

Steel 421

Chapter 421 - A Day In The Life Of Linde

Chancellor Otto was standing within the confines of the Royal Palace; one might think he would be visiting his daughter the High Queen of Austria; however, if one were to observe his actions, they would be surprised to see that instead, he was meeting with the Second Queen of Austria Linde von Kufstein.

The reason for his visit to the Second Queen was entirely because of her job as the Director of Austrian Royal intelligence; recently he had received a letter from Duke Dietger von Wittelsbach about the willingness of Bavaria to submit itself to the Austrian Crown, and some valuable intel about what the other German realms were planning.

While Berengar was away at war, it was up to his Uncle and Father-in-Law to run the country. Thus far, he had done an exemplary job of it; therefore, as this essential matter came to his attention, naturally, he desired to verify the contents of the document. With this task, there was only one person he could trust who was his daughter's greatest rival in love.

Linde read through the contents with a stern expression on her face as she paid attention to every little detail, checking to see if anything was written in code. Oddly enough, it was a relatively concise letter without any encrypted content. After coming to a conclusion she sighed heavily as her substantial bosom heaved in the air before revealing her thoughts on the document in her hands.

"According to my spies in the Luxembourg Royal Court, everything on this document is legitimate. Luxembourg's forces halted Bavaria's mercenary army within Brandenburg. As a result, Duke Dietger attempted to rally the German Realms against us while Berengar was at war in Iberia. They rejected his notions, and he likely realized that any hope of getting his vengeance on his was null.

He may be an incredibly proud and short-tempered man. Still, he is not a fool; he likely realizes that we will decimate the Peasant's Crusade to Iberia and annihilate the more professional force that marches

on our borders in the next few years. Thus, I think his willingness to submit to our rule is an attempt to avoid Berengar's wrath when he finally brings the German World to heel.

For now, I will task my agents in the Bavarian Royal Court to keep an eye on Dietger and his confidants. This is just my advice, so take it with a grain of salt; however, I suggest you write back to him informing your intent to work alongside Bavaria for the near future and that we will accept their payments in installments as was initially agreed upon.

Remind him that the only reason Berengar hasn't marched upon his Realm with the full might of the Austrian Army at his back is that there is still some time left on the treaty until he is forced to pay the Reparations back in full. After doing so, hint to the Duke that such a deadline could be extended if the Bavarians were to begin paying their installments immediately.

If they start paying their reparations in installments, it can be seen as a sign of their sincerity towards Austria and its King. Rest assured, if Dietger tries anything foolish, Royal Intelligence will be aware of it, and I promise you we will stop it before it becomes a problem. So, by all means, proceed as you see fit."

Otto bowed his head in response to the Second Queen. Though he was never a fan of Berengar's polygamous lifestyle or the fact that the King had cheated on his daughter with this woman, the Chancellor must admit that Linde was a fearsome and intimidating woman. The look in her sky blue eyes brought chills to his spine as he watched her read the contents of the letter with a severe expression on her flawless face.

After listening to Linde's opinion on the letter, Otto sighed in relief before taking it back. He only raised his head from the bow after Linde had seemingly permitted him to do so.

"I thank you, my Queen, for your guidance; I will be sure to negotiate a favorable alliance with the Duchy of Bavaria and pave the way for Berengar's annexation of their realm shortly..."

Linde nodded her head in response to this before commenting on his statement.

"Be sure that you do... Now, if there is nothing else, I have things that I must attend to. I am sure that you know your way out of the Palace..."

Otto bowed once more before bidding; Ithe Second Queen farewell.

"I thank you for your time, your majesty; I will be taking my leave, I pray that you and your children are healthy and happy."

After saying this, Otto left the area and returned to his Chateau to get to work. As for Linde, she returned to the main bedroom and sprawled out on the bed while sniffing the scent Berengar had left behind on his spot.

As she did so, she noticed one of Berengar's other wives' approach; it was none other than Honoria. The Byzantine Princess had a slightly worried expression on her face as she asked the question on her mind.

"Have you heard?"

Linde stared at Honoria with a mocking expression before making fun of her.

"I hear lots of things it is part of my job; you are going to have to be specific..."

The purple-haired beauty immediately began to pout as she clarified what she meant.

"Did you hear that Berengar executed the King of Castile and his family? He plunged the entire Kingdom into Chaos!"

A wide smile spread across Linde's face as she sprawled out on the large feather mattress. As she did so, she spoke playfully.

"Oh yes... that! Yeah, I heard about that? What of it? Castile is our enemy; who cares what happens to their monarch and his pitiful family?"

Honoria scoffed as she crossed her arms and began to complain to her rival. She could not believe that Linde was so lax about the whole ordeal.

"Who cares? Berengar has broken international etiquette; for centuries, every King has known not to outright massacre a rival monarch and his family, what if the Catholic World does the same to us!?!"

The strawberry-blond-haired vixen spread across the bed further exemplifying her curves, though she was visibly pregnant she was as beautiful as ever; as she did so she began to laugh at Honoria's comment. After a few moments of collecting herself, she finally revealed how foolish the princess of the Byzantine Empire was being.

"I wouldn't worry about that if I were you, you might not be aware, but as Director of Royal Intelligence and Berengar's favorite wife, I have access to the weapons designs he and the Research and Development team of the Royal Armory have been working on.

Let's just say that in a few years, the entire Catholic World and all of its residents could unite against Austria, and the Royal Austrian Army would still massacre them before they ever step foot in our land. Not to mention the secret border defense project our husband is working on..."

Honoria stared at Linde in disbelief; since when did she have access to such top secret information? More importantly, did she just claim that she was Berengar's favorite? Honoria instantly began to pout as she questioned the Second Queen on this part in particular.

"Who says you are Berengar's favorite? If that were so, wouldn't you be the High Queen!?!"

Linde immediately got up from the bed and walked over to Honoria with a coy smile on her face; after a while, she kissed the Byzantine Princess on the lips slightly before whispering in her ear.

"You are cute when you are jealous! Unfortunately for you, I don't have time for this..."

Honoria's cheeks began to flush with embarrassment as she endured Linde's harassment; after the Second Queen began to walk towards the door, the Byzantine Princess and Third Queen of Austria began to call out to her.

"Where do you think you are going!?! This isn't over!"

Linde merely turned around and smirked before responding to Honoria's question.

"I am going to review some important information at the Headquarters of Royal Intelligence. Some of us have more important roles to play in Berengar's life than merely appealing to his fantasy of a Pirate Queen."

After saying this, Linde left Honoria behind to steam in her inner fury. Sometimes that woman knew just how to get under her skin. As such, she sat down on the bed and began to pout. She refused to listen to that vile woman's words of provocation. As she thought about this, she decided to visit Adela and inform her of just what Linde had said. After all, as High Queen and Linde's greatest rival, she would indeed have something to say about all of this.

As for Linde, she did exactly as she said she would; Despite the fact that the Department of Intelligence had essentially become self-sufficient without a need for her input. She was still technically its Director. Thus Linde intended to oversee some ongoing issues in the three regions of interest which were Iberia, France, and the Baltic.

As for the rest of the Western World, Though Austria had long since spread its web of agents across it, there was little concern over those regions for the time being. Thus while Berengar was away at war, things within Austria continued to advance at a steady pace.

Chapter 422 - A Day In The Life Of Adela

Within the Royal Palace of Austria, two young women were having a conversation. Since Henrietta had confessed her feelings to her older brother, she had been alienated by most of the women in Berengar's life. The only exception to this rule was the High Queen Adela, her cousin, and her close friend.

As the two young women stood next to each other, it became increasingly clear how closely related they were, as they shared many similar features. If one was unaware of their background, they might even

assume they were sisters. Despite being two years younger than Adela, Henrietta had grown more significant in stature than her elder cousin.

By now, the teenage girl was taller and curvier than Adela, which brought a frown to the High Queen's face as she noticed this. She had no idea what Berengar had been feeding his sister for her to grow so much bigger than herself. However, she quickly turned her face away from this noticeable difference and instead returned her attention to the event she was planning.

As the years passed, the first batch of recruits from Berengar's Armed Forces who were now hardened Veterans would be retiring from active service and entering the reserves, leaving the Nation's defense to the younger Generation.

Considering Berengar had time and again expressed the importance of honoring the Nation's soldiers and preserving its militant culture, Adela had taken it upon herself to organize a Grand Ceremony for the thousands of Soldiers who had perished in battle and the many more who were now seeing the end of their days in combat.

Without the King's advice, Adela planned to hold the first annual Veteran's day parade when the soldiers stationed in Iberia returned from their exhausting campaign. With this in mind, she had opted to involve the King's sister in the planning as Henrietta needed to fulfill her duty as a member of the Royal Family.

The High Queen of Austria pointed at the replica of the City of Kufstein that lies on the table before her; specifically, she was aiming her dainty finger at Main Street, which would be sectioned off and used as the area for the parade, as she did so she expressed the thoughts on her mind.

