

Steel 491

Chapter 491 - Until His Last Dying Breath

Prince Iwan of Poland stared into the distance where the Austro-Bohemian forces had gathered; as a highly mobile and relatively modern force, the Austrians generally did not engage their enemies with the entirety of the Expeditionary Force. Instead, they utilized smaller units spread across more significant swaths of territory.

At most, a division stood in the distance across the fields. Still, that was 25,000 men, all of which were armed with needle rifles, revolvers, and breechloading cannons. Such a well-equipped force of this size was in itself fully capable of annihilating any army they came across.

Immediately the Polish Prince performed the sign of the cross as he began to recite his prayers. Today was the day of his death, and he knew it. However, his father's orders were absolute, and his honor as a Catholic was on the line. Thus he lowered the visor of his bascinet and unleashed his sword from his sheath as he boldly gave the orders to charge to his retinue of heavily armored Knights.

"Charge!"

Upon giving this decree, the young Prince snapped the reins off of his steed, sending the mighty destrier down the hill and towards the enemy. While the Austrians were entirely aware of the Polish Army not far away, they had yet to react. After all, blasting such an army to bits with nothing but artillery became dreadfully dull after a while.

Some of the more battle-crazed soldiers of the Austrian Army wanted to fire their rifles at the enemy lines. Thus, they would not begin firing the artillery shells at the enemy Cavalry until they were near the danger close proximity. Instead, while the Army of 10,000 horsemen charged down from the mountainside, the Austrian Infantry reacted calmly as they fixed their bayonets and loaded their paper cartridges into the chambers of their rifles.

Ten feet turned into a hundred feet, a hundred feet turned into a thousand, and yet the Cavalry continued to charge, with a sufficient amount of Infantry rushing behind them. If they could not close the gap in time, then they would indeed be eradicated; their only hope was to get past the 600-yard mark to ensure that they were beyond the point where the Austrians could safely fire their artillery.

After much trial and error, the Polish Army had discovered that the Austrian artillery never fired shells beyond a certain distance in relation to their location. Thus, they devised the rapid cavalry charges to close the spaces before the Army could be obliterated. Unfortunately, they were walking right into a line of needle rifle fire, but then again, they were not too keenly aware of how rapidly the Austrians could reload their weapons after firing a shot.

Sweat began to pour down Iwan's forehead as he began to close the distance, and yet he could not wipe it away, for his helmet still covered his entire face. Thus he was forced to endure as he reached ever closer to the Austrian lines. Of course, once he reached the 800-yard mark, the thunder of the artillery shells firing at his location began to echo in the air.

The first shell impacted not 75 yards behind him; in doing so, it blasted men and horses alike to bits. He foolishly looked back to see the damage caused; as he did so, he intensely felt the desire to throw up. He forced his head forward and raised his sword in the air to avoid doing so, screaming the words in his native tongue.

"Charge!"

However, the closer he got, the more artillery shells impacted his Army behind him, one barrage, two barrages, three barrages, by the time a full minute had passed, ten barrages from an entire Brigade's worth of artillery had fired upon his Army inflicting massive casualties. Yet there was still hope! He was dangerously close to the line that marked the area safe from artillery fire.

After safely crossing the aforementioned line, he let out a sigh of relief; however, in the next moment, bullets flew past his head; he could hear them whistle as they just barely missed his body. Despite this, he continued to usher his horse forward; either victory or death would be achieved on this day.

The Austrian soldiers continued to fire their needle rifles at the advancing Cavalry, gunning down men and horses alike; iron-clad warriors crashed to the ground, either crushed by their mounts or already lifeless by the moment they hit the floor. However, Iwan was more determined than ever to reach the enemy lines.

When he was finally a distance of roughly thirty yards away from the enemy, he felt a searing hot pain in his abdomen; when he looked down, he noticed that blood had begun to pour outside of his armor; he had been hit. As he continued to bleed, the strength began to fade from his body, and yet he still managed to rush his horse forward; if he could make it to the enemy formation, perhaps he could claim the life of at least one of the enemy.

However, when he was roughly five meters away from his target, another volley was fired from the Austrian rifleman, this time, three bullets had entered his torso, and another five had claimed his horse's life. The lifeless steed crashed to the ground, tossing the young Prince from its back.

Evidently, a bullet had struck his spine because he could no longer feel the use of his legs; instead, as the dust cleared, he noticed his steed lying dead, not three feet away from him. Tied to its saddle was the stuffed rabbit his little sister had given him.

As he looked around and witnessed the Austrian gunfire rip his Army to shreds, the only thought on his mind was to protect the stuffed rabbit named Kacper; with this in mind, he struggled, using all the strength remaining in his arms, to drag his broken body forward towards his now deceased steed.

With each movement, he felt the life further fade from his body, until finally, he reached the saddle, where he quickly pulled out his arming dagger to cut the stuffed rabbit free. After doing so, he clutched it to his bleeding chest, where he began struggling for breath.

The stuffed white rabbit became stained with his blood as the young Prince of Poland slowly lost consciousness; the final thought on his mind was the regret he felt for not being able to live up to his promise to his darling little sister.

After reflecting upon this, the life faded from Iwan's eyes when Eckhard observed this curious behavior; he made his way through the ranks of his soldiers before staring at the dead Prince and the now crimson rabbit in his hands.

