched from all corners of Christendom in an attempt to eradicate the Austro-Granadan forces, and I fear they will be obliterated!"

Out of all the men present, Dietger was the most familiar with Berengar's forces, as he had been thoroughly swept aside in Austria by a small number of what were then Tyrolean troops. He had no idea that the equipment of the Austrian army was rapidly being modernized and that the weapons used to defeat his forces so thoroughly were already being replaced.

Dietger concluded his rant with words of caution as he addressed his peers from the German-speaking regions.

"If we do not unite together, and march on Austria now, then we will have no chance of victory when the Pope finally manages to march his crusaders against our enemy!"

Though Dietger was correct in saying this, the other Dukes looked at him as if he had gone mad. Thus one man, in particular, the Margrave of Baden, spoke out against his paranoid delusions.

"Though Berengar has managed to defeat the forces of Italy and Switzerland, I do not believe he has the power to repel the near half a million men who have marched on his allies in Granada. He has sent half of his army into their lands and will undoubtedly face a disastrous defeat.

If the so-called King of Austria does manage to escape from his inevitable loss in Iberia, then he will be left with half his army to contend against the same force who beat him! Not only that, but the additional crusaders prepared for this conflict will be marching alongside them!

Despite this, I understand your fears as his neighbor and will concede that this Self-Titled Kingdom of Austria is a grave threat to our continued existence. Thus rather than unite to march upon Austria immediately, I propose we conduct a ceasefire.

Which will allow us time to build up our forces to contribute to the upcoming Crusade against the Berengar Heresy. Only after we have wiped this heretical menace from our lands should we continue our petty disputes over the title of King of Germany. "

What the Margrave of Baden said made sense to the remaining German Dukes and Margraves. However, it was ultimately up to the two potential successors of the Throne to agree. Thus all eyes gazed upon the man known as Duke Hartman von Luxembourg, or as his rivals referred to him as "the Bastard of Luxembourg," to see if he would be willing to declare a ceasefire for the time being. After careful consideration, the young man, who was currently engaged in a brutal stalemate with the Bavarian pretender, sighed heavily before nodding his head in affirmation.

"Under these circumstances, I can allow for a ceasefire to exist between our camps. Until the Berengar Heresy and its leaders are routed out and destroyed, I swear that my forces and that of my allies shall not aggress further upon Dietger or his faction so long as they agree to the same conditions."

Dietger was upset that his warning was not taken seriously and knew that such efforts would ultimately be vain. He believed that Berengar would further rise in power over the next few years, and with it, he would quickly sweep aside the Crusader army, no matter how large it grew; from there, he would use it as an excuse to invade the German realm and unite it under his banner.

Dietger may be a proud and ill-tempered man, but he was wise enough to see the writing on the wall. As such, he hung his head in defeat before nodding his head in agreement. After doing so, he spoke his piece.

"Very well, I shall agree to your ceasefire, but mark my words, by the time we invade Austria alongside the crusaders, it will be too late!"

After saying this, he stood up from his seat in the conference and stormed out of the room where he was flanked by his ministers. It was not until they were in a secure location that he began to speak in secrecy.

"Send a letter to the Chancellor of Austria, tell him that Bavaria is willing to cooperate with their realm in the upcoming Crusade and is even willing to pay

back our debts immediately. If they are willing to forgive our previous intrusion, then I, as Duke of Bavaria, am willing to aid them in their efforts."

The ministers gazed at Dietger in shock as he said this and immediately began to question his words.

"I thought we were here to convince the other realms to unite against Austria; how did we get to the point where we must grovel before them?"

Dietger immediately slammed his fist upon the stone wall in rage as he enlightened his ministers about what doom he perceived would follow in the near future.

"Those fools think Berengar and his Army will be trounced in Iberia and the upcoming Crusade. However, they do not know what I know. If they wait that long then defeat, and annexation is inevitable, we might as well submit ourselves now and gain some advantages as loyal followers while we still can!

It goes against every fiber of my being to submit to another man, but I see what lies on the horizon and am willing to put aside my personal pride for the sake of my family and my realm! Do as I say and make sure the other Dukes do not find out about this!"

Dietger's ministers immediately bowed their heads in respect; even they feared the ever-increasing threat of their southern neighbor; if the Duke was willing to submit to the Austrian Crown, then they believed it was indeed a wise decision.

With this in mind, they quickly got to task as they silently dispatched a messenger to Kufstein to inform the Chancellor of Germany of their decision. Their choice to kneel before their southern neighbors would turn out to be a wise one, and Dietger would one day consider it the wisest decision he had ever made as a ruler.

As for the remainder of the German High-Nobility, they had no way of knowing that their entire meeting was observed by Austrian Royal Intelligence, for one of the ministers present in the conference was a devout believer of the German Reformation and had long since been recruited by the Austrians as a spy.

Thus, before the Bavarian delegation reached Austria, Linde would already know what had transpired and began making preparations to sabotage the German rearmament. With this, a new war of intrigue was about to begin.

Chapter 415: Sacking of Toledo Part I

The dust had settled after the Army of tens of thousands of prisoners had been rendered into meat paste by the Austrian artillery brigades. Many of the young and veteran soldiers gazed upon the destructive scene with expressions of both trepidation and pride.

Fearful of what could occur if they should ever make the mistake of taking up arms against the crown, and yet proud of the military might their nation possessed. They had single-handedly wiped out an army over twice their numbers without the enemy even getting in range of firing their weapons.

Such a feat was only achieved due to the use of flares and artillery, which had a combined effect on the superstitious feudal men of the Iberian Army who genuinely believed that the Austro-Granadan alliance had somehow managed to force Angels to fall from the heavens.

If the enemy had kept their wits together, they might have been able to advance upon the first trench line and engage in melee combat with the Austro-Granadan soldiers. However, such an overwhelming display of advanced technology was no different than magic in the eyes of the primitive armies of Iberia and Christendom. Thus they were frightened to their wits and exposed their backs to their enemies, who cut them down with ease.