"We should have the surviving veterans of each conflict stroll out one at a time in chronological order of their wars!"

Upon hearing this, Henrietta nodded her head before coming up with an idea of her own; however, she struggled to express her opinion out of fear that it would be rejected due to her meek nature.

"Maybe... If it is not too much, we can have them wear replicas of the uniforms they wore during that conflict?"

Upon hearing this, a gorgeous smile appeared on Adela's luscious lips as she listened to her cousin's input.

"That's a wonderful idea, Henrietta! We will start with the peasant militia at the battle of a mining town and move on to the mixed uniforms of the veterans from the Kitzbühel Border War. After that, we will honor the soldiers who fought in the Conquest of Tyrol, and so on!"

Henrietta's lips curved into a pretty smile as she heard the praise from the High Queen; her confidence in her role began to skyrocket as she began to suggest another idea.

"Perhaps we can dust off some of the old weapons in storage and have them refurbished to be used in the parade?"

Adela nodded her head in response to this before moving on to the next point of the event as she moved a small wooden figure used to represent Berengar into position at the head of the formation.

"Our beloved King will be leading the parade atop horseback, in whatever uniform he desires; after it is complete, he will give a speech about the Veterans and their efforts towards this Kingdom."

Henrietta smiled warmly at the thought of her precious big brother leading the parade in all his glory; this smile did not go unnoticed by Adela, who felt frustrated. She did not know how to broach the subject without making it awkward. After all, Henrietta's feelings for Berengar were most definitely taboo, and Adela did not support them. Eventually, the young Queen mustered the courage to ask about the topic.

"So... Henrietta, there are sure to be many prominent young noblemen in attendance for this event; after all, military service is considered a civic duty, and there are bound to be a few exceptional young lads who have proven themselves on the field of battle. Is there anyone in particular who might have caught your fancy?"

The young Austrian Princess flushed with embarrassment as she thought about the question; in her mind, there was only one man she adored, and as such, she felt uneasy speaking about it even though she had kissed her brother on the cheeks and professed her intent to fight for him, now that she was being asked about the question directly by one of his wives she did not know how to react.

Upon seeing Henrietta's innocent and sheepish reaction, Adela felt a need to protect her from Berengar. After a few drinks, the man was liable to lay his hands on any woman who he deemed attractive, even if that woman might be his younger sister. More importantly, the High Queen felt the need to keep a distance between the two siblings considering that it was Henrietta, not Berengar who was the most interested in such a taboo affair.

Adela gritted her teeth and clenched her fists at the thought of such a sinful relationship; such a fate could never be allowed to exist; she swore in her mind then and there that she would do whatever necessary to stop Berengar and Henrietta from progressing beyond the point of siblings. After all, it was her life's goal to save Berengar's soul, and incest was not something easily forgiven even by the Lord God Almighty.

After a while, Adela calmed her nerves before placing her hand on Henrietta's shoulder, which caused the girl to react in fright; she was not used to being touched by anyone as she was usually timid. Upon witnessing her cousin's intense glare, Henrietta's heart became filled with dread. Adela forced a smile on her face as she gave a fair warning to her younger cousin.

"I know what you're thinking, but I assure you that it will never come to pass. Even if you have gotten some twisted ideas about your brother in that pretty little head of yours, I will make sure that he never engages in such a wicked sin. You should let go of your incestuous thoughts and find a man more suitable for yourself."

However, despite the Queen's fierce pretense, Henrietta did not back down like Adela believed she would; instead, she gathered all the strength within her heart and lifted the arm from her shoulder as she returned Adela's frightening gaze with a determined expression.

"You do not get to determine who is right for me, cousin! My love for my brother is as pure as the driven snow, and just because you and the others may disapprove of it does not mean that I won't fight for us to be together!"

After saying this, Henrietta began to depart from the room with a smug expression; as she did so, Adela called out to her from behind with a challenge.

"We will see about that!"

Adela was practically fuming as she stomped her foot on the ground in a fit of rage. She could not believe the girl would be so stubborn even after being confronted about her sinful thoughts. This task would be more complicated than she initially thought.

If Henrietta could not be convinced to cease her abominable pursuit, then Adela's only choice was to focus on monitoring Berengar's behavior and prevent him from doing something that would permanently tarnish his soul.

With the gauntlet laid, Adela was prepared to return to her work of planning the upcoming Veteran's parade. However, a knock on the door immediately garnered her attention as she looked over to see the purple-haired beauty that was Honoria standing by the door. A second later, she could hear her rival's voice resound throughout the air.

"We need to talk..."

Adela sighed before putting on a friendly facade; as she forced herself to smile, she spoke the words most appropriate for a woman of her position.

"Honoria, pray to tell what is so important that you must interrupt my work?"

Honoria had a solemn expression on her face as she spoke the thoughts on her mind.

"It is about Linde..."

Upon hearing this, the friendly smile that Adela presented instantly collapsed and was replaced with a frown; she began to speak with a voice filled with contempt.

"What did that bitch do now?"

Honorina chuckled when she heard such harsh language from the supposedly pious High Queen of Austria and decided to instigate conflict between her two rivals.

"It is not much; I just thought it was necessary to inform you that Linde claims she is Berengar's favorite, and that she is asserting her claim by rubbing in the fact that she knows top secret information about Berengar's plans for the Defense of Austria..."

Adela's frown instantly soured further as she began to speak her mind about her oldest rival.

"Of course, she knows classified information about the defense of our Kingdom; she is the Director of Intelligence! That has nothing to do with being Berengar's favorite at all! That bitch is always talking smack behind my back! First, I have to worry about Henrietta trying to snatch Berengar away in an unholy union, and now I have to deal with Linde's snide comments?"

You tell that whore that if she were actually Berengar's favorite, then he would have chosen her to be his High Queen! She knows damn well that our Husband is not the type of man who abides by obligations such as engagements if it gets in the way of his whims!"

Honorina had a devilish grin on her face as she heard Adela's response to Linde's claim. She had successfully baited the girl into open conflict with her rival. While these two bitches were at each other's throats, she could reap the spoils.

All she had to worry about now was the dark horse in their household. After all, Honorina also did not trust Berengar to be alone with his little sister at the moment. Having fulfilled her plot to divide and conquer, Honorina put on a friendly facade as she responded to Adela's comment.

"I will be sure to inform Linde of your words."

After saying this, she departed from the room, leaving Adela in an increased state of fury. As usual, Berengar's wives' relationship was far from cordial behind the scenes. Each of them struggled to gain his affection and secure the future of their progeny. Even though Honorina's marriage to Berengar was matrilineal, there was still much to be gained for her future son by having the King of Austria's support.

Chapter 423 - The Cowardly King Of Aragon

Berengar sat upon horseback as he gazed into the distance towards the city of Zaragoza through his binoculars. He would never have guessed that the main Portuguese army would be defeated at the Southwestern Border.

It was because of this event, as well as the ruthless attack on Toledo, that the two remaining monarchs had grown cautious and withdrew half of their forces to defend their home territory. The result of which would have massive consequences for the Reconquista as a whole.

Upon seeing an army of a hundred thousand men gathered within the vicinity of the city of Zaragoza, Berengar knew that he had no chance of rooting out and destroying the Aragonese King with the 10,000 men under his command. Having come to this realization he stored his binoculars away before issuing the orders that would change the course of history.

"Fall back to the main defensive line. We do not have the manpower necessary to take this city."

The men of Berengar's advanced force sighed in relief as they heard their King's orders. If he had insisted on taking the city with so few men, they truly believed they would be entering the gates of heaven. As such, the small force of roughly 10,000 men began to depart back to the main defensive line established on the borders of Andalusia.

King Felipe de Trastámara gazed upon the retreat of the Austrian forces and sighed heavily; he felt as if a great weight had been lifted from his heart. Though it was only 10,000 men, he could not deny that his heart was filled with dread.

After personally witnessing the destruction of one of his armies at the hands of the Austro-Granadan alliance not long ago. The devastation he saw that day had forever imprinted itself upon his soul. In doing so he had resorted to hiding within the illusionary safety that his castle's walls provided.

With the King of Castile and his family now deceased at the hands of King Berengar the Accursed, Felipe truly believed that he was next in line to embrace the angel of death; in fact, he no longer had the will to fight against his enemies.

Castile was in a state of chaos as its Noblemen fought among each other for the right to rule, and Portugal had just suffered a humiliating defeat. Out of the roughly 500,000 men gathered to fight in Iberia, 200,000 or so now lie dead at the hands of their enemies.

The fact that one of the five armies of the Iberian Union was held off by a single regiment numbering no more than 2,500 Austrian soldiers was a shocking truth. Though all but one had perished in the attack, the brave warriors of Austria had managed to hold their ground long enough for reinforcements to arrive and annihilate the remaining crusaders.

Even the Crown Prince of Portugal was killed in battle, as for King Luiz de Avis of Portugal, he swore to avenge the loss of his son and heir. By now he had called upon Felipe to combine their forces and assault the weakest point in the Austrian defensive line.