The Veteran Field marshal immediately reached down and pulled the helmet from the Prince's head to reveal his handsome face and the distraught expression that lay upon it. The boy had died in grief, and Eckhard suspected the rabbit of being at least partially responsible. With this in mind, he ripped the toy from the Prince's cold dead hands and then began to inspect it.

As the soldiers beneath his command witnessed their Field Marshal inspecting a stuffed rabbit on an active battlefield, they immediately rushed over to his side to protect him. One of the men commented on this situation.

"What is it, sir?"

Eckhard did not shift his gaze from the dead Prince and the toy he had fought so desperately to protect as he voiced his thoughts.

"Curious, isn't it... With his last dying breath, this boy fought to protect a toy... Why would he even bring such a thing to the battlefield?"

Eckhard recognized the tabard that the Prince wore, signifying him as a member of the Royal Family of Poland. With this in mind, a bitter expression appeared on his lips as he grabbed ahold of the toy and stuffed it into his pouch; after doing so, he gazed off into the distance towards Warsaw before making one final comment.

"Finish this battle quickly; it would appear the Polish Princess is missing her favorite toy... I intend to return it to her..."

The Austrian soldiers immediately saluted their Field Marshal upon hearing this before getting back to the frontlines. It did not take long for the well-trained and supplied Austrian Army to mop up the Polish Army's remnants after this point. Within an hour, the enemy either lay dead, had routed, or was taken as prisoners.

As for the corpse of the Polish Prince, it was buried in a mass grave alongside all of the deceased of the Polish Army; only the Austrian corpses would return to their homes. For the enemies of Austria, they were not afforded such a luxury.

Having finished the battle, Eckhard shifted his target towards Warsaw, where the remainder of the Polish Royal Family lay in hiding, far away from the consequences of their actions. Upon witnessing the spectacle of the Prince's death, Eckhard was convinced now more than ever that he would need to speak with the Polish King personally about his choices in life.

Chapter 492 - English Ambitions

Within a dimly lit castle sat a short yet burly man. This man had a long brown beard combed to perfection; his hair was in a similarly long and straight state. The short man was dressed in attire that would be luxurious for his Kingdom but when compared to the wealth of his neighbors, across the English channel was more fitting being worn by a pauper than a King.

The Banners of the House of Lancaster were proudly displayed behind his throne, and despite this, they appeared to be in a rather unkempt state. It would appear that Father Time had not been the most generous of benefactors to the Royal House of England. Despite the lack of wealth, one thing remained certain. King Lawrence of the House of Lancaster was a mighty foe, one who had made his French counterparts bleed dearly over the past decade since he had assumed the mantle of King of England.

At the moment, two servant girls sat in his lap as he drank from a massive goblet that appeared to be made of pewter. Embossed on this cup were depictions of the Arthurian Legends. Should the chalice been made of gold, it would be quite the exquisite piece, and yet despite his martial prowess, and his successful campaigns against the Irish, King Lawrence could not well afford such a magnificent drinking device.

Despite his early advances into France and the rebelling Duchies swearing loyalty to him and him alone, he was not exactly in the best mood. After all, the French had recently employed firearms in significant numbers, something that he had not expected to occur after his dastardly plot had succeeded.

Kneeling before the English Monarch was a man dressed in far more luxurious attire. This aging and feeble man was bound with a cloth gag and rope ties. He was none other than the French King Giles, who had disappeared from the Royal Court in Paris weeks prior. Lawrence, ever the ruffian, snapped his fingers, and in doing so, his guards immediately released the restraint that prevented the French Monarch from speaking.

Giles immediately panted for breath; after all, he was a mouth breather and was not well accustomed to breathing through his nose. Having secured his breath, Giles immediately unleashed curses upon his rival across the English Channel.

"Lawrence, you bastard! You have kidnapped me from my home! What is it you plan to do with me, exactly?"

The English King immediately began to break out into laughter as he abruptly stood up from his seat; in doing so, casting the two servant girls aside, with his pewter goblet in hand, he approached his primary enemy and backhanded him across the face. After doing so, he grabbed ahold of Giles's long grey hair before pressing his head to the cold stone floor.

"Initially, I had planned to execute you and overcome your pathetic son with my forces. However, before I do such a thing, I am curious. As soon as you disappear and your twink of an heir assumed control, thousands of firearms were deployed to the battlefield! While your soldiers are not exactly the most trained and capable men, these weapons have proven to be a great deterrent to my armies! This leaves me wondering if you had such weapons stashed away. Why did you refuse to use them?"

Giles immediately spat on the ground in front of him before chastising the English King.

"Oh, that foolish bastard! I knew I should have raised him better... I'll have you know, the Kingdom of Austria provided those weapons! However, I refused to use their vile weapons on the field of battle; after all, what idiot would sell his soul to that devil?"

It was apparent that Giles referred to Berengar when he used such terminology. However, this only intrigued Lawrence further; after all, he had yet to reveal his secret weapon. After hearing such valuable intelligence, he released his hold over his French counterpart and left him struggling with his bindings.

In a fit of mad laughter, Lawrence had concluded about the state of the ongoing war with France. When Giles looked at him as if he were insane, the English King immediately whistled; in doing so, several crates were brought forward where the contents were laid bare for the French King to see.

Several hundred firearms fell out of the crates and onto the ground, which astonished Giles; though these firearms did not bear the Proof Marks of the Kufstein Armory like the ones delivered to France did, there was no mistaking that they were manufactured in the Southern German Kingdom. Upon

seeing Giles' confusion, Lawrence explained what had occurred to the French King as if he had uncovered a grand conspiracy.