Berengar gazed upon the carnage that he had inflicted on this field of battle with a wicked smile on his face before stepping back into the trench line, silent as he did so. This sinister appearance led many among his ranks to believe that their King was a man of great cruelty to his enemies. After approaching the rear-trench line, Berengar laid down in his command bunker where he quickly found himself sleeping without a care in the world.

Hours passed, and morning came; with it, Berengar was up bright and early, rallying his Cavalry Forces to prepare to set off in an attempt to wrestle control of the Capital of Castile. With the main Army of their enemy defeated, Berengar did not have to worry about fighting more significant numbers as he advanced upon the city of Toledo.

Berengar was standing in front of four Generals who had gathered before him. Generals Arnulf and Adelbrand represented the Austrian Divisions. General Ziyad was responsible for what remained of the Royal Granadan Army, and finally, General Alexej Kaspar was here to lead the Bohemian Expeditionary Force.

The Bohemian Royal Army was equipped with apparel and armor similar to the Austrian Army; the primary difference was that it resembled the Steingaru M1917 Field Uniforms used by Austro-Hungarian Forces during the Great War Berengar's previous life.

Of course, they were equipped with surplus weapons from the Austrian Royal Army, such as 1417/18 Rifled Muskets and 1417 12lb Field Guns. Nevertheless, they were provided with vastly superior equipment when compared with their enemies. With the quick loading tubes at their disposal, they were still capable of firing roughly five rounds a minute from the entrenched positions.

Berengar was dressed in his field uniform, with a cavalry saber attached to his belt, along with his 1422 Service Revolver, contained within its holster. He quickly began to give the Generals their instructions as he prepared to set off.

"While I march off and secure our victory, you will all continue to conduct warfare as we have done so thus far. Maintain a perimeter around the borders of Granada, and ensure that any army that advances on your position is met with artillery fire the moment they enter firing range.

If the time comes that you must retreat from an entrenched position, do not be afraid to do so, the survival of our troops is the most crucial factor of this conflict. Care for each soldier under your command as if he was your beloved son, and he will follow even into the gates of hell!"

The Generals saluted Berengar as he hopped onto the back of his mount, where Berengar returned their salute; as he did so, he yelled the long-established battle cry of the Austrian Armed Forces.

"God with us!"

After saying this, he regrouped with his Cavalry, awaiting his arrival, where they set on that path towards Toledo. By the time they arrived, the Castilian King was sure to be aware of his primary force's disastrous defeat. Whether he had the stones to stay within the confines of his city and defend it had yet to be seen.

For several days the Austrian Cavalry, followed by its attached Artillery Battery and logistics unit, trodded forth through the Castilian landscape before finally arriving at the city of Toledo. As they entered firing range of the artillery, which was roughly five miles away, Berengar gave his order to the artillery officer who had accompanied them.

"Set your men to task and focus your bombardment on the main gatehouse; I want that section of the wall brought down before my force's arrival within the proximity of your shelling!"

The Artillery officer suppressed his internal laughter as he heard such a ridiculous order; of course, the wall would be brought down before they arrived within the proximity of the shelling. With the power of the 7.5cm FK 22 field guns, the wall was likely to be brought down by a single barrage. After that, they would focus their guns on the castle within the center of the city.

However, out of respect for his monarch, the officer merely saluted the young King and nodded his head before responding in the affirmative.

"Yes, your Majesty!"

After saying this, the Artillery battery of six field guns began to deploy their weapons. Upon doing so, Berengar issued his Cavalry to advance forth, five miles was quite a long distance, and a horse could only gallop at full speed for a distance of roughly two miles before becoming exhausted.

As such, they trotted forth towards their target while the Artillery Battery, supported by a logistics unit, began shelling the city, which was utterly unaware that the enemy had gathered in the distance.

The echo of six guns resounded throughout the air as a single battery landed perfectly onto the main gatehouse. The detonation from the six 75x200mmR shells was enough to bring it to ruin; the unfortunate men inside the

gatehouse were immediately crushed by the rubble of the stones above their heads.

Having succeeded in their objective, the Artillery officer in charge of the battery immediately fired upon the Castle in the distance, it was only after a section of its wall was brought to ruin that he ceased fire. After all, they had limited supplies and wanted to take down as many cities as possible without having to withdraw and resupply.

After roughly an hour, the 10,000 Cavalry reached the ruined gatehouse where they waited upon the orders of their Sovereign and Reichsmarschall. Berengar did not hesitate and immediately bellowed his decree with a stern tone.

"Charge!"

With this command, 10,000 Cavalry comprised of Hussars, Uhlans, Cuirassiers, and Mounted Infantry rushed into the city with weapons in hand and ruthless intent. The path to victory was cleared by the artillery, all they had to do was cut down anyone who got in their way.

The city's few defenders were quickly cut to ribbons by the advancing Cavalry. Those who were not shot with revolvers, or needle carbines, were ruthlessly torn apart with swords and lances. The mounted infantry had dismounted from their horses and advanced into the city with needle rifles in hand and bayonets affixed as they fired upon any man clad in armor or carrying arms.

Blood now stained the streets and corpses lie piled atop one another as the Austrian forces rapidly made their way through the city which was filled with panicked citizens and towards the castle where the King of Castile was sure to be hiding. With the castle walls brought down, it was a simple matter of rushing through the courtyard where Berengar's Cavalry quickly gunned down the royal guards of Castile.

Afterward, Berengar stashed his blade away where he dismounted from his horse and raised his pistol, cocking back the hammer so that it was in single-action mode as he advanced toward the Castle's entrance.

Surrounded by his royal guard, who were outfitted with Needle Carbines, Berengar pulled out a Stick Grenade where he pulled the pin before chucking it towards the front gates. The wooden doors immediately shattered into splinters as the grenade went off with an explosive blast. Afterward, Berengar and his Royal Guard advanced into the castle as the vanguard.

The moment the smoke cleared, Berengar saw a Knight of Castile rushed towards him with a blade in hand, yet the young monarch did not even flinch. Instead, he aimed down the sights of his revolver, which was contained within his left hand, and squeezed the trigger. In doing so, a .38 caliber projectile propelled down its barrel and into the skull of the heavily armored knight.