However, King Felipe of Aragon dreaded the idea of leaving his castle and entering the fray once more. By now, reinforcements from Austria and its allies were bound to have arrived in the strait of Gibraltar, and the defensive line would no longer be spread so thin. Despite having 300,000 remaining soldiers, most of which were peasant levies from foreign lands, Felipe was not confident in Iberia's chances of winning this war.

His wife approached him as he watched the Austrians return to their defensive line. He would not rest easy until he could no longer gaze upon their backs. Seeing her husband frightened out of his wits and biting his nails like a child, the Queen of Aragon grasped ahold of his hands and asked the question on her mind.

"Will you not fight? These Heretics and Infidels have already caused so much destruction to our lands! You have lost so many men; how can you sit here like a frightened child and do nothing!"

Felipe immediately became enraged upon hearing his wife's remarks. She had not seen the horrors of this war; it was unlike any other fought in history. So few men could easily defend Granada from the massive army the Catholics had raised; the longer they waited, the more troops would arrive, and the more powerful the Austro-Granadan alliance would become. As such, Felipe freed himself from his wife's grasp and began to berate her for her ignorance.

"You do not understand! We cannot win this war! The enemy is more powerful than the Iberian Union; no matter how much support we receive from our allies, they will overcome it. I have seen the weapons they use and the destructive power they are capable of! There is no hope for victory, no matter how much Luiz thirsts for the blood of the men who killed his child.

With Francisco dead, we now can usurp the Kingdom of Castile and increase our power if we can only buy some time from our enemies. Thus, I have no choice but to sue for peace! Even if the Portuguese wish to fight on their own, I will not send my men to their deaths against the Austrian Armies!"

The wife of the King of Aragon looked at him with utter disgust as she made her thoughts known.

"You are a coward, Felipe! The enemy is at our doorstep, and yet you do not ride out to meet them; you merely hide away in your castle praying that they will leave you alone!"

Upon hearing this insult, Felipe became enraged resulting in him backhanding his wife across the face with a vicious slap before raising his voice to her.

"And my prayers have been answered! Reconquista is a failure! With the backing of Austria, Granada will never fall into the hands of Catholics! We must sue for peace, or we will all be destroyed!"

Upon hearing this, the Queen of Aragon looked at her husband with complete contempt as she left the cowardly King of Aragon to wallow in his misery. As for Felipe, he truly believed his actions were more out of wisdom than Cowardice, for what man could face such horrifying weapons and expect victory?

King Luiz had reported that the enemy had a mere six cannons at the battle of the Andalusian Border, and yet, they were capable of killing tens of thousands of the Crusading forces before they even reached the trench line. Estimates from Iberian Scouts had put the number of these new weapons that were deployed to the Iberian Peninsula in the hundreds.

Against such overwhelming might, only a mad man would dream of victory. With this in mind, the King of Aragon began to draft a letter towards King Berengar and Sultan Hasan in an attempt to establish fair terms of surrender. It was better to sue for peace now than suffer the same fate of Francisco and his family.

King Luiz of Portugal was determined to continue the fight against Austria and Granada however for the remainder of this war he was destined to fight by his lonesome. Of course, he would not be fighting empty-handed; Felipe would ensure that the foreign volunteers that made up the bulk of his remaining forces would be dispatched to Portugal before his terms of surrender could be agreed upon, giving the Kingdom of Portugal a fighting chance.

Though it was unlikely for them to achieve any significant victory, it was the least Felipe could do to aid his former ally. As for his troops? They would be used to unite the Kingdoms of Aragon and Castile under his banner. From the ashes of this failed Reconquista, a new Kingdom would rise in Iberia, a Spanish Kingdom.

How long would it endure throughout the test of time? That was uncertain; after all, the Granadans would not simply sit by and allow their enemies to grow stronger. It was only a matter of time before they struck back against their Catholic Neighbors, for the centuries of bloodshed between the two people could not be overcome peacefully so long as they both inhabited this land.

As for Berengar, he and his army would return to the front lines in time for Felipe's messenger to have arrived. While the Kingdom of Portugal planned its next attack, Berengar and Hasan would meet in Granada to establish appropriate conditions for Aragon's surrender. Berengar would take advantage of this situation to buy Granada enough time with its neighbors to grow and prosper to the point where it could become self-sufficient.

The Austrian intervention in Reconquista was far from over. Still, with Aragon's surrender, tens of thousands of Austrian and Granadan soldiers could be moved from its borders and focus their sight on Portugal. After all, King Luiz was far from finished with his conflict; he would not rest until he had made Berengar pay the price for his son's untimely demise or he would die trying.

Chapter 424 - Naval Warfare Off The Coast Of Portugal

Emmerich gazed into the distance while standing upon the bow of the SMS Berengar, which was the lead ship in its class of frigates. Flanked by his sides were two other frigates that were fully armed and

prepared for conflict. At the moment, he led a small fleet of five ships, as he patrolled the coasts of Portugal with a single purpose, destroy all enemy vessels.

If so much as a fishing ship left the coast of Portugal, it was considered a valid target within this ongoing conflict. As such, Emmerich had been using small fleets like this to ravage the Iberian coastline and prevent any form of commerce or fishing from occurring within the lands of the Iberian Kingdoms.

He had gone so far as to order a complete blockade of the Iberian Peninsula, which only the vast Armada that belonged to the Kingdom of Austria was capable of achieving in this current day and age. After the destruction of the Genoan and Venetian Navies at the hands of the Austrian Navy during the previous war, there were few Naval forces with more than a hundred vessels within their ranks.

The Austrian Frigates were used extensively in this current conflict to ensure that the economy of the Catholic Iberian Kingdoms suffered immensely. However, by attacking fishermen, he also cut off a significant food source for the people who dwelled within the Iberian Kingdoms.

Through his spyglass, Emmerich spotted a fleet of Portuguese ships; until now, the Portuguese crown had kept its Navy docked within their ports and refused to come out to fight. It would appear they were now desperate enough to break this blockade that they had sent their ships into conflict.

The Portuguese fleet sent to intercept his Frigates numbered roughly thirty in total. Emmerich was not afraid despite facing an overwhelming numerical advantage; instead, a giddy expression was on his face, almost like a child at Christmas. Thus, he shouted with excitement as he ordered his sailors to prepare for battle.

"Load the Cannons, and intercept that fleet! I want it at the bottom of the ocean within the hour!"

Upon seeing their Grand Admiral filled with such enthusiasm, the sailors on board the SMS Berengar quickly got to their tasks and began loading the muzzle loading cannons onboard the vessel. Despite the protests of the Admiralty, Berengar had refused to outfit the Navy with breach loaders until after the entirety of the Austrian Royal Army was fully equipped with them.

In the eyes of the King, the Army took priority over that of the Navy when it came to implementing new technology. Thus Emmerich had to make do with the same tools that he used to decimate the Imperial

Fleet of the Holy Roman Empire. As he thought about this minor inconvenience, the Guns on board his fleet were loaded, and the Frigates were quickly on the path to intercept the hostile fleet.

Emmerich looked through his spyglass once more as his vessel rapidly approached the Portuguese sailors; he could see the looks of fear on their faces as they prayed to their God for the safekeeping of their souls when they finally entered the afterlife. Such a sight amused the Grand Admiral of Austria as he gave the order to open fire on the hostile vessels.

"Send these bastards to the depths of hell!"

With that said, the Frigates quickly sailed within the formation of the Portuguese caravels. The moment they made contact with the enemy, they began unloading their cannons onto the enemy vessels.

Hundreds of shells flew through the air and exploded among the ranks of the Portuguese Fleet. As a result, the surviving enemy sailors dove into the water in the hope of escaping their perilous situation. For if they stayed onboard their sinking ships, then they were sure to die on this day.

Immediately several vessels were torn apart as the outnumbered Frigates engaged in combat. However, oddly enough, something strange happened as the Austrian ships leisurely passed by; shockingly, the Portuguese fired back with their own broadside cannons.

Though they were few per ship, when combined in total, well over a hundred cannonballs fired towards the five frigates. Though many of the projectiles missed their mark, some of them tore through the thin sheet of galvanized steel surrounding the Austrian Frigates and punched through the wooden hulls beneath it.

Though it was not enough to immediately sink the vessels, it did cause some damage, resulting in the crews of the Austrian Navy being forced to bilge out the excess water and repair the hulls for the first time since they had entered service.

The Portuguese had learned from Italy's defeat in the Adriatic and had mounted their cannons on the broadsides of their vessels, allowing them to fight against their enemies. Emmerich snarled when he saw minuscule damage inflicted upon his fleet before giving the order to fire upon the enemy once more.

The five frigates fired their combined total of 220 guns in retaliation, whose projectiles landed upon the enemy vessels in large numbers, sinking most of them in the process. As the ships engulfed in flames sank to the bottom of the Atlantic, Emmerich raised his fists in the air and cried out with a heightened voice.

"Wonderful!"