"A while ago, I was approached by men who identified themselves as ambassadors of the Iberian Union, as were the Dukes of Burgundy and Aquitaine. They gave us these firearms as a gift and were willing to sell more to allegedly fund their war against the Austro-Granadan alliance. Naturally, I accepted and purchased much of these weapons for my troops.

Until now, I have been ensuring that my soldiers are properly trained in these weapons before deploying them to the battlefield. Unlike you, I prefer my soldiers to have a degree of discipline appropriate for a proper army.

Curious enough, even after the Iberian Union collapsed, the same men approached me once more with intent to sell; by this time, they claimed to be representatives of the Kingdom of Aragon. Thus, I kept buying the weapons. I never thought until this moment that the entire time I was purchasing these weapons, the true mastermind behind their delivery was King Berengar von Kufstein and his Austrian War Machine.

Tell me, Giles, what is his goal if that madman will arm all sides of this conflict? To make the most money from us as possible? Fat chance, nobody in the Western world is more wealthy than the King of Austria, so what other purpose could he have in arming all of us with more efficient weapons? What exactly are Austria's plans for France?"

When presented with such evidence, Giles struggled to comprehend Berengar's plot; like his rival Lawrence, he wrongfully assumed that Berengar had his eyes on conquering the French Kingdom. For how could they realize Berengar held a vendetta against their country based upon grievances suffered by his ancestors in another world?

Upon seeing Giles come to a similar conclusion, Lawrence laughed again as he unsheathed his sword from his belt. After doing so, he raised it above Giles's neck while taunting the man.

"Take solace from the fact that I will prevent Berengar's conquest of France in your stead!"

Upon hearing this, Giles spat on the floor. There was a tint of blood in his saliva as he did so. With a smirk on his face, the French King accepted his fate.

"Go ahead, Kill me! I'll be dead in six months, anyway..."

With this said, the English King brought his sword down, decapitating the King of France. A satisfied smile was on Gile's severed head as the life instantly faded from his eyes. Having finally killed his rival, the English King tossed his bloody sword aside and chugged the wine in his goblet. After doing so, he returned to his throne, where he barked orders at his servants.

"Clean this mess up, and bring my marshal. it is time we bring this war to new heights! Now is the time to launch our attack!"

Shortly after that, the servants cleaned up the French King's corpse and the bloodied stone floor; as they did so, the Marshal of England presented himself where he and his Monarch discussed a new invasion plan. They would soon march on France with all the might the Kingdom of England could muster, in doing so bringing a new era of chaos and suffering to the French Kingdom.

Despite his bold claims to repel Berengar's future invasion, Lawrence had unwittingly played into Berengar's hands.. Without Giles keeping the Kingdom together, the various duchies of France would soon begin an all-out battle royal for control of the crown. After all, what man was foolish enough to follow the commands of the disgraced Prince Aubry?

Chapter 493 - Rule Germania!

In the center of Kufstein lie a Theater Hall, which had recently finished construction, and tonight was its grand opening. Because of this thousands of people from across the city had gathered to witness the masterpiece that was written and directed by the young High Queen of Austria.

Whether it be commoners or the nobility, all would gather together to witness the brilliant play conducted by the talented actors and actresses who lived within the Kingdom of Austria. For the Grand Opening of the Theatre House, Adela had constructed a play based upon the Battle of Teutoburg Forest.

This was a battle fought in ancient times by the Cherusci Chieftain Hermann, also known by his Roman name Arminius, who led the Germanic tribes to victory against three Legions of the mighty Roman Empire. In Berengar's previous life this battle was used as a propaganda piece for centuries, and he intended to make use of it in this timeline as well.

Standing in the center of the stage was an attractive young man with long straight blonde hair and sky blue eyes; he was dressed in the thick woolen clothing of the Ancient Germanic People, with a lorica Hamata coat of mail over it.

This actor who played the role of Arminius was currently huddling over a fire on stage as he discussed the Roman Advance into the Black Forest with other actors who represented the various Germanic Chieftains.

"The Romans shall enter the forest on the morrow; when they do, we will meet them with sword and spear! When these foreigners enter our lands, they shall feel the wrath of the German people! For Wodanaz! For Germania!

Another actor who was a middle-aged man scoffed when he heard this before responding with a boisterous voice.

"You want us to fight the legions of Rome? Have you gone mad, Hermann? The Roman War Machine is not easily beaten in battle!"

The actor who played Hermann grabbed ahold of the other actor by his cloak and shook him around in a state of frenzy as he countered his argument with a passionate speech.

"What would you have us do? Lie down and accept the Romans as our masters? They would make slaves of us all! You have not dwelled in Roman lands, but I have lived as one of them! I would rather die a thousand deaths than allow one inch of German soil to be occupied by our enemies!

If you are too afraid to fight, then, by all means, you and your people are welcome to stay behind like the cowards you are, but I promise you, before the dawn rises in the East, I will have watered these forests with the blood of the Romans!"

While the play continued, Berengar and Adela watched it from above in their private booth. The Austrian King had a broad smile as he began to whisper to his wife about the play she had written.

"Truly, an excellent display of talent, this piece of theatre will be sure to inspire our people to work hard for a greater tomorrow and to resist foreign influence over our lands. I must say, Adela, you have outdone yourself this time..."