Blood and grey matter splattered out the massive exit wound of the steel helmet and covered the walls. While Berengar killed his opponent, his Royal Guard quickly raised their carbines and gunned down any other Knights within its entrance in ruthless fashion. The access to the Castilian Royal Castle was now secure.

Chapter 416: Sacking of Toledo Part II

Having secured the entrance of the Castle within the city of Toledo, Berengar waited for his mounted infantry to arrive. When the men finally caught up to the cavalry, they immediately advanced down the narrow stone halls with rifles in hand and bayonets affixed. Berengar proceeded calmly behind them with his revolver safely stashed away in his holster.

The Mounted Infantry swept through the halls, ruthlessly gunning down any man to get in their way. After every shot fired, they would lift the bolt handle and rack it back before placing another paper cartridge in its chamber; after seating the round, they would push the bolt back home and prepare to fire on the next target that got in their path.

The Knights of Castile bravely defended their master's abode as they tried to hide behind the corners and ambush the oncoming Mounted Infantry. Still, it was to no avail; the moment they slashed their blades forth, they were easily deflected by the 10-inch bayonets fixed to the side of the infantry's bores.

After the swords were deflected, a round was fired through the torso of the Knights, and their insides were torn apart before being spewed out the other side of their armor, mercilessly reaping their souls like wheat to the scythe.

The soldiers confidently reloaded their weapons as they led their Monarch across the Castle's vast interior.

Despite conflict appearing in every corner of the Castle, the Austrian Soldiers found themselves well protected with their armor and sustained few if any casualties. Instead, piles of heavily armored knights riddled the halls as their blood flowed onto the cold stone floor.

Eventually, Berengar and his soldiers reached the Great Hall where the King of Castile sat upon his Throne; oddly enough, there was not a single hint of fear on his face; instead, it was tranquil as if he had come to peace with his fate. Berengar and his soldiers cautiously approached as they secured the room from the few remaining bodyguards of the Castilian King.

Upon seeing the devil in the flesh, King Fransisco de Trastámara gazed upon Berengar with disdain as he boldly spat upon the floor in front of him before speaking his mind.

"So you are the Austrian upstart who challenges the authority of God! I did not expect you to have such a regal appearance. I suppose it is true what they say; Lucifer was indeed the most beautiful among the Lord's creation!"

Berengar immediately felt sickened upon hearing such a remark and instead stepped closer to the King of Castile before making his demands.

"Your Army is defeated, yet the people of your city remain intact for the most part. I suggest you surrender, or else I will be forced to engage in unnecessary cruelty towards you, your family, and your people..."

However, the King of Castile's expression did not change; there was no hint of dread or fright in his eyes, only disgust. As if the very existence of Berengar was an insult to his pride as a natural-born monarch. Thus it was no surprise when he began to insult Berengar to his face.

"You are no King, Berengar von Kufstein! You are a lowly Baron who does not know his place! Without your advanced technology, you would be nothing! I wonder what the price was for you to obtain such limitless knowledge? Tell me did you sell your soul to Satan? For what? Temporary power on this mortal plane?"

I pity you; no matter what you achieve in this world of ours, ultimately, you are destined for an eternity of hellfire and torment. Whereas I, and my family will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, through his divine will, we have led our people in this life and will do so in the next! The right to rule is not determined by your strength but by God himself! Do with us as you please; you will only be ensuring greater damnation for your wretched soul!"

Berengar had a twisted expression on his face as he heard such insults to his power and authority; he knew that in history, the Spanish were among the most fanatical Christians on the planet, who were willing to destroy valuable knowledge if they believed it had offended their God, yet to meet such zealotry in the flesh was genuinely irritating.

With this in mind, a malicious grin spread upon his lips as he decided to toy with the religious fanatic sitting in front of him. Berengar slowly stepped closer to the Throne; with each foot gained, the sound echoed throughout the stone corridor as if it was thunder.

As he finally reached the Castilian King, Berengar grabbed ahold of the man's neck and slammed him to his knees before stepping on his skull and forcing him to kowtow before him. He began to taunt the religious Monarch with the anecdote of his personal experience with the so-called afterlife as he did so.

"I am sorry to be the one to inform you, but there is no God; Heaven does not exist nor does Hell. There is only life and death. Thus, I hope that you remember when you find yourself in the next life, that I, King Berengar von Kufstein, was the one who sent you there. I truly hope that you are born in the lowest rung of society as an impoverished member of the common people who you claim to have divine rule over so that you will know the pain and suffering of your people first hand."

After saying this, Berengar kicked the man onto the floor, where the King of Castile gazed upon him with bitter hatred. As the man struggled to his knees, he then looked up to the heavens and performed the sign of the cross, saying one last prayer before he embraced the cold hands of death.

As he did this, Berengar circled to the man's back and pulled out his revolver, where he pressed it to the back of the man's skull. Before the King could finish his prayers, Berengar pulled the trigger and sent him to the afterlife.

Blood and gray matter sprayed onto the floor as the man's body collapsed; with an indifferent expression, Berengar holstered his pistol before giving out an order to his nearby troops who witnessed his speech and vicious manner.

"Find the King's family, and eliminate them after you have done that sack the city for all it is worth. Anyone who attempts to resist is to be killed on the spot."
"

After saying this, Berengar sat upon the Castilian Throne with a look of disgust on his face towards the corpse that lay before him. He began to mutter under his breath a single sentence, which sent chills down the spines of the few men of his who were near enough by to hear it.

"One down, two to go..."

It was exactly as Berengar had said, the young King of Austria planned to eliminate all three Kings of Iberia and their families. In doing so, he would be plunging the Catholic Realms of the Peninsula into utter chaos, buying him the much-needed time to arm and train his Granadan allies so that they would be capable of winning Reconquista without further intervention from Austria and Byzantium.

Throughout the rest of the night, cries echoed throughout the city as the Army of ten thousand men tore it to pieces, taking every bit of gold, silver, and precious stones they could find, mercilessly skewering anyone who resisted with their bayonets.