As he did so, the crew loaded up the next set of guns while suffering a barrage of their own. The few remaining Portuguese ships refused to relent and sent another volley towards the Frigates. Though it caused more damage to their hulls, ultimately, it was not enough to sink the powerful vessels employed by the Austrian Navy.

Thus the moment the frigates had reloaded their weapons, they opened fire yet again on the last few ships remaining among the Portuguese fleet; the resulting explosions caused the poor caravels to be torn asunder upon the moment of impact, leaving no survivors.

Seeing how his enemies were so thoroughly defeated, Emmerich smiled fiendishly as he gazed upon the remnants of the brief battle off the coast of Portugal. After taking in the sight and smell of victory, he sighed heavily before turning his fearsome face to his crew and issuing his orders.

"Return to the Coast of Gibraltar; we need to repair the damage done to these ships!"

Immediately the sailors on board the vessels sprung up and saluted their Grand Amiral before replying in unison.

"Yes, sir!"

The small fleet would spend the next few hours returning to the Port of Gibraltar, where the Austrian Navy had established a temporary base to ensure the smooth transfer of men and supplies from the fatherland to the field of battle. The slightly damaged frigates docked within the port, where Emmerich departed from his vessel with a broad smile on his face.

However, his joy immediately vanished as he gazed upon the sight before him. Tens of thousands of Byzantine soldiers were idling about within the Gibraltar Encampment. Evidently, reinforcements had

arrived from their ally in the east while he was away. It was not that Emmerich despised the Byzantines, but rather that their arrival signified that the end of the war was near.

If that were indeed the case, then after this war was over, he would have to endure another few years of patrolling the coastline of Austria and attacking pirates. Emmerich was disheartened upon witnessing this sight as a man who enjoyed large-scale naval battles.

After all, the war had only been going on for a handful of months now, at least as far as Austria was concerned, and yet, they had already come so close to victory. He silently prayed to the Lord God Almighty that he would be able to engage in a large-scale naval battle before this conflict came to an end.

However, for now, he supposed he should enter the Headquarters that had been established in Gibraltar for the Alliance's Naval Command and get to know the Byzantine Admiral; after all, they would be working together from now on. Thus Emmerich placed his executive officer in charge of the repairs while he ventured forward to meet with the Byzantine Commanders.

Chapter 425 - The Triple Alliance

Berengar sat within the confines of the Granadan Royal Palace in a meeting with both Hasan and his older sister Yasmin; by their side was the commander of the Byzantine expeditionary force, which was none of the then Strategos Palladius. For the first time in history, the representatives of what would later become known as the Triple Alliance had gathered in a single room.

Their purpose was simple, to discuss the matters pertaining to the ongoing war in Iberia, as well as the request by the King of Aragon to cease hostilities against his realm. However, despite his willingness to end the war, Felipe had made some serious demands in order to ensure his surrender. With this in mind, Yasmin began to read the letter written by the Aragonese King, which outlined the conditions that must be agreed to for his Kingdom to surrender without incident.

"First and foremost, the Kingdoms of Austria and Bohemia must withdraw their forces from the borders of Aragon and Castile. They must also agree not to intervene in any conflict between the Emirate of Granada and the Kingdoms of Aragon and Castile within the next ten years.

As for the Second stipulation, the Kingdom of Austria and its allies must not interfere with the Castilian succession crisis that resulted from King Berengar's actions in Toledo. Any foreign intervention in this dispute is explicitly forbidden, whether that be espionage or direct military action.

Thirdly, Austria and its allies must agree to lift their blockade over the Kingdoms of Aragon and Castile and allow open access to trade across the Iberian Peninsula. If any of these conditions are violated, then the treaty will be null and void, and the fighting shall resume."

Berengar sat back and frowned as he listened to the conditions presented within the letter, though on the surface they may seem like conditions similar to that of white peace, in reality, they heavily favored the Crown of Aragon. As such, he was quick to voice his discontent on the matter to those around him.

"It is obvious that Felipe intends to buy time so that he may unify the Castilian and Aragonese Crowns. After he does this, he will draft a larger army and supply a higher percentage of them with both Arkebuse firearms and cannons. Once this is achieved, they will pose a bigger threat to Granada."

Yasmin nodded her head in agreement as she gazed fondly upon Berengar before adding her comments.

"Especially the stipulation about Austria not getting directly involved in any dispute between Granada and its neighbors for ten years. They're practically asking for us to call off the alliance..."

Palladius gazed over at the busy Moorish princess with a hint of surprise; he did not expect her to be so well accustomed to diplomacy and warfare. His opinion of her instantly increased. Unlike other Byzantine Generals, he was not blinded by prejudice.

As a matter of fact, he was not opposed to the idea of allying with the Moors in Iberia; rather, he greatly approved of the plan that Berengar had begun to enact, which would allow a powerful Moorish state to rise in the Western Mediterranean.

If such an Empire could prove to be moderate, secular, and friendly to the Kingdom of Austria and the Byzantine Empire, an alliance between the three nations would prove greatly beneficial to all parties. As he was reevaluating his view of the Granadans, Berengar began to speak up about the pros and cons of the terms presented to them.

"If we decline these terms, then we will be forced to march on Zaragoza, which will split our forces in two, allowing the Portuguese to take advantage of our thin lines as they have already done so in the past. Though it won't be disastrous, there will still be casualties, and the war will go on for much longer.

However, if we agree to the conditions presented to us, we can secure a few years of peace with Castile and Aragon, allowing us to focus our efforts on Portugal. If such a scenario were to occur, we could unite the bulk of our forces and invade the Kingdom with the intent of complete and total conquest.

By doing this, we will be splitting the Iberian Peninsula into Two Kingdoms, one Muslim and one Catholic. Though Austria won't be allowed to directly intervene in future conflicts, we can still supply Granada with military advisors and equipment as they rebuild their land and expand their forces.

By the time Aragon feels confident that they can take on Granada by themselves, it will already be too late as the Royal Granadan Army will be rebuilt and more potent than ever before; and the Granadan Economy will become a local powerhouse, capable of fully supporting its own military efforts in Iberia!"

Upon hearing the Austrian King's perspective, Hasan considered his options carefully. Though Aragon would inevitably prosper and form a powerful state on his borders. Granada would also be able to seize the Kingdom of Portugal and create a powerful state of their own to counter their enemy's efforts. Thus after careful consideration, he nodded his head in agreement and spoke about the decision he had made.

"Very well, I will agree to these terms, only if King Berengar does as well. If we can come to an agreement on this matter, then I see no reason to decline Felipe's offer.

Berengar smiled when he heard this and immediately voiced his support.

"I will be more than happy to sign this treaty and support your realm from behind the scenes."

Upon seeing that her brother and suitor had come to an agreement, Yasmin smiled gracefully in silence. This was the best course of action since, at the moment, Granada was woefully unprepared to swallow all of Iberia. Instead, they would be able to take a large piece of the pie and prepare for further conflict with their neighbors.

Having settled on terms, Berengar and Hasan wrote a combined letter to the King of Aragon agreeing to the terms and setting a time and date within the nearby Duchy of Aquitaine to sign the treaty. Aquitaine was Neutral ground and was currently in a war of rebellion against the Kingdom of France. Thus it was the perfect location to sign the treaty.

After agreeing to King Felipe's terms, Berengar then shifted his attention to Palladius, where he began to make a request to his ally. Though Berengar was considered the Supreme Commander of all allied forces within the Iberian Peninsula, he still greatly admired the Strategos of the Balkans and thus respectfully asked him to follow his plan.

"Palladius, if you would not mind, I would appreciate it if you and your soldiers could depart for the Portuguese-Granadan Border and hold the line alongside our troops currently stationed there until this treaty can be concluded."

Palladius smiled and nodded as he heard this request before responding in the affirmative.

"If it is as simple as holding the line, I promise my soldiers are more than capable of such a feat. I look forward to the day we can ride into battle together, King Berengar!"

After saying this, Palladius excused himself and prepared for the long trek ahead, leaving Berengar alone with Hasan and Yasmin. With the departure of the Byzantine representative, Yasmin felt less constrained and immediately walked over to Berengar, where she began to flirt with him.

"You have only just returned, and yet you are leaving so soon. We should celebrate your victories while you are still within Granada."

Berengar smirked as he heard this and returned the Granadan Princess' advances.

"I might just take you up on your offer..."

Hasan realizing that he was getting in the way, immediately announced his departure, which went unnoticed by the young couple.

"Well, I have things to do, so I will leave you two be. If you need anything, you know where to find me!"

After saying this, he left the room, leaving Berengar and Yasmin alone for the first time since she danced for him. Berengar immediately closed the distance between him and the Granadan Princess as he began to whisper into her ears.

"How about we find someplace more private and get ourselves a couple of drinks?"

Yasmin silently nodded her head and grasped ahold of Berengar's hand as she followed him to a secluded area where the two drank the night away as they discussed various topics. Though nothing serious happened between them, Berengar felt as if he had grown closer to the woman.