In response to her husband's kind words, Adela smiled and latched onto his arm as she rested her head on his shoulder. It was rare for her to have alone time with the man she loved. Not only did Berengar have multiple wives, but he had many children to take care of, and frequently Adela felt that despite her position as the primary wife, she was neglected.

Despite this, he had accompanied her to the opening night of the Grand Theatre Hall she had designed, as well as the first of many plays that she had written. It was indeed a monumental occasion for the High Queen of Austria. The play continued for some time before an intermission was declared, and with it, Berengar and his wife got up to stretch their legs.

Gathered outside of the theatre hall were the thousands of people who had come to watch the play's opening night. Berengar was dressed in his kingly attire, while Adela was in a black evening gown. Together they stood side by side as various members of society approached them and discussed what they thought of the play so far.

"It is truly amazing what you have created here, your Majesty! You have quite the future as a playwright."

This woman addressed Adela, who wore a proud smile on her face. After all, compared to anything else that existed in this medieval world, the Austrian Theatre was extremely impressive; not only were the sets grand, but the acting was top-notch.

Watching such an extravagant piece of theatre was a luxury that only the people of Kufstein could currently afford. However, Adela had planned to open theatre halls all across the Kingdom, among other institutions, to enhance Austria's culture further. The Noble young Queen? nodded her head and thanked the aristocratic woman for her kind words with a pretty smile on her luscious pink lips.

"I am glad that you are enjoying the play so far. However, the best is yet to come, so feel free to eat and drink your fill of wine and fine cheeses; when the intermission ends, I promise you, you will be pleased with what comes next!"

Having said this, Adela began to entertain more guests, and before long, they returned to their seats, where the play continued. Berengar continued to watch with an eager expression. Before long, the main battle scene occurred where the Germanic warriors ambushed and slaughtered the Roman legionnaires; as the last eagle fell, the crowd erupted in applause.

Shortly thereafter, the end of the play came, where the actor representing the Roman General Varus gazed upon the devastation that had been wrought upon his army. After hearing the howls of the German warriors closing in on him, the fat, old, and bald man who played the character pulled out his Gladius and fell upon it, in the end leaving behind a single sentence.

"What man could tame such a wild and unforgiving land?"

Having committed suicide, the actor playing Hermann and his Germanic allies found the Roman General's corpse, where they proceeded to sever Varus' head, holding it high in the air the Germanic Hero boldly proclaimed for all to hear.

"Let this be a lesson for those who seek to impose their will on the German people; no foreigner shall ever claim dominion over our lands, for so long as the blood of Germania flows through our veins we will never submit, and we will never be conquered! Rule Germania!"

After saying this, the curtains were drawn, and the crowd erupted into thunderous applause, standing from their seats and cheering with the final phrase spoken in the play.

"Rule Germania!"

When Berengar witnessed this, a smile etched itself upon his lips. Adela had done more than he ever expected of her. She had invoked the fighting spirit that he wished for his people to have with a single play. Thus he gazed over with an affectionate gaze towards his High Queen and grabbed ahold of her hand. After doing so, he kissed her on the lips and whispered in her ear.

"It was truly an inspiring piece of Propaganda; you have done well. I look forward to your future work..."

Upon hearing her husband's praise, Adela blushed. She then shifted her attention to the stage where the actors took their bows. She had put a lot of effort into the production of this play, and it turned out better than she had imagined.

After the play was over, Berengar and Adela returned to the Royal Palace; this play would continue to perform for the following month within the City of Kufstein; after all, the theatre hall could only fit so many people. With each show, it would gain an even more excellent reputation, inspiring many Austrians to work hard for the glory of Austria and the dream of a united Germany.

Adela would immediately begin producing more plays, most of which acted as propaganda pieces to idealize Berengar's vision for a unified German Empire. The extravagance of Austrian theatre would catch the attention of wealthy noblemen and women from around the German Speaking regions who would visit Austria to see the play.

With each play, the importance of German unification would be more prevalent, paving the way for the people of not only Austria but the German regions as a whole to accept Berengar's plans for a single German Empire. In doing this, Adela had secured herself in the good graces of Berengar as one of his most essential tools for developing German culture in his image.

Perhaps one day he would make her the Minister of Propaganda; if she had such an important government role, the young woman who always lived in the shadow of her rival would be able to hold her head high with pride as she said to the world.

"See, I am every bit as useful as Linde!"

Of course, Berengar had no idea that Adela's success would further increase the rivalry between her and his second wife.. However, such a thing was none of his concern; as long as it was conducted with a degree of civility, he would encourage such petty competition between his wives.

The golden-haired and one-eyed King of Austria sat upon his throne, gazing down at the newest arrival to his court with a smirk on his face. Though he had estimated this outcome was inevitable, he still did not believe it would happen so soon.

As word spread about Austria's continued victories against the Eastern Coalition, and the destruction of Krakow, fear and panic had followed it into the hearts of Austria's neighbors. Dietger, the Duke of Bavaria, had long since realized that a sleeping Lion dwelled on his southern borders, and had taken various actions to counter it.

In fact, for the past year, he had taken an option of appeasement. Unfortunately for him, Austria's power continued to rise like a soaring eagle, and thus, additional difficulties presented themselves. After witnessing the entirety of Eastern Germany, annexed by the southern State, Dietger had realized any attempt to keep his sovereignty was moot.