The Royal Family of Castile was found hiding in a secret room and were gunned down where they stood. As for Berengar, he gazed upon a map of the Iberian Peninsula where he stuck a boot knife into the location that marked the City of Zaragoza.

His next target was the Kingdom of Aragon; after all, the house of de Trastámara ruled over both Castile and Aragon, with King Francisco de Trastámara and his family dead, his relative Felipe now had a claim to his territory, and Berengar intended to execute him before he could seize power for himself.

With the Army and Royal house of Castile Annihilated, Berengar had dealt a mighty blow to the Iberian Union in the initial stages of the War. He suspected that the Portuguese and Aragonese Kings would pull back at least one Army that pressured Granada to defend their territory. Thus he would have to move swiftly to eliminate his next target.

A messenger hawk was sent back to the frontlines of the Granadan defense, informing them of the swift victory that Berengar had achieved over the Castilian Crown and the result that had occurred. In the coming days, the various forces throughout Christendom would come to learn of what had happened to Castile and begin to fear the power of the Austrian Army and the brutality of its Monarch.

For if Berengar did not even treat the lives of his peers with the respect and dignity they were afforded, who would he not eliminate in his pursuit of power? For now, the war in Iberia continued to wage, and it was far from reaching its peak intensity.

Chapter 417: Clandestine Operations in the Kingdom of France

Within the confines of the Duchy of Burgundy, a meeting was held within the Duke's castle. The man who had begun an open rebellion against the French Crown due to the promiscuous behavior of his former lover, the Crown Prince, was sitting upon his ducal throne.

Standing before him were a group of diplomats dressed in the attire of belonging to the upper class of the Iberian Peninsula. The man at the forefront of the delegation began to speak French with a heavy Iberian accent as he addressed the man before him with a sign of humility and respect.

"I understand that you are doing the Lord's work by exposing the sinful nature of the Royal Family. Prince Aubry de Valois's behavior is truly disgusting, and the boy is destined to burn in eternal hellfire! Thus my master King Fransisco de Trastámara, ruler of the great Kingdom of Castile, has ordered me to deliver these weapons to your Grace as a sign of our support."

After saying this, the diplomat whistled, which signaled the men beneath his employ to bring forth the crates filled with weapons. Upon opening the wooden cases, various handheld firearms in the form of the Arkebuse

appeared. Unlike the guns Berengar had given to the French Crown, these were crude knockoffs of local Iberian Manufacture.

They were made of inferior materials and lacked a standardized caliber; they were hardly the same quality of weapons issued to Berengar's allies. Despite this, the Duke of Burgundy had a wide grin as he witnessed the numerous crates that filled his great hall.

With these weapons, his armies would be able to do significant damage to the loyalists who backed King Gilles and his rotten dynasty. Upon witnessing the new weapons, the Duke raised from his seat before addressing his guests with a warm smile.

"I thank you for traveling all of this way to deliver such magnificent weapons. I promise you; I will make great use of them in my future conflicts with the Royal Family."

The lead diplomat nodded his head in response; as he did so, he began to speak further about the ongoing conflict in France.

"The Iberian Union supports you; we will make sure to bring in more weapons when we are next available to do so. As for the gunpowder and munitions, it can be sold for a reasonable price."

The Duke of Burgundy nodded his head in agreement; he found these terms acceptable. As such, he quickly sat down upon his seat before playing with a golden coin as he twirled it through his fingers. This coin was none other than the Austrian Gulden, whose silver counterpart had rapidly begun to replace other forms of currency as the international standard.

After a few moments of thought, he tossed the coin down to the diplomats below, who quickly caught ahold of it. As he did so, a smirk appeared on his face before responding to their statement.

"Consider this the first payment for your services. I look forward to doing further business with you."

The diplomat bowed his head with respect before responding to the Duke's statement.

"I thank your Grace for your generosity..."

After hearing this, the Duke dismissed the Iberian Diplomats who returned to the quarters that they were granted within his keep for the duration of their stay. After they arrived in their quarters, the delegates waited until they were confident that none outside the room could hear their whispers before speaking. The moment they began to converse, it was no longer in the French tongue with a Castilian accent but rather perfect German.

"For now, we shall maintain appearances, later at night; I will dispatch an encrypted message to headquarters, letting them know that the first stage of our operation has been successful and that we will maintain contact with the Burgundian host for some time before we begin the next phase."

In reality, this was not a delegation from the Iberian Union, but rather undercover operatives from Austrian Royal Intelligence who had begun to conduct the beginning stages of Austria's covert operations within the Kingdom of France.

Upon hearing this, the other agents nodded their heads in response to their Commander's orders. One of the men in question immediately began to inquire about the second phase of their objective in a hushed tone.

"What exactly is the second stage of this operation?"

The Agent in Command immediately began to inform his subordinates of their plans for the near future with a cautious tone.

"After we have finished establishing ties to the Burgundians, we will withdraw from their castle under the ruse that we are returning to Castile. Instead, we will enter the borders of the Kingdom of France and begin encouraging dissent against the Royal Family."

Upon hearing this, the agents nodded in silence before their Commander gave them their remaining orders.

"Alright, get some rest; in the coming days, we will maintain our current identities as foreign dignitaries until after we have withdrawn from the keep."

The subordinate agents nodded their heads before doing as they were told.

Weeks passed, and Linde sat within the confines of the Royal Palace within the City of Kufstein; by now, her belly had grown quite large, as she was several months pregnant. Despite this, she never ceased her responsibilities as the Director of Intelligence, even though much of her work was adequately delegated to the appropriate branches. In front of her was none other than Deputy Director Hemma, dressed in her full uniform, reporting information regarding their ongoing operations in France.

"Our agents have infiltrated the rebellious duchies of Aquitaine and Burgundy and have successfully supplied their leaders with the weapons and munitions necessary to inflict more significant casualties upon the French Armies. Their aliases are intact, and the rebels genuinely believe they have the backing of the Iberian Union.

Your plan of having our soldiers in Iberia capture the Union's knockoff Arkebuses and distribute them to our field agents for use in our covert operations was absolutely genius. If we were to use our supply of such primitive weapons, it would be much more difficult to conceal our identities."