He knew it would not be long before he was able to conquer her heart, and when he did, he felt as if he would be bringing yet another bride home. Despite this yearning growing inside him, there was a hint of trepidation as he considered how his wives would react if he were to inexplicably return with a beautiful woman's arms wrapped around him.

Whatever the future may hold, Berengar chose not to run from it and enjoy the time he had here in Granada. After all, it would not be long before he departed for the Duchy of Aquitaine to sign his treaty, which would immediately be followed by an invasion of the Kingdom of Portugal. The work of a Monarch was never truly fulfilled.

Chapter 426 - Conspiracies Within Th...

While Strategos Palladius Angelus was dispatched to the Iberian Peninsula as the commander of the Byzantine expeditionary force, two of the Princes of the Empire began to conspire against their rivals as they sought to succeed the father as the next Emperor.

Quintus gazed upon the fields outside of the ancient city of Constantinople as he witnessed the first example of a four-field system being employed alongside advanced fertilizers and new irrigation technology. Since the Alliance between Austria and Byzantium had been established, Austria had given a large amount of agricultural technology as a gift to their newfound allies.

As the Prince most renowned with skill in administration, Quintus was quick to experiment with the technology within the Empire's borders. The fields before him had produced a far larger quantity of crops than years prior. After witnessing this, a gentle smile formed on the young man's face as he nodded his head in agreement with the results.

"Father will be pleased to know that our food stores will be filled to the brim this year!"

Standing by the Prince's side was the Strategos of Syria, who had traveled to the court of the Empire to provide his support to the candidate that he had chosen to succeed the Emperor. At the moment, the political rivalry between Decentius and Quintus was rising to new heights of intensity.

This man was shocked to see the results of the new agricultural technology that Quintus had begun to employ; as such, he smiled heavily as he complimented the young Prince.

"Your highness, I must say that what you have accomplished here in Constantinople is an achievement that overshadows your brother's conquest of Egypt and Lybia. If such improvements can be fielded across the entirety of the Empire, then our people will never have to worry about going hungry!"

Quintus frowned as he thought about Decentius's achievements on the battlefield despite the compliment to his efforts. To many within the ranks of the Imperial Court, combat achievements were far more glamorous than those performed through administration.

If Quintus lacked one thing to solidify his claim to the throne, it was military service. Without it, he would always be seen as a weak and pacifistic leader compared to his hawkish brother. Though Decentius had no mind for anything other than combat, his willingness to fight anyone and everyone was greatly admired by many of the critical members of the Byzantine Aristocracy.

Despite this harsh reality, Quintus had no desire to achieve victory in battle; according to his philosophy, war should only be used as a last resort when diplomacy fails to achieve its objectives. In his eyes, those who supported his brother were mindless fools hellbent on the Empire's destruction through an endless pursuit of meaningless glory. With this in mind, he sighed heavily before speaking about a more pressing concern.

"With Arethas' death, Palladius is now the greatest General of our Empire; tell me, Zeno, what news do you have in regards to his loyalties?"

The Strategos of Syria, known by the name Zeno Glycas shook his head before revealing the latest information he had about this subject.

"As far as I can tell, that old bastard has not shifted his stance from Neutrality. He has never, nor ever will care about court politics. I do not see him supporting either you or your brother for the throne."

Upon hearing this news, Quintus bit his lip in distress, though his powerbase was currently evenly matched with that of his brothers, if he wanted to tip the scales then he would need the support of such a renowned General like Palladius.

Unfortunately, it looked like the man was still adamant about remaining permanently neutral in court affairs. The Byzantine Prince sighed heavily as he reflected upon this before revealing his thoughts on the matter.

"Very well, leave him be. However, if he shows the first sign of entering Decentius' camp, be sure to eliminate him!"

Zeno nodded his head before responding in affirmation of his Prince's orders.

"I assure you, we will keep an eye on him. If he does make a move for the throne, we will be aware of it. However, the man is currently leading the Expeditionary forces in Granada, so the likelihood of your brother winning him over is slim."

Quintus nodded his head upon hearing this news with a smile on his face. He had no qualms with Palladius, but if the old general chose to side against him, then he would not be merciful. Little did Quintus and his allies know that Palladius had already created a tertiary faction to place Bernegar and Honoria's future son on the throne.

If they were aware of such a scheme, they would do everything in their power to kill the plot in its infancy. However, Palladius had hidden his tracks well, and while Quintus and Decentius focused on each other, this third faction was swelling in numbers.

After all, the prospect of a member of the Imperial Dynasty being raised in Austria and receiving an Austrian education appealed to many of the more humble members of the Imperial Court. They recognized the benefits of such an upbringing.

While Quintus was scheming with his most prominent supporter Strategos Zeno Glycus, Decentius was in his secretive meeting. In the city of Antioch, the Second Prince had gathered his most valuable supporters together as they discussed a more serious topic.

Decentius was enraged by the actions of Berengar. Not only had the Austrian King married his sister, but he also impregnated her with his barbarian seed. On top of all of this, Decentius had faced utter humiliation at the hands of the man during that fateful breakfast.

With the Byzantines reinforcing the Austrian interference in Reconquista, Decentius was left with few options to strike back against them and who had invoked his ire. As such, he was venting his frustrations with the Austro-Byzantine Alliance to his backers.

"Who does this filthy Barbarian King from the West think he is? Does he truly believe he is worthy of an alliance with our Great Empire? My father has clearly shown his weakness by agreeing time and again to the requests of that King of savages! We must do something about this pitiful alliance, for if we continue to abide by the wishes of King Berengar, then the Prestige of our Roman Heritage will continue to be defiled!"

The ruler of Antioch was gathered in this meeting and calmly observed the Prince's enraged behavior before making a statement of his own.

"There is not much that can be done, your sister has married King Berengar, and an alliance has been firmly established. Though he may be a barbarian, King Berengar has established his Realm as an area that is nigh impossible to successfully infiltrate. So long as he remains within Austria, he cannot be harmed."

Upon hearing this, Decentius threw his chalice across the room in a fit of rage before uttering the unthinkable.

"If that is the case, then we are only left with one option! We must kill my slut of a sister before she brings her progeny into this world! If she gives birth to a son with the name of Palaiologos, we will have another contender for the throne on our hands. Though I can take care of Quintus, the barbarian offspring of Honoria and Berengar will be a threat to our power and must be removed!"

The various members of Decentius' power base shifted their eyes towards one another with hesitation, to assassinate the only Princess of the Byzantine Empire was a treasonous move, one that was sure to see their heads on pikes if such a plot was ever discovered.

Despite their hesitation, they all knew what a child between Berengar and Honoria that bore the surname of Palaiologos meant. As such, after the fierce internal debate, every man within the room nodded their heads in agreement as they cursed their once beloved princess in their own crude ways.

"The Princess must die!"

"Princess Honoria is nothing more than a common whore who has spread her legs for a Barbarian from the West! She gave up her honor as a Roman long ago!"

"If the barbarian child is brought into this world, then the pure lineage of the Palaiologos Dynasty will forever be tainted! The bitch must die!"

Decentius grinned wickedly as he heard the men who made up his power base support his decision with such enthusiasm. Now that he had gotten their agreement to do the unthinkable, it was only a matter of time before the Byzantine Princess found herself eliminated.

As for Berengar's reaction to her death, that did not matter, Decentius truly believed he would be able to hide his ploy from Austria's agents so that the Barbarian King never discovered who was responsible for his third wife's death.

With all of this said, a conspiracy to assassinate the Byzantine Princess and her unborn child had been established within the confines of the city of Antioch. A faction of Byzantine Noblemen and Generals had sworn to secrecy as they plotted against the Princess of their Empire.

Chapter 427 - Portugal's Last Ditch Effort

King Luiz de Avis sat upon his throne within the city of Lisbon. In his hand was a letter signaling the end of the Iberian Union. King Felipe de Trastámara had issued a letter to his Portuguese counterpart informing him that he would be suing for peace with the Austro-Granadan alliance.

With the death of the Castilian King and its royal family, Castile was ripe for the taking, and Felipe had planned to take advantage of this. The Portuguese King was shaking with rage as he read the letter that informed him that his only other ally in the Iberian Peninsula was backing out of their short-lived alliance.

He could not believe he would be so utterly backstabbed by the King of Aragon. The very idea that he would be left to fight this war on his own had almost completely dashed any hope of victory within his heart.

However, when he read the following sentence written in the latter, he sighed in relief. King Felipe of Aragon had promised to send Portugal the foreign volunteers that he had received from the Pope's call to Reconquista. This meant that despite the surrender of Aragon, roughly 300,000 men would continue its fight against the Austro-Granadan Alliance. With this, Luiz believed he had a fighting chance.

Thus he managed to calm his wrath as he finished reading the document. Just when he was about to order yet another invasion attempt through the sparsely defended lines of Granada, his Marshal came storming into the Throne Room; there was a look of panic spread across his face.