Thus, without speaking to his allies in Saxony and Wurttemberg, he had traveled to Kufstein with a single purpose in mind. At the moment, the once proud Duke of Bavaria, who until now had fought tirelessly to be crowned King of Germany, was kneeling before the Self-Proclaimed King of Austria.

"Your Majesty, King Berengar; I have come to Kufstein to declare my allegiance to you, and submit myself and that of my lands to the authority of the Austrian Crown. If you would have me as your vassal, it would honor me to serve you and your dynasty for perpetuity."

Berengar gazed upon the aging Duke of Bavaria with a cruel smile etched on his immaculate features. This was exactly what he wanted. With Dietger's support, other German regions would follow suit and swear fealty to him in the coming days. Allowing himself to proclaim the formation of the East German Confederation, he would elevate these Dukes to the status of Kings, and proclaim himself the leader of this new faction.

It was only after he had united Germany under the banners of Austria that the young king intended to declare the formation of the German Empire and crown himself Kaiser. Such a thing had long since been the goal of Berengar. Dietger played a pivotal role in this vision, and thus Berengar was more than happy to accept the man who had once been a bitter enemy in his service.

"Dietger, I accept your vassalage, and declare the annexation of the Duchy of Bavaria into the Kingdom of Austria. You and your dynasty may preside over the land of your ancestors, as you have done for centuries. However, the laws of Austria will henceforth apply to Bavaria and all of its people."

A sigh of relief escaped from Dietger's lips as he heard the mercy the young king of Austria had given him. After doing so, he nodded his head thrice before responding to Berengar.

"Thank you, your Majesty, I promise to be a filial servant of the Austrian Crown until the day I die..."

Upon hearing this, Berengar smiled and nodded his head. He then stood up from his throne and approached the Duke of Bavaria, where he placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Be sure that you do... Come, let us feast, and enjoy the union of our two realms!"

After saying this, Berengar departed from the Throne Room with the Duke of Bavaria in pursuit. Eventually they arrived in the Dining Room where Berengar instructed a servant to bring his family down to eat. While the two noblemen waited for the Royal Family to arrive, they quenched their thirst with fortified wine and talked about trivial matters.

Linde was the first among Berengar's wives to arrive. She was clutching her youngest daughter Isla to her chest, whereas Hans and Helga followed by her sides. The busty young redhead seated her children first, before taking her place by Berengar's side on his left.

Berengar immediately introduced his second wife to his guest, Dietger, who gazed in awe at the beauty of the young mother.

"This is my second wife, Queen Linde von Kufstein. She is the daughter of the late Count of Innsbruck Lothar von Habsburg, and the love of my life."

Linde immediately smiled gracefully at the Duke of Bavaria and introduced herself.

"It is a pleasure to finally meet you, Dietger. I am glad to hear that your visit to Austria this time is for more peaceful reasons."

Naturally, as the Director of Austrian Royal Intelligence, Linde was aware of Dietger's purpose for visiting Kufstein the moment he set out from Munich. Dietger had remained silent with an enamored expression since the moment he first laid eyes on Linde. Ultimately, he could not help himself from complimenting her appearance.

"I had heard there were three heavenly beauties of Austria, and I must say that you are much more beautiful than the late Duke Wilmar von Habsburg's daughter Agnes, who is said to be chief amongst them. If I had known that such an angelic woman existed in Austria, I would have claimed you instead of her as the bride of my eldest son."

In response to this claim, Linde giggled in a rather sadistic fashion. In doing so, she responded in a manner that the Duke did not expect.

"I highly doubt that, by the time you wiped out the main Habsburg line, I had already dedicated my life to Berengar, and he would never allow you to take me from him. A man of your caliber would have died trying."

Though this was a direct insult to Dietger's prestige, one that wounded him greatly, he knew better than to invoke the ire of King Berengar, especially after he had just sworn subservience to him and his dynasty. Berengar merely sat back and drank his wine as his wife unleashed her venomous tongue towards his newest vassal.

Before long, Adela arrived with her kids in tow. She gazed upon the awkward scene with a curious glance before introducing herself to her husband's guest.

"I am the High Queen, Adela von Kufstein. It is a pleasure to meet your acquaintance, and you are?"

Dietger stood up as he bowed before the High Queen of Austria, before introducing himself.

"Duke Dietger of Bavaria, I have just sworn my allegiance to your husband. I look forward to working with you and your family soon."

Adela nodded her head and sat down beside Berengar on his right. As she did so, she noticed the expression on Dietger's face. He could hardly believe that Berengar had two of such beauties by his side. He understood Linde. After all, she was one of the three heavenly beauties of Austria, but he was unaware of who this young blonde was. It was at this moment he remembered something important and immediately inquired for clarification about it.

"You wouldn't have a sister named Ava, would you?"

Upon hearing her eldest sister's name, Adela's smile turned upside down, and she glared at the man before silently nodding her head. Upon seeing this odd expression, Dietger felt confused, but ultimately smiled before complimenting the High Queen of Austria.

"Then that makes sense. You are the younger sister of the third member of Austria's legendary trio of Heavenly Beauties. Who knew that her younger sister was every bit of a looker as she was? I feel you need to update your fables and include the High Queen as the fourth member of this elite group."