Linde had a smug smile on her beautiful face as she heard this compliment; it was indeed nothing impressive, after all, she was the one who created Berengar's spy network from scratch, and with very little assistance from her husband, was capable of reforming it into a modern Intelligence Agency far beyond the capabilities of their rivals.

In comparison to this feat, the small details of their current operations in the neighboring Kingdom to the West were mere child's play. She had an arrogant tone of voice as she began to inquire about the next phase of their work in France.

"With Arkebuses in the hands of the rebels, it is only a matter of time before they use them on the field of battle; when that happens, the French loyalists will be forced to employ the arms we have already given them.

When the French people realize that their Monarch has accepted military aid from Austria, it will cause a massive scandal; thus, with our hidden agents' support in the field, France will soon find itself embroiled in a far greater conflict than they have seen thus far.

When this happens, the English will be sure to capitalize on it. As such, we must work swiftly to ensure that these new rebellious groups have anti-English sentiments so that they too have their work cut out for them!"

Hemma nodded her head as she heard Linde's train of thought before commenting on the situation.

"I will make sure to relay your orders to the field; before long, the entire Kingdom of France will be one giant warzone. I do not doubt that such a thing will spark a refugee crisis; what should we do about this potential outcome?"

Linde's smile went from smug to cruel as she sipped the tea in her cup; after drinking from it, she responded to this question with a bold statement.

"Seal the border, and give our soldiers orders to open fire on anyone who tries to enter the Kingdom of Austria illegally. I highly doubt Berengar would want a bunch of filthy French peasants entering his Kingdom."

The Deputy Director of Austrian Royal Intelligence immediately saluted her superior officer before responding to this order in the affirmative.

"It will be done, your highness!"

After saying this, Linde placed down her teacup filled with tea and dismissed her subordinate.

"If there is nothing else, then you may leave; I have many things to prepare for..."

Hemma nodded in silence before departing, leaving Linde by her lonesome as she drank from the rest of her tea in silence. Truthfully, she was not that concerned with the outcome of the Hundred Year's War, at least not in comparison to her husband. Instead, She was apprehensive about Berengar's

safe return from the War in Iberia. As such, she spent some time in silence praying for his well-being.

While Berengar continued to wage war against his enemies, his Second Wife was hard at work, overseeing the various operations of Austrian Royal Intelligence; after all, it was not just France that had garnered Austria's attention.

Chapter 418: Cat Fight V

Within the City of Kufstein, sitting in a popular Cafe, were two young women. Adela and her eldest sister Ava were seated across from each other, while the younger of the two siblings had a scowl on her face. It had been some time since she had seen her elder sister, and as usual, the relationship between the two sisters was far from cordial.

Since Adela had become engaged to her cousin Berengar all those years ago, her relationship with her eldest sister had continuously worsened. By now, it had become abundantly clear to Adela that her sister Ava was envious of her marriage to Berengar. Thus like a childish brat, Ava had repeatedly acted out against her in numerous fits of jealousy.

Now, the mother of three and former Countess of Salzburg was begging for an opportunity in an attempt to rescue her husband's place in the Austrian Social Hierarchy. After all, due to his cowardly actions during the Bavarian occupation of Austria, Wolfgang had been stripped of his land and titles and been thoroughly disgraced in the eyes of his peers.

Chancellor Otto and his wife grew weary of looking after their eldest daughter and her dullard of a husband. Thus, Ava had no option but to convince Berengar to allow her family back into his good graces. Of course, the only way to achieve this was through her sister, the First Wife of the King of Austria. After all these years, Ava still could hardly believe that the sickly boy she had grown up with was now the most powerful man in the western world.

With each passing day, she lamented her past actions; Though Berengar was unaware; when the two of them were both small children, they were engaged to be married when they reached adulthood. However, as Berengar's sickly condition progressed to a near-death state, Ava became disillusioned with the boy she once loved and convinced her father to break their betrothal.

Surprisingly years later, this resulted in Berengar and Adela's engagement, which greatly shocked Ava. After all, her youngest sister had become engaged to her first Crush. However, It was not until Berengar had begun to rise in power that Ava truly began to regret her decision and become filled with envy towards her sibling.

Of course, Berengar had no memory of this as the original inhabitant of his body had not been involved with family politics in his youth and just thought of Ava as a good friend in their childhood years. If he knew he was once engaged to Adela's older sister, he might take her as a mistress to lay claim to what could be perceived as his "original wife."

This was the most significant reason Ava often sought conflict with Adela in the past. She had come to realize that she had thrown away a diamond in return for a polished turd. Now, Adela was the High Queen of Austria, and Ava was the wife of a disgraced, landless nobleman. With this in mind, Ava began to break out in tears as she began to speak to her youngest sister about the hardships she had to endure as the wife of Wolfgang.

"You are so lucky to be married to a man like Berengar... Wolfgang is an absolute idiot! He has no idea that those around him are openly mocking him. Everywhere we go, people treat us as pariahs with their backhanded comments, and he thinks they're being genuinely nice to him.

Daddy won't even pay for my kids to get a private education, so they have to sit with those filthy commoners in the new public schools! Without our parents, my family wouldn't even have a thaler to our names now that Adelbrand has seized control of his house and their fortune."

Adela was not the least bit sympathetic to her sister; unlike Berengar, she was aware of the arranged marriage between Ava and Berengar when they were kids. In fact, if anything the young Queen of Austria was quite spiteful to her elder sister. The very thought that her husband could have been married to her bitch of an older sister brought out the worst inside her.

Luckily for Adela, Ava threw it all away for a numbskull like Wolfgang, simply because his family was at the time wealthy and powerful. As such, the young Queen did not even hesitate as she spoke with firm determination to her spoiled eldest sister.

"Ava, what exactly do you want from me? If you have come to ask for money, It is out of my hands; Berengar has invested most of our wealth into the Royal Treasury, which acts as the funds for the entire Kingdom. I regret to inform you that I do not have the authority to withdraw from it.

As for our savings, I will need to discuss with Berengar personally whether or not I can loan your husband money. Since the King is currently in Iberia waging war against our enemies, it will be some time before I can make that request."