This detail caused deep concern to arise in the depths of Luiz's heart. His blood began to boil once more as he was forced to inquire to his Marshal about the reason for his overtly anxious expression. An irritated tone erupted from the King's voice as he questioned the man kneeling before him.

"Speak! What has made you so anxious?"

The Marshal struggled to utter the words contained deep within the depths of his mind; it was as if every time he came close to uttering what he had learned, the panic would strip him of his ability to speak. After fumbling around with his words for some time, he finally managed to profess the knowledge that had been reported to him by his nation's spies.

"The Byzantines have arrived in Granada! I do not know how Hasan has managed to gain their support, but thirty thousand Byzantine soldiers now march towards our borders, equipped with weapons more advanced than the ones issued to their Granadan counterparts!"

Upon hearing this, Luiz's expression sank before tearing apart the document in his hands. It was extremely obvious to the man who was responsible for such devastating news. The King of Portugal's face was practically glowing red as he vented his frustrations by screaming as loud as he could.

"Damn you, Berengar! Damn you to the depths of hell for bringing your Byzantine allies into Iberia! What gives you the right to interfere with our centuries-long Reconquista!?!?"

The very idea that Berengar had not only sent his troops into Iberia but also received the military aid of the mighty Empire to the east instantly shattered Luiz's resolve to invade the Granadan trenches. Instead, he knew that the tables had turned, and his enemies would soon be marching on his borders.

Though he had roughly three hundred thousand men at his command, the enemy army now had approximately a third of his forces, and they were far more technologically advanced. Such news meant that he would be forced to fight a defensive war to maintain his rule over Portugal. Thus he did not hesitate to do what was necessary to secure his Dynasty's reign.

"I want our smiths to produce as many arkebuses as possible and outfit every man and child capable of bearing arms with them! We must defend our lands from this foreign menace at all costs!"

In response to this, the Marshal immediately began to protest, for he could not conceive how they would manufacture such a significant amount of firearms in such a short period of time.

"But your Majesty, we do not have the means to produce such a vast amount of weapons! There are too many men to arm!"

King Luiz immediately threw his chalice at the wall as he began to chastise his Marshal. The man was making excuses, and Luiz refused to listen to them. As such, he instantly began to make a counterpoint to the Marshal's objection.

"Then you will work the furnaces day and night until sufficient arms have been prepared! I don't care if you have to burn the Buçaco Forest; see it done!"

The Marshal gazed at his Monarch as if the man had gone insane; while such drastic action may be able to aid in the manufacture of a small portion of the required firearms, the Marshal still believed that creating the necessary amount of weapons in the given time frame was impossible.

More importantly, even if they managed to manufacture such a staggering amount of firearms, where would they get the gunpowder needed to utilize them? The Austrian Royal Navy had cut off their trade routes overseas, and Europe severely lacked natural saltpeter mines.

Unfortunately for the Portuguese crown, they were unaware of a large concentration of the precious material within the area of Catalonia known as Collbató. Thus when the Marshal brought up this point of contention, King Luiz nearly had a stroke.

"Your Majesty, even if we were to be able to manufacture such a large supply of the weapons, how will we use them without gunpowder!?!"

In truth, the King was in such a state of fury that he had failed to think about this critical component. All of his plans to arm a massive army of hundreds of thousands of soldiers with arkebuses had come crashing down. Thus, he was left with few options to successfully defend his borders.

It took the King some time to cope with the fact that he was completely and utterly doomed, yet despite this reality, he still refused to submit. After all, he would never yield to the man responsible for the death of his firstborn son! With great determination, he clawed his way out of depression and spoke forth his decree.

"We will make do with what we have! If we can't smuggle gunpowder and firearms into our Kingdom, then we will throw wave after wave of men at the enemy forces until we have secured victory!"

The moment the King said these words, the Marshal beneath his command had lost all hope of victory. He knew that such a tactic would not work against their enemies. Whether or not he believed this mad strategy would succeed, his duty was to fulfill his orders. Thus he kneeled before his King before vocalizing his acceptance of the task set upon him.

"Your Majesty, I will fulfill your orders, but know this, even if we manage to survive the onslaught of our enemies, the loss of life will be so severe that our Kingdom may never fully recover!"

Despite the Marshal's words of warning, the King of Portugal was determined to get revenge for his son's death. As such, he simply glared at his Marshal once more before uttering words that were filled with contempt.

"Your opinion is duly noted, Marshal; now go and fulfill your orders!"

After saying this, the Marshal left the Throne Room of the Castle within Lisbon. As the man in charge of the Kingdom's armies, he knew that the King's plan was suicide. Thus he had no intent to go through with it. Instead, he planned to immediately defect with his family and cross over to Morrocco to live the rest of their lives in exile.

As for King Luiz, the moment his Marshal had left his Throne Room, he collapsed onto his throne, mentally exhausted from the ordeal. He gazed upon a crude portrait of his son that hanged on his wall while lamenting his loss.

"My son, if I had known that you would have perished in that battle, then I never would have allowed you to lead the charge. I swear to God in Heaven that I will avenge your death. Berengar von Kufstein will die by my hands!"

After making such a bold claim, the King of Portugal passed out on his seat of power. He had gotten too little sleep since the death of his son, and now it had finally caught up to him. While Luiz slept upon his throne, various government officials raided the Kingdom's treasury, with the intent to flee to North Africa with as much wealth as they and their families could carry.

While the leading officials of the Portuguese Kingdom fled to Morocco, the Triple Alliance would fortify their position on the border, waiting for the peace accords between Austria, Granada, and Aragon to be finalized. It was only after the peace treaty had been signed between the three nations that the Triple Alliance would march its forces into Portugal with the intent of total conquest.

What meager defense could the Portuguese manage without their Marshal and the Kingdom's treasury? That remained to be seen. One thing was sure, Berengar did not intend to leave Iberia until after the entire Kingdom of Portugal had fallen to Granadan rule. Thus the war in Iberia continued in a direction that heavily favored Granada and her allies.

Chapter 428 - A Day In The Life Of Henrietta

It was a typical summer's day within the Kingdom of Austria. Deep within the Austrian Alps lies the city of Kufstein, and within this city was the Royal Palace, which acted as the primary residence of the King of Austria and his family.

At the moment, the Princess of Austria, Henrietta von Kufstein, was lying on her bed beneath her silk covers as she grasped ahold of her knees and clenched them tightly to her chest. She was currently in a state of depression as she worried about her future.

While sending her brother off to war, she had confessed her taboo feelings for him in front of his wives. This had caused a rift between her and the three women she had come to think of as her friends and her family over the years.

Linde had outright barred the young princess from seeing her niece and nephew which she had grown exceptionally fond of over the years. Henrietta believed that the red-headed vixen who had stolen her big brother was being utterly unfair by doing this, but there was nothing she could do.

Because of this, Henrietta has been stuck alone within her room for most of the day, struggling to deal with the conflicted emotions inside of her heart. She knew her feelings for Berengar were wrong; after all, they were siblings related by blood, and such a thing was beyond a simple taboo. Yet, she could not deny that she could no longer see any other man as a potential suitor. After everything he had accomplished, what man could compare to her precious big brother?

The young princess sighed heavily as she began to think about her kind-hearted brother, who had always looked after her and continued to do so. He was not only her big brother; these last few years he had even been her father figure. Seeing how her mother and father had abandoned her and retired to the countryside, she could not help but see her brother as her caretaker and provider.

Yet despite this, she knew that it would not be easy to convince Berengar to break a massive taboo by taking her as his mistress. After all, though he was a bit of a pervert, and a playboy, there was no way that he thought of her in the same way she did him. This very concern caused her to rub her pretty forehead in a state of distress in an attempt to calm her growing headache.

Ultimately she could sit still no longer; she needed something to calm her heart, and since Berengar was gone, there was only one thing that could make her feel a sense of relief. With this in mind, the young princess rose to her feet and crept out of her room. She carefully walked down the hallways, making sure not to run into any of her brother's wives who would surely make life difficult for her. After all, they were currently in a state of rivalry.

Before long, she found her way to the penthouse which Berengar had commonly referred to as the "Harem Room," after creeping through its entrance, she walked over to the Hookah which lie in the center of the room on a small round table. This device had remained unused since her brother had left, thus Henrietta began to place a mixture of hashish and herbal shisha within its bowl.

Henrietta sucked on one of the mouthpieces that she knew contained her big brother's dry saliva making sure to gobble up every last drop. Afterward, the young princess took a long puff before licking her lips as she leaned back and relaxed on the pillows that surrounded the device. If Berengar's wives knew she was in this room smoking hash by herself, they would probably drag her out by the ear and spank her.

As the young princess's mind began to drift off into space, she noticed something interesting in the corner of her eye. Stashed away behind one of the sofa's cushions was a pair of shorts that she knew

belonged to only one person. How the maids had missed such an item during their cleanup of the area after Berengar's departure, she had no idea.