Adela merely scoffed in response to these veiled compliments and took a sip from her wine. She had no desire to be lumped in with her elder sister in a reputation based solely upon appearance. Shortly after this minor incident, the other members of Berengar's family made their way to the dining hall, where they enjoyed their meal.

It surprised Dietger to see that Berengar had collected so many beautiful women from different parts of the world, and was becoming envious. However, a thought suddenly entered his mind as he witnessed this: if Bavaria was now a part of Austria and had to obey its laws, didn't that mean he now could marry a few more beautiful young women too?

Thus, Berengar had unknowingly inspired his newest vassal to work hard to get a lifestyle similar to that of the Austrian King. Perhaps one of his children or grandchildren could even marry into the von Kufstein line. Such a thing would surely bring prestige to the house von Wittelsbach. After all, it was becoming apparent that Berengar would achieve far greater feats in this life than he had already done.

Thus, the Bavarian Duke had got a new life goal, as he sat and dined with his new King. As for the ramifications of Bavarian submission to the Austrian Crown. The folding of the Bavarian Duke and his claim on the vacant German Throne would allow the House von Luxemburg to claim that they were, in fact, the true German Kings.. Something that was in a direct conflict with Berengar and his goals of a unified German Empire.

Chapter 495 - Berengar Von Kufstein Must Die!

Duke Hartman von Luxembourg sat upon his seat of power in the land of his ancestors. At the moment, the young man was twirling the white queen of his chess set in his hand as he prepared to make his next move against his old friend and mentor.

The man sitting across from the young Duke went by the name of Renault De la Roche. He was a Frenchman by birth. Yet, he had travelled into the heart of Luxembourg and swore his service decades ago to the father of the young man sitting in front of him.

Since then, he had looked after the bastard of Luxembourg as if he were his own child. Teaching him the ways of Chivalry, and the tactics that a Duke should know should he wish to be victorious on the field of battle.

Over the years, Hartman had proven himself a capable warrior and a cunning leader. In fact, it was because of his actions that the true-born sons of his father met an untimely demise. Of course, none of this had ever been proven, and to speak of it was slander. Which would surely result in the decapitation of whoever had uttered such foolish words.

Despite his natural intellect and charisma, Hartman now found himself in a difficult situation. He could not see through his mentor's play on the chessboard, and was only a step away from being checked. After spending nearly five minutes gazing at the board, examining every path to victory, he suddenly realized that Renault had defeated him long ago.

It was then that the young man noticed the cruel smile spread across the veteran Knight's lips as he gloated in victory. Though such a sight always brought out the worst of Hartman's inner emotions, he calmed himself by taking a deep breath and exhaling before doing the one thing a man in his position could do... admit defeat.

"You have bested me once again Renault, I humbly admit defeat..."

The elderly Knight broke out in laughter as he took a swig from his flagon of wine. Upon doing so, he gazed fondly upon his charge before commenting on the situation.

"You are getting better, but you are still a ways away from defeating this old Knight."

Before Hartman could respond, a messenger entered the room and whispered something in his ear. Though Renault could not hear what the messenger said to his master, he could tell by the excited expression on the young man's face that something good had happened. Despite his eagerness, Hartman remained calm as he dismissed the servant from the room after he had received the complete message.

"Leave us..."

The messenger did not hesitate and immediately departed from the room, leaving the Mentor and his student completely alone in silence. Hartman took a sip from his drink before gracefully wiping away the residue with a hanky. After doing so, Renault broke the silence that existed between the two.

"Well... Don't keep me waiting."

In response to this, Hartman smiled before giving the good news he had received from his servant.

"Dietger has relinquished his claim to the Throne! There is nobody else left to challenge my claim. That means I am the new king of Germany!"

Despite the good news, Renault did not react overly joyously, instead he scratched his chin as he thought about what he was told. After a few moments of silence, the veteran Knight quickly inquired for further details on the matter.

"What exactly happened? I can't imagine Dietger would spend decades of his life preparing for this war, engage in a bloody stalemate for five years, thoroughly bankrupting his realm just so to back out at the last moment..."

Hartman did not hesitate to inform his mentor of the details of what had transpired within the City of Kufstein.

"I don't know exactly what happened, but Dietger has submitted to the rule of that pretender Berengar von Kufstein. The self-proclaimed king of Austria! Without Dietger, we now have control over most of Germany. Aside from Bavaria and Austria."

While the news overjoyed Hartman, Renault was far more cautious. Just what kind of man was Berengar von Kufstein? Though he had never met the Austrian Monarch, he was well aware of the stories that shrouded him. Then again, it was hard to decipher what was reality, and what was propaganda.

Still, it could not be denied that Berengar had risen from among the lowest ranks of nobility to one of the most pivotal figures in the Western World. Such a feat was rare in the entire history of the world. If Dietger had submitted to this man, then it meant that he knew something about Austria that they themselves did not know. Because of his cautious nature, Renault sighed heavily before speaking the thoughts that dwelled in his mind.

"I dare say that this is not something to celebrate. You know as well as I do the propaganda that is coming out of Austria nowadays. Every facet of their society is preaching for the unification of Germany under a single Empire, ruled by the von Kufstein Dynasty. If Dietger has submitted to that man's authority, then it means he believes Berengar is likely to succeed in this endeavor.

By declaring yourself King of Germany, you are standing in the way of Austria's vision for a unified German Empire under their hegemony. You are making yourself the enemy of a powerful man, one who has proven himself invincible so far."