Ava bit her lip as she heard this news; she suspected that Adela could grant her some money but refused to do so. As such, her heart was filled with resentment as she thought about the degree of luxury that Adela lived in and the fact that if she had not been so foolish in her youth, it could have all been hers. Despite this growing fury, Ava calmed her inner wrath before putting on a gentle facade.

"Little Adela, I'm not asking for money; I simply want some land for my husband so that we can earn a decent living. Surely there is some factory somewhere that your husband doesn't need. Even if it is just a small production facility, your husband has so much wealth generated from the rent that he charges the business owners for using his land. Can he not spare some of this for his family?"

Adela's brow raised slightly upon hearing this suggestion as she glared at her sister in disbelief. She immediately asked for clarification as to what Ava was suggesting.

"Are you suggesting that I use my authority as High Queen to usurp a private business which has been granted the power to operate within the Kingdom of Austria by the Royal Crown itself, solely for your husband's benefit?"

If I were to do such a thing, I would be committing multiple crimes under the Anti-Corruption laws that are in place. Not only would you and I be punished severely for such actions, but the prestige of the Austrian Crown would be forever diminished in the eyes of the people!

You don't understand how things work nowadays, do you? The Nobility no longer can take whatever they please from the common people. There are

punishments that can be applied to all members of society, including the Royal Family, for engaging in such corrupt behavior. No, Ava, I will not give you land, even as though you are a member of my family.

Suppose you and your husband want a business to run. In that case, you will have to build it from the ground up like everyone else; you will have to purchase or rent the land from whoever owns it, build the factory, pay your employees a decent wage, and have a product of high enough quality that people wish to purchase it with their funds. You will also have to pay the necessary taxes to the Royal Treasury that apply.

If you and your dullard of a husband can figure out how to achieve all of this, then maybe, just maybe, I can give you a loan from the Crown with a fair interest rate. However, until such a presentation can be made, I will not assist you."

After saying this, Adela reached into her purse and pulled out a few silver thalers that acted as the price to pay for the meal they had shared and as the tip to the server. After doing so, she leaned in and whispered something to Ava.

"It is funny, isn't it? In your youth, you wanted nothing to do with Berengar and even broke your betrothal because you believed he was worthless. Now he is the King of Austria, and I am his Queen; I guess your loss is my gain!"

After saying this, the young Queen of Austria departed from the Cafe and returned to the protection of her guards, where they proceeded to ride in the Carriage back to the Royal Palace. Ava was left stunned in the Cafe by her lonesome; she had no idea how Adela had found out about her previous engagement to Berengar so many years ago.

However, Adela was wrong about one thing; Ava did not break her betrothal with Berengar because she thought he was worthless; instead, she did so out of fear that he would die before they could get married. In her childhood, she deeply cared for Berengar; in fact, he was her first crush. However, when he became sickly, she did not have the emotional strength to stick by him and thus ran away from her responsibilities.

This misunderstanding between the two siblings was because they were separated in age by nearly a decade. The engagement with Berengar was broken up long before Adela was old enough to understand what such a thing was. If Adela knew that even now, Ava still had some feelings for her Berengar, then the young Queen would have been far more ruthless in how she dealt with her sister's request.

Eventually, Ava sipped on her tea before sighing in silence. Even though she deeply regretted her past actions, she had no way to change the outcome. As such, she could either do as Adela had advised and begin the arduous process of building a business from scratch or continue to mooch off her parents for the rest of her life.

After careful internal debate, Ava sighed before taking a sip from the tea in front of her once more; since her husband was all but useless, she would have to rely entirely upon herself. After all, she was reasonably clever; how hard could it be to start a business? If only she knew the difficulties, she would face in the long path set before her.

Chapter 419: Last Man Standing Part I

It was early morning in the mid of summer within the southwestern borders of Andalusia. Sitting within a fortified trench line was a Regiment of Landwehrs comprised roughly 2,000 men. Merely two artillery batteries supported these infantrymen as they gazed off across no man's land, bored out of their minds while they guarded a portion of the border that was deemed the least likely to engage in combat.

At the moment, the Austro-Granadan Alliance comprised of roughly 75,000 men deployed to the borders of Andalusia, because of this, their forces were spread thin throughout the area, as they waited for the attack of the Iberian Union who had now gathered four separate armies of roughly 100,000 men each in different locations.

While the King of Austria led the cavalry to eradicate the Royal Families of the Catholic Iberian Kingdoms, regular soldiers such as the ones in this trench line drank their coffee and entertained themselves with card games. Colonel Johan Vilinger was drinking from a stainless steel field cup as he fulfilled his duty by gazing, watching over his men, and ensuring that their defense area remained under Austrian control.

The man had graduated from Officer training with high marks. However, he never believed he would be sitting at the rear lines in a hardly noticeable section of the Andalusian border while the rest of his comrades were fighting off waves of medieval soldiers. He was in a state of depression as he thought about how mundane his life as an infantry officer had become.

As the man lamented his current position, he decided to fulfill his obligations; as such, he peered his head over the sandbags to look into the distance, where he saw a sea of shimmering iron, though its reach was far off, one could tell this was no natural structure. Instantly alerted by this discovery, the man pulled out his binoculars to get a better glimpse of what he was looking at.

In the distance, an army of roughly 100,000 men flying various banners, especially that of the Kingdom of Portugal, were clad in various forms of armor. The glance of the sun reflected towards the Colonel's position as he gazed upon the sight of tens of thousands of iron-clad warriors. At the same time, they marched towards the entrenched Regiment of Austrian Soldiers.

The moment this Colonel realized what he was looking at, he lost control over his grasp, and the stainless steel cup fell onto the mud beneath his feet, splashing it with hot coffee. In a moment of fear, the Colonel's hands began to shake as he struggled to withdraw his flare gun from its holster.

Johan's mind was filled with dread as he firmly grasped his flare gun with two hands before breaking its action open. He fumbled through his leather web belt, reaching for a flare that slipped from his grasp and fell into the mud below.