The young princess gazed at her brother's used shorts with a longing expression before shifting her gaze back to the door, making sure that nobody could see her. After careful deliberation, she rushed towards the sofa. Where she grabbed ahold of the shorts, which contained her brother's body odor, before pressing them against her nose and taking a deep inhale.

The moment she did so, the door to the room opened, and one of the maids witnessed her perverted gesture. Henrietta did not notice her presence until after she heard the sound of the wooden hamper clang against the floor. She gazed over in shock upon hearing this to see the maid staring at her with a flustered expression.

The young princess's cheeks immediately began to flush in embarrassment as she realized she was caught in the act of sniffing her brother's used shorts. She immediately stashed the shorts behind her back in a poor attempt to hide the evidence as she began to make an excuse to the maid.

"This is not what it looks like!"

However, the maid refused to listen and shut the door behind her as she left Henrietta by her lonesome. Immediately the young princess was overwhelmed with dread and embarrassment because of her actions. She could not believe she had done something so scandalous and had been caught in the act.

She collapsed against the sofa, losing all hope in life, this maid was bound to spread what she had seen, and her reputation as the Princess of Austria would be ruined forever. Henrietta thus broke out into tears as she cried into the pair of sweaty shorts.

As for the maid, she had not gotten far before she rested against the wall; she could hardly believe what she had seen. The princess was sniffing her brother's shorts with such enthusiasm. What kind of scandal was this?

She was smart enough to realize that if she spread rumors about this incident, she was liable to lose her head. As such, she calmed her heart before resolving herself never to speak about this affair to anyone, not even the Queens.

Having made this commitment, she immediately slapped her face a few times to clear her head before getting back to work. As for Henrietta, she eventually recovered and hurried off back to her room with Berengar's shorts bunched up in her dainty hands. As long as she hid the evidence, nobody would believe that foolish maid.

She quickly got to work building a secret area in her desk to contain the sacred article of clothing that her brother had once worn. Nobody would ever know that she was hiding these shorts within her room. Thus the princess of Austria had gained a treasure to help her cope with the stress she felt over her taboo feelings.

As for Berengar's wives, they would be blissfully ignorant of this incident, as the maid had lived up to her vow of silence over this matter. Thus things continued within the Royal Palace of Kufstein as they usually did. The only difference was that Henrietta would frequently retrieve her hidden treasure and sniff it whenever she felt the need to feel comforted by her absent big brother.

Chapter 429 - Peace Accords In Aquitaine

Berengar tapped his finger on the table repeatedly; the sound resounded throughout the air and was the only thing preventing the entire room from being silent. Three monarchs and a Duke were sitting at the table within the Duchy of Aquitaine. Sitting next to Berengar was Hasan, and across from the two of them was King Felipe of Aragon.

Mediating this convention was none other than the Duke of Aquitaine, who watched with interest, ensuring that everything remained civil but not taking part in the discussion himself. His role was more symbolic than it was practical.

The Peace Accords had been ongoing for three days now, and despite the willingness to cease hostilities between the involved parties, they had yet to come to a comprehensive understanding. Begrudgingly Berengar was prepared to accept the conditions of Aragonese surrender that heavily favored the enemy. After all, he wanted to end this war as quickly as possible and return to his family.

Despite this, King Felipe of Aragon had taken advantage of Berengar's impatience and had begun to make greater demands of him, resulting in an ongoing stalemate within the negotiations. Thus Berengar gazed across the table at the Aragonese Monarch, with an expression filled with contempt. Ultimately he decided it was time to break the silence and put his foot down over the issues being discussed.

"Under no circumstances will Granada return the occupied province of Murcia. From now until the end of time, it shall be recognized as Granadan soil; this is the price you must pay for your arrogance in challenging the Emirate of Granada and her allies!"

Ultimately Berengar had the final say in the conditions; after all, though he may not desire to, he had the full capability of invading Aragon and enforcing his demands. To him, it was a simple matter of practicality. Doing such a thing would extend the duration of his campaign in Iberia.

King Felipe was visibly flustered when he heard this remark. Though he would be capable of invading Castile and gaining its lands after settling this matter with Granada, he knew that there was a high possibility that Portugal would fall to the Austro-Granadan alliance.

If such a thing were to occur, his advantage of gaining Castile would instantly be negated; the loss of Murcia on top of this would be a severe blow in the future efforts of Reconquista. The fact of the matter was that the objective of this peace was not long term-stability but gaining a reprieve so that both sides could build up their forces in an attempt to re-engage at a later date. After a few moments of awkward silence, Felipe raised his voice as he presented a facade of strength to get Berengar back down.

"If you do not return Murcia to her rightful place as a part of the Kingdom of Castile, then I am afraid that peace can not be achieved between our realms. The war will continue and your armies will bleed in Iberia for years to come!"

Upon hearing this, Berengar's bored expression did not change; in fact, he sighed in exhaustion before taking a sip from the wine contained within his chalice. After doing so, he placed it down on the table, and with the same disinterested look upon his face, began to clarify his stance on the matter.

"If you do not agree to the annexation of Murcia by the Kingdom of Granada, then as you have said, hostilities will continue to exist between our Nations. As a result of this, I will be forced to draft tens of thousands of more soldiers and bring them into Iberia with the full intent to march them upon your Kingdom. Within a year, your whole Kingdom will cease to exist.

Allow me to be frank if such a scenario were to occur; I do not know if I will contain the damage that my soldiers will inflict upon Aragon and its people. Blood will flow in the streets, and entire cities will be brought to rubble. Is that the outcome you desire? Submit to the terms presented or face your reckoning those are your two options."

Felipe was taken aback by this statement; he did not suspect that Berengar would be willing to move more troops into Iberia; after all, as far as he was aware, roughly half of the Austrian Royal Army was currently located within the Iberian Peninsula. Increasing the number of soldiers in this conflict would surely leave Austria poorly defended, or so he thought.

Of course, Felipe had no way of knowing that Berengar's Kingdom was currently undergoing the process of Nation-Wide compulsory military service. Thus hundreds of thousands of young men were being trained in the art of warfare and being outfitted with the equipment necessary to fight across the globe. Therefore Felipe made the mistake of believing that Berengar was bluffing and thus called him out on his boast.

"You would empty the soldiers in your lands in an attempt to end this conflict swiftly? I wonder how the enemies at your borders would react if they saw how defenseless Austria became in a foolish attempt to conquer Iberia for their ally?"

Berengar sneered in disdain as he heard this comment; with a confident smile etched upon his handsome face, he quickly retorted with a response of his own.

"If you genuinely believe such a scenario would occur, then I regret to inform you that your intelligence on my forces is severely outdated. Please do not mistake my comments for hubris; within a year, I will have the full ability to deploy a hundred thousand men into Iberia. I promise you that I will not be merciful when I bring you to your knees with such an Army. I will reiterate, submit to the terms presented or face your reckoning."

Whether Berengar was lying or not, Felipe did not know. However, he was unwilling to risk such a scenario. After all, the entire point of these Peace Accords was to remove Austrian soldiers from Iberia and buy him the time necessary to absorb Castile to rebuild his Army. He could not allow a hundred thousand Austrians to embed themselves in this conflict. Thus with a bitter expression, the Aragonese King relented, he internally resolved himself to retake Murcia later.

"Very well, I will allow the annexation of Murcia into the Emirate of Granada..."

Hasan, who had been silent up until now, smirked upon hearing his enemy relent to this condition. Throughout this conflict, thousands of Granadans had bled to forestall the enemy's advance; if he did not get some land as compensation for their loss, then he would not be satisfied with this temporary peace.

The young Sultan had no way of knowing that Berengar intended to fully conquer Portugal and incorporate it into the Emirate of Granada. Thus he was happy with this small concession. As for the Austrian Monarch, he smiled before making one last condition to the terms of this treaty.

"Allow me to make one final demand. To put it simply, all I ask is for is exclusive mining rights within the region of Collbato. If you give me this, then I will agree to these peace accords in their entirety."

Both Hasan and Felipe gazed at Berengar with suspicion. As far as they were aware, there was nothing of value within that province, yet Berengar had specifically made demands for such a small region. Had he perhaps found something of note within its boundaries?

Though Felipe was suspicious of this, he suspected this was nothing more than an attempt by Berengar to gain something from this treaty for himself and that nothing significant was within the region. Thus he foolishly relented to this demand as he sighed.

"Very well, for the next ten years, Austria will have exclusive mining rights to the region of Collbato. Is there anything else?"

Berengar shook his head in response to this; he had gotten what he wanted. The caves of Collbato were filled with saltpeter, and though Berengar no longer needed black powder now that his chemists had invented Smokeless powder; to hold a monopoly over such a valuable resource was major strategic play.

This meant that his enemies would not be able to get their hands on the gunpowder needed to field firearms en masse, thus ensuring a significant advantage for the Austrian Army over their rivals for decades or perhaps even centuries to come. Berengar nodded his head before pronouncing the peace accords concluded with these terms agreed upon.

"If there is nothing else, then I believe it is time to sign this treaty!"