The moment Hartman heard these words, his expression dropped significantly. Just when he thought he had won the war, Renault had to reveal that an even more powerful enemy lie between him and the title of king of the Germans. A scowl appeared on the young man's face as he asked for advice on how to proceed.

"Renault, you have always advised me on the best path forward, and you have never failed me. I need you to tell me how I get rid of this monumental obstacle between me and my rightful place as king..."

The veteran French Knight relaxed back in his chair as he contemplated the most suitable path to victory. After several minutes of silent thought, he finally revealed the plan he had devised.

"Only a fool would face Austria in open battle. In fact, the chance of you winning any form of engagement against them is virtually nonexistent. Austria has the largest, most well equipped, and most well-trained army in the world. Don't even get me started on their Navy.

However, that does not mean they don't have any weaknesses. The Kingdom of Austria's greatest weakness is that until now, they have relied entirely on their King to achieve their wealth and power. Without Berengar, Austria is nothing. None of his children are old enough to take the Throne, and no man at the present can fill his shoes and lead them to glory."

Hartman gulped heavily as he swallowed the saliva pooled in his mouth. After doing so, he asked the question that was on his mind.

"What are you saying I should do?"

Upon hearing this, Renault's expression became grave. He leaned in close to his student with a stern look in his eyes before revealing the words that would resound throughout history.

"It is simple... You must kill Berengar von Kufstein..."

Hartman immediately scoffed upon hearing this, before throwing up his hands in defeat.

"Kill Berengar? If it was so simple, somebody would have succeeded by now!"

Renault's expression sank further as he heard his student's protests.

"I never said it was going to be easy, but this is the only way that you can achieve your goals in life. Without Berengar's guidance, Austria will fall into ruin. With the King of Austria's death, his bitches will fight to the death to put their sons on the throne, further dividing the unstable Kingdom that he has built. If you kill Berengar, you will become the king of Germany. I promise you that..."

Upon hearing this speech, Hartman mulled it over in his head for a long time. Nearly half an hour of silence had passed before the young man concluded on what needed to be done. With a cruel smile on his face, he took one last sip of his beverage before boldly declaring his intentions.

"Very well. If that is the only path to victory, then I must take it. Berengar von Kufstein must die!"

Upon saying this, a tacit understanding had taken place in the heart of Luxembourg, an assassination plan to eliminate the young King of Austria, and defeat his Kingdom had been hatched.. Regardless of whether this plot was to succeed, it was bound to have dire consequences on the western world and the fate of the German people.

Chapter 496 - Formation Of The South...

Within the Royal Palace of Kufstein, in its great hall, stood several prominent leaders from central Europe. Chief among them was Berengar von Kufstein, who held the titles of both King of Austria and Bohemia. As for the others, they included the Grand Duke of Switzerland, the Duke of Bavaria, as well as the Dukes of Saxony, and Baden and Wurttemberg.

These various German leaders were gathered for a single purpose, and that was to come to agreements over the future of their realms. By now Austrian fashion trends had made their way across Southern Germany as a whole, thus these men were not dressed in the medieval attire of their North German counterparts, rather they were dressed in a style similar to the Royalty of Austria.

Among these men, none had a more striking appearance than Berengar. If these men's daughters were present to witness this occasion, it was most certain that they would fawn over the Austrian King. Berengar, however, was interested in who sported the greatest fashion, rather he was more interested in the serious political ramifications that this meeting would have on the western world as a whole.

Thus, as he Dukes bickered among themselves, he stood back and drank from his chalice. Listening to each one of their concerns.

"This is your fault, Dietger, you bowing before Berengar has made a mockery of our alliance. If it weren't for the fact that we were permanently on Hartman's shit list for siding with you, we would not even be here!"

Berengar merely scoffed when he heard these words being spoken by the Duke of Saxony, these were bold words for a man who shared a border with Austria. The moment the man saw the displeasure on Berengar's face he felt a chill go down his spine, and tried to backpedal on his statement.

"That is not to say that the King of Austria is not worthy of serving, but your actions have spit in the face of the sacrifice that thousands of our men have made on the field of battle over these past few years!"

The young king of Austria did not bother to respond to this comment, instead, he allowed his newest pet to do so. Dietger was more than willing to stand up for his actions and he quickly informed his former allies of just why he had knelt before the Austrian crown.

"Look around you, Sivert, you old fool. While we have fought for a meaningless title, King Berengar has elevated his status to that beyond any ordinary King. You saw the technological marvels that are commonplace in this land. You have seen the weapons the Austrian Army wield, and the ships that comprise their navy. Do you honestly think we stand a chance of defeating this mighty Kingdom?"

There is only one solution to this petty war for a nonexistent crown. Kneel before Berengar and proclaim him the true king of Germany! What does lineage matter when faced with overwhelming power? If you stubborn fools do not submit to the Crown of Austria as I have, I assure you, only blood and death await your lands!"

Berengar raised his brow when he heard this last point, while he had gained the reputation as an utterly ruthless conqueror, his plans for Germany, should it be required to be unified via force, was actually to be quite lenient on not only their armies, but especially its people. To Berengar, the German people were his people, and he had no desire to shed any more blood than was necessary to unite them under one banner.

Despite his true intentions, he did not make it clear, as Dietger's speech was swaying the men who had gathered in Kufstein. The three Dukes here who had not already submitted to Berengar realized just what the future entailed. With this in mind, the Duke of Baden finally broke his silence before addressing a question to Berengar.