Immediately the man knelt into the trench, covering his uniform with grime, and dug through the dirt to retrieve his fallen flare. Having wasted precious moments doing so, Johan quickly shoved the flare into his gun and fired it off into the air.

As the red projectile lit up the blue sky, the sight caused the half-asleep soldiers in the Austrian trench line to panic as they immediately looked over the edge of their fortified position and gazed in horror at the massive army heading in their direction.

After confirming that nearly 100,000 men were marching towards their position, another nine flares were fired off from within the trench line, signaling the nearby forces that a full-sized army was marching on their position and that reinforcements were needed at their location.

This caused a chain reaction of the various infantry placements to fire off their flares until they reached the central portion of the Austro-Granadan Army. The need for reinforcements was urgent; after all, there was no way 2500 men could defend against an army of 100,000. Despite the inability to hold the position, the Austrian Colonel gritted his teeth before screaming out his command to his regiment.

"Load your weapons, and get into your positions! The enemy is upon us, and we must halt their advance until reinforcements arrive! If we falter here, then Granada will be overrun, and the Catholics will cut off our retreat from Gibraltar.

If such a thing were to occur then, our entire army would be stranded in this God-Forsaken land with no way out! For the sake of your King and Fatherland, you must hold the line! Hold the line even if it means your death! God with us!"

The moment the Colonel gave this speech, the 2500 men who comprised the Landwehr regiment and the two Artillery batteries lifted their weapons into the air and chanted back the battle cry of the Austrian army.

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

After saying this, any trepidation contained within the hearts of the Austrian soldiers was forced out by a fearless resolve that only a warrior can know within their hearts. Two thousand five hundred men loaded their weapons as they fixed their bayonets before aiming over the edge of the trench line, waiting for the enemy to get within firing distance, committed to holding the ground until the last man was standing.

Before long, Johan could see through his binoculars that the enemy army had approached the range of the Austrian artillery; he immediately cried out to the men responsible for using such weapons to fulfill their duty.

"Open fire! Rain hell upon these bastards!"

Upon saying this, his message was conveyed to the Artillery Officers, who began to do as instructed. Before long, the echo of the 7.5cm FK 22 Field Guns resounded in the air as the Colonel gazed through his optics to see the shells land upon the Iberian Position. A wide grin appeared on his face as the first barrage of 12 shells pounded the front lines of the enemy army.

Before long, the subsequent thunderous explosion filled the air as the shells continued to land upon the advancing Iberians in the hundreds. Yet despite this, the soldiers of the Iberian Union and their foreign volunteers continued to march through the barrages unaffected, with looks of grim determination on their faces.

The scene of the fields in the distance was wholly scorched by artillery, and corpses lie blasted apart in the ruined landscape; tens of thousands of men had already perished, and yet, it was as if they had not even made a dent in the massive army.

Before long, the Iberian Soldiers passed through the artillery and entered rifle range, where Colonel Johan immediately pulled out a nearby needle rifle and loaded its breach with a paper cartridge. As he did so, he commanded the soldiers in the trench line.

"Fire at will!"

As Johan fired his first shot, and those around him did the same, his ears rang from the volley of gunfire; despite this, he quickly pulled back the bolt of his needle rifle and loaded another paper cartridge before firing downrange once more.

His bullet hit its mark as it pierced through the unarmored torso of the Pesant levy charging towards him with a spear in hand. However, they dropped to the ground dead on the spot; his comrades rushed forward through the bullets volley, utterly undeterred by the barbed wire and needle fire as they ran towards their deaths.

After firing one more shot, Colonel Johan immediately ordered to retreat to the following trench line. Their position was about to be over-run, and he did not want to be swarmed by the enemy army.

"Fall back to the next line! Fall back!"

After saying this, he quickly climbed over the trench wall and ran through yet another no man's land towards the second trench line; his men promptly followed his lead, where they immediately slid into the trench alongside the rear-guard who had their rifles loaded and ready for the oncoming Catholic warriors.

Johan immediately said a silent prayer as he prepared his weapon to fire; the battle at the Portuguese border had just begun, and though they had not lost any soldiers yet, eventually the Austrians would run out of trench lines to hide within, when that happened it would be all-out melee combat with tens of thousands of their enemies.

As the front lines of Iberian soldiers and their foreign volunteers reached the first trench line, they immediately began to charge over its fortifications and into the line of fire. While this was happening, the King of Portugal sat back safely, gazing upon the battlefield with a sneer on his face. He gave a single order to the thousands of heavily armored men at arms and knights at his side.

"Now that the peasants have soaked up their bullets, it is time to advance upon their position, leave no heretic alive, God wills it!"

With this said, the heavy infantry and the cavalry forces of the Portuguese army began to charge into the fray; the battle for the Andalusian Border had only just begun.

Johan squeezed the trigger of his rifle, causing the needle to protrude through the paper cartridge, thus striking the percussion cap embedded within. This reaction ignited the gunpowder propelling the .451 caliber projectile down range and into the skull of an oncoming Crusader.

Crusader would be the most appropriate word, as these men were fighting a holy war against the Granadan Army and their reformist Austrian Allies. Despite being mere peasants who had picked up a weapon for the first time in the name of God, these fearless warriors of Christ were genuinely deserving of the term.

The Colonel of the Austrian Regiment continued to fire upon the advancing enemy alongside his soldiers. However, no matter how many bullets were sent down or how many crusaders they killed in combat, the Catholics never seemed to run out of troops.

If not for the entrenched positions and their protective helmets, the volleys of arrows fired upon their location likely would have caused far more casualties than they currently had suffered. However, right as Johan thought about this, the crackle of gunfire and the smoke of gunpowder spewed into the air, as lead balls fell downrange and onto the Austrian positions.

From the other trench line roughly a hundred feet away, the Crusader Arkebusiers had begun to unleash a volley of fire. A single lead ball clanged against Johan's stahlhelm as he fell back from his position and hit the floor. He was heavily dazed as a nearby soldier checked on his condition.

Ultimately the steel helmet was removed from his head, where he gazed upon a massive dent on its surface with awe. If not for this standard-issue helmet, his life indeed would have been taken at that moment. After regaining his clarity of mind, Johan placed the dented helmet back upon his skull, where he shook off the soldier who was checking on his condition.