After saying this, he waited for a response, and when the silence prevailed, he pulled out a fountain pen from his pocket and signed his name on the document before allowing the others to use his utensil and hence sign this treaty into law.

For the time being, peace with Aragon and Castile had been achieved, and the Triple Alliance could now focus its entire efforts on the conquest of Portugal. The effects of this treaty would have long-reaching consequences for the decades to come.

Chapter 430 - Just Following Orders

Within the borders of the Kingdom of Portugal, there was a unit of Austrian Jaegers embedded deep behind enemy lines. While the peace accords between the Austro-Granadan alliance were underway in the Duchy of Aquitaine, the orders the Austrian soldiers had received were quite simple.

Hold the line at any cost! With this in mind, General Adelbrand had issued a decree to utilize specialized units such as the Jaeger Regiment and the Grenadier Guards to advance into Portugal and disrupt their operations via sabotage and outright raiding.

The company of nearly a hundred Jaegers was gazing through their binoculars at the sight of the Portuguese village, which had been supplying the enemy with the grain needed to sustain their ranks. However, the scene that the Jaeger's witnessed when they entered the vicinity of the village was out of their expectations.

With the treasury raided by corrupt officials fleeing the Kingdom, and the marshal nowhere in sight, the Portuguese Military had fallen to a state of complete and total chaos. The only regions with any semblance of a lawful order were the cities, where what remained of the Portuguese Army that had not outright deserted contained the last vestige of civilization within the borders of the Kingdom of Portugal.

The soldiers of the Portuguese Army had deserted en masse over the past few weeks; those who remained within the borders of the Kingdom had begun to act as brigands forcing the local villagers to give up their supplies and wealth under the guise of protection.

As for the Local Lords, they were abandoning the Kingdom and heading towards Castile or Morrocco with whatever wealth they could carry with them—leaving their territory in a state of lawlessness, where Brigands ruled and might be right.

At the moment, a Warband of roughly two hundred and fifty men at arms, led by a single knight, was basking within the village. Here, at the end of days, they were kings in their own right. Capable of doing whatever, and whoever they wanted.

These men were aware that the Kingdom of Portugal was coming to an end and were merely taking advantage of the chaos to increase their wealth before following the example of their former masters and fleeing the borders of the collapsing realm.

Considering Captain Andreas Jaeger was currently undergoing Special Forces training, his command over the Jaeger Company had been replaced by an officer named Captain Jonas Giering who witnessed the abuse and humiliation that the local peasants were suffering as he clicked his tongue in disgust. These ruffians were better off eliminated in their entirety. Unfortunately, as a light infantry unit, they severely lacked any form of artillery to support their efforts.

Thus they would have to rely entirely upon their Needle rifles to take down these enemies; it was with this in mind that the veteran Captain pulled back the bolt on his weapon before placing a paper cartridge in its chamber. After slamming the bolt home, he rested his finger on the trigger guard waiting for the opportune moment to fire his shot.

He looked back towards the soldiers under his command who blended into the landscape before ordering a full-scale assault on the village. His orders were to raid this village and disrupt the enemy supply lines. However, Jonas could not in good conscience sit idly by and let the people within this village suffer under the yoke of barbarism. Thus, he quickly raised his voice and ordered the men beneath his command.

"Get into flanking positions and open fire on the enemy; I want these brigands taken out as quickly as possible!"

The men within this company of Jaegers saluted their superior officer before responding in the affirmative.

"Yes, sir!"

After saying this, they rushed into positions, making sure to use the local terrain as cover while blending in with their surroundings. The enemy had no way of knowing that the legendary Austrian Ghosts were moving on their position.

Within the center of the village, a knight in full plate armor with a garish surcoat had his arm wrapped around a local peasant woman; his gauntlet was removed as he forced its way through her dress where it grasped ahold of her small but soft breasts.

The young woman winced in displeasure as she was molested by the Knight, who had a toothy grin beneath his bearded and scarred face. Her father lay dead on the ground in front of her with a split open skull while the Knight's soldiers snickered at sight. Tears streamed down the peasant girl's eyes as she waited for her horrible fate at the hands of the Knight, who now acted as a mere brigand.

The man stuck out his tongue and licked her face before stripping the girl naked and tossing her down on the ground next to her deceased father. After doing so, he stood up from his seat and made a bold declaration.

"Men, enjoy yourselves with the soft flesh of this young beauty! Once you have finished having your fun with her, we will move out to the next village; after all, there is more fortune to be had before we depart for Castile!"

After saying this, the men at arms beneath his command began to roar with laughter and cheers as they surrounded the young woman with menacing gazes. She instantly began to scream in terror as the soldiers pounced at her.

However, a booming echo resounded in the air in the next moment, and the soldiers stared in shock as the Knight's head was blown apart. They immediately realized that they had come under fire and fled behind cover, leaving the poor village girl in the center of the field crying next to her dead father.

Smoke plumed out from the barrel of Jonas' rifle as he pulled back the bolt and reloaded his weapon. Within seconds his sights had acquired another target where he proceeded to squeeze the trigger, thus sending another round down range and into the torso of one of the brigands who thought he could hide from the unknown enemy.

Unfortunately for the Portuguese soldiers, the Austrian Jaegers were camouflaged as they assaulted the village with only a plume of smoke to reveal their positions within the tree line. After the initial volley, a platoon of Jaegers advanced further towards the town while reloading their weapons. While they charged, the second platoon provided covering fire.

The two units combined their efforts to assault the village and the brigands who occupied it. Eventually, the Portuguese men at arms mustered their courage and charged towards the Austrian Jaegers; after all, they still outnumbered the enemy.

The villagers hid in their homes and tried not to get involved in the chaotic battle outside their doorsteps. As the wave of brigands charged towards the Austrian Jaegers, their lines were swiftly cut down from the rapid volley fire until less than a quarter of their numbers remained.

Despite the massive casualties, the Portuguese Men at Arms managed to reach melee combat with the Austrian Jaegers; unfortunately for them, the Austrians were well prepared for such a thing. Bayonets met swords in the middle of the field as the rear platoon rushed forth to join the fray.

While this was going on, the poor peasant girl was crying and hugging her father's corpse. She did not even see Jonas rush up to her; thus, when he grabbed ahold of her arm to make sure she was okay, the girl flinched in reaction.

Upon Seeing her naked flesh, Jonas blushed awkwardly before taking off his camouflage smock and throwing it towards the girl. As he did so, he spoke in German, which was a language she did not understand.

"Cover yourself, and hurry. It is not safe here!"

Though she could not comprehend the words, judging from the man's body language, she could make out the gist of what he said. Thus she quickly covered herself in the camouflage smock and grabbed ahold of Jonas hand before following him to safety.

The chaotic melee outside the village ultimately ended in the Jager's favor, as the men at arms lie dead in the fields, their blood fertilizing the soil that they had so ruthlessly trodden upon. The few survivors were brought forth into the center of the village, where the Portuguese villagers gazed upon the men who had turned from their protectors to common criminals with utter contempt in their eyes. One of the brigands quickly pleaded with Jonas when he arrived with the peasant girl in his arms. He spoke in Latin to ensure that his captors could comprehend him.

"Please, spare us; we were just following orders!"

However, Jonas did not spare the man a second glance; he quickly reached into his holster and withdrew his 1422 Service revolver, where he squeezed the trigger, sending a round straight through the man's skull. After doing so, he ordered the Jaegers under his command to fulfill their duty.

"execute these brigands!"

After saying this, the Portuguese Men at arms were tossed into the center of the village, where they were executed via firing squad. With their deaths, this small farming village had now fallen into the hands of Austria.

Thus Jonas was presented with a difficult position. Their orders were to raid this village and plunder it for its worth before lighting it ablaze to ensure that the Portuguese Army could not utilize its resources.

However, the situation behind enemy lines was more chaotic than they were led to believe. There was no semblance of law and order at the border, and deserters roamed the lands as warlords and brigands.

Ultimately, Jonas looked over at the girl who was crying within his arms and felt his heart bleed; his conscience would not allow him to treat this village with any more cruelty than it had already suffered at the hands of the brigands.

Not wanting to be the same as the men who had claimed they were simply following orders, Jonas quickly decided to disregard his orders and instead entrench his position within this village, utilizing it as a forward outpost to relay information about the current condition of the Kingdom of Portugal back to the main Army. He would deal with the consequences of his disobedience when that time came. Thus with a heavy heart, he gave his commands to his soldiers.

"I want this village fortified and capable of being defended by nightfall. For the time being, this will be our forward outpost."

The soldiers were confused; after all, such a command went against the orders they were given. However, most of them were not officers and thus were not trained to think but rather obey their officers' commands. Thus they saluted their Captain before responding in the affirmative.

"Yes, sir!"

Jonas had established a forward outpost behind the enemy lines with this act. The other units dispatched to the region would quickly report the chaos and devastation they witnessed in the field to their superiors. Thus the strategy on dealing with the volatile Portuguese border would ultimately follow a method similar to that which Jonas had opted to undertake on his own accord.