"I am alright! Don't worry about me; continue to fire on the enemy position!"

With this said, the soldier immediately saluted his commanding officer and returned to combat. Johan quickly unscrewed the lid to his canteen and took a sip of the purified water within before stowing it back on his belt. After doing so, he checked to see if his rifle was loaded once more and poked his head over the trench line.

By the time he was back in combat, another volley from the Arkebusiers was fired on his position. Though it was woefully inaccurate at this distance, it was in such a volume of fire that it was not uncommon for the Austrian defender to be hit by the projectiles.

Luckily, they wore advanced steel armor, which defended their vitals from the primitive weapons that their enemies used. With this in mind, Johan aimed down his iron sights onto the nearest arkebusier. He fired his shot, the .451 caliber cylindrical projectile propelled downrange and through the kettle helm of the arkebusier, splattering his brains across the nearby sandbags.

Unfortunately for the enemy, their medieval armor was no match for the advanced weapons of the Austrian Army. Having fired his shot, Johan immediately pulled back the bolt on his gun and reloaded another paper cartridge before firing once more on the advancing enemy.

Undercover of arkebuse fire, the Iberian infantry rushed towards the trench line; before long, Johan found himself engaging in melee combat with a peasant levy, armed with a spear as he ran into the Austrian trench.

Johan immediately lifted his rifle in the air where he deflected the oncoming spear before shifting his balance and thrusting his ten-inch steel blade bayonet into the peasant's gambeson armor, piercing directly through it and into his flesh. After doing so, he retrieved his bayonet and no longer paid attention to the corpse in front of him.

Instead, he loaded another shot and fired on the next wave of Crusaders who charged towards their deaths like madmen. Before long, the Peasant levies were spent, with only a few hundred of them remaining. However, just when the Austrians thought that victory had arrived, the Knights and Men at Arms of the Kingdom of Portugal as well as their Crusading Allies rushed across the no man's land and into the trench.

These men were heavily clad in iron and steel armor, and thus the bayonets would not be nearly as effective on them. The Iberian heavy infantry unleashed their swords and maces upon the defending Austrians without fear of death. Unfortunately for the average Landwehr, they were not as well trained in melee combat as those who had trained their entire lives in such arts.

Bodies of Austrian soldiers began to collapse around Johan as he struggled to fend off a Knight of Portugal. Before long, he felt the hot sting of steel penetrating through his flesh as a longsword stuck through his back. Luckily for him, it had missed all of his vitals. However, it was enough to cause him to drop his weapon.

In response to this, he quickly withdrew his revolver and fired a shot through the torso of the knight before him before turning around and firing another through the man who had backstabbed him. He had four shots remaining as he collapsed against the wall of the trench, firing off another shot at a nearby man at arms who was about to slay one of his soldiers.

The bullet pierced through the man's helmet and claimed his life, causing his iron-clad body to collapse on top of the wounded Austrian Landwehr. Johan struggled to his feet as he tried to rally his surviving men against the oncoming attackers.

"Hold your ground! Reinforcements are on their way! Hold your ground!"

As the Austrian defenders heard this, they began to fight with every fiber of their being, yet by now, only a few hundred of them remained. With this in mind, Johan reached onto his belt and pulled out his spade, which was sharpened for close-quarters combat. With a revolver in one hand and a blunt weapon in the other, he began to walk through the trench line while bleeding out his back.

Johan began to fire upon nearby Iberian soldiers with his revolver while striking others across the helm, concussing them in the process; he did not stop bashing their skulls in until their helmets had been completely cut through by the sharpened steel edge of the spade.

Upon seeing how effective the spade was, his remaining soldiers tossed away their needle rifles and unleashed their entrenching tools, which proved to be lethal within the tight confines of the trench line. The Iberian Knights were forced to half-sword their weapons as they struggled to kill the Austrian Defenders.

Steel clashed with steel as the Austrians fought with everything they had; Johan parried an oncoming blade with his entrenching stool as he fired his last shot directly into the forehead of his attacker. After doing so, he tossed his revolver aside, where he began to batter away at the Crusaders. Outnumbered and overwhelmed, the Austrian Landwehrs fought on, desperate to defend their position until reinforcements arrived.

By now, Johan had lost a lot of blood from his back wound and began to slow down, the adrenaline and endorphins in his system began to fade, and he struggled to move his limbs as he engaged in combat with the enemy. Eventually, he collapsed into the mud, struggling to retain his consciousness.

The crusaders disregarded him as a corpse and continued to cut down the remaining Austrian soldiers. Eventually, only one soul remained alive within the Austrian Trench line; the Crusaders had killed all of its defenders, except for Johan, who was now struggling for breath as his body was kicked over to reveal a heavily armored Knight wearing the Royal Arms of Portugal on his tabard. This man was a member of the Portuguese Royal Family. The man gazed down upon Johan through his bascinet with a look of disdain on his face as he uttered his contempt.

"Fucking Heretic!"

Right, when the man was about to bring down his sword, the echo of gunfire resounded in the air, and his skull was blown apart. Johan could roughly make out the sound of Austrians screaming the battle cry "For King and Fatherland!" as a wave of ten thousand Germans opened fire upon the Crusaders contained within the trenches.

As the Colonel faded into unconsciousness, the last thing he saw the sight of muddied puttees belonging to an Austrian soldier who had climbed into the trench and rush into battle against the Iberian Forces. When he awoke a few days later, he would come to find that he was the lone survivor of his Regiment who successfully managed to defend the Granadan Border until reinforcements could arrive.

Roughly 2500 Austrian men died in the trenches, while the reinforcements successfully annihilated the Portugues and Crusader forces. Though, as they arrived, the Portuguese King had escaped the battlefield and fled back to his Home in Lisbon.

The aftermath of this battle would be considered a heroic last stand by a group of Austrian Landwehrs against overwhelming odds. King Berengar would later posthumously award every soldier who died in this battle some variant of the Iron Cross, as a symbol of bravery for the men who gave their lives to secure the Granadan Border.