"Apologies if I am out of place, your Majesty, however I can no longer keep my curiosity to myself. If you would permit me to ask a simple question, I would be most honored."

The other Dukes gazed at the proud Duke of Baden with awe. Was this man really the Duke they all knew? Never once in the past had he responded so respectfully in the face of authority, and yet here and now he was practically grovelling at Berengar's feet.

The Austrian king was amused by the over-polite nature of the Duke of Baden's request, and simply responded with a silent nod, signifying his approval to ask the question which was plaguing his mind. The Duke of Baden took a deep breath before doing so.

"Just what are the extents of your ambitions, Berengar von Kufstein?"

Upon hearing this, Berengar smiled gracefully, before responding to the question with much enthusiasm.

"My ambitions are simple, Duke Cuert von Z?hringen, I plan to unify the German people of this world into a single Empire, and not some confederation which pretends to be the successor of the ancient Romans. No, I plan to create a German Empire, one whose power and influence will extend to every corner of this world.

Make no mistake, gentlemen, I have the ability to accomplish this, and I will stop at nothing to achieve my goals. I am well aware that the bastard of Luxembourg plans to fight against me until his last dying breath, and if that is his desire, then so be it. I understand that I have gained a reputation for being ruthless to my enemies.

Of course, that does not mean I lack any form of generosity to those who support me from the bottom of their hearts. The time has come for every leader of the German world to make their decision. Do you kneel before the power of the Austrian Crown and recognize me and my dynasty as sovereign over all Germans? Or will you choose death? Those are the only two options available to you all.

Do not feel pressured to bend the knee to me if you do not desire to. As guests in my Kingdom you will be allowed safe passage back to your realms. However, if you leave here on this day without bowing before me, I will assume that you have made your choice, and the next time we meet, I will not be so merciful."

Despite him saying otherwise, there was a heavy pressure in the atmosphere. The murderous glint in Berengar's one good eye had practically caused the three dukes to suffocate under the yoke of his tyranny. Dietger had made a valid point earlier. After witnessing a display of Austria's weapons earlier in the day, not a single man in this room was confident of beating Berengar.

In fact, they had seriously begun to doubt the capacity of Christendom as a whole to defeat the Austrian Royal Army. Now they were told to make a choice, kneel before another man, or die. Though Berengar had guaranteed them safe passage back to their homes, they knew it was only a matter of time before Austria's armies swarmed their lands like a ravenous horde of locusts.

When presented with such options, only a fool would choose death. Thus, the three Dukes of Southern and Eastern Germany, who had not yet sworn service to Berengar, knelt before the Austrian King as if it were the most natural thing to do. Not only them, but even the others who had sworn fealty to Berengar once more knelt and repeated the vow of vassalage.

Being surrounded by so many powerful noblemen, swearing fealty unto him, brought a sense of Euphoria to Berengar, when they were finished a cruel smile spread across Berengar's lips as he uttered the words that would change the status of these men and their families for the rest of history.

"All of you here today, except for one, have knelt before me as a Duke. Under the power afforded to me as King of Austria, I hereby grant you permission to rise as Grand Dukes of your respective realms."

The various men gazed at each other in shock, though it was just a change in title, to become known as Grand Dukes elevated their position to that of monarchs rather than just mere high nobility. However, Berengar's next statement after they had risen to their feet surprised them even further.

"Today marks a grand occasion that is sure to be remembered until the ends of time. Today, I King Berengar von Kufstein, in the presence of my Greatest Vassals, announce the formation of the South German Confederation, to be presided over in perpetuity by the Kingdom of Austria, and the von Kufstein Dynasty.

As members of this confederation, I grant you the privilege of the introducing the technological innovations that have made Austria the greatest Kingdom in the world. The more you prove your loyalty to me and my house, the more you will be rewarded in this regard. Serve me well, and you will see your wealth and power soar to new heights.

Betray me, and the men next to you, and you should expect the most fierce of retaliation. I can consider only the death of you and your house an appropriate price for such betrayal. Remember this well gentlemen, you have chosen to join me on a lifelong journey to see the establishment of a Great German Empire, and now that you have sworn your allegiance to me, and my house, I expect you to fulfill your obligations.

Now I am sure that you all have your affairs, which you must put in order now that you have sworn service to me. You are free to return to your homes as Grand Dukes, with all the prestige that follows such a lofty title. I expect to see major reforms being instituted in your realms over the coming months. If you have any questions, you know where to find me. Until we meet again, gentlemen."

After saying this, Berengar lifted his chalice in the air and took a swig of wine before departing from the Great Hall of his Palace, leaving the newly established Grand Dukes of the South German Confederation alone in a state of both excitement and despair. Though they had risen in the noble hierarchy and gained access to some of Austria's secrets.. Ultimately, they had sworn themselves, their family, and their people to the service of a Tyrant.

Chapter 497 - The Anagpur Delegates Arrive Part I

Sitting atop the back of a brilliant chocolate colored steed was a man dressed from head to toe in the unique garb of Medieval India. This man was named Ishwar Tomara, and he was the son of the current Regent of the Anagpur Empire, which lie in the northwestern corner of the Indian Subcontinent.

Normally he could not be bothered to waste the time necessary to travel to the Western World, and yet despite his reservations, he had received orders from the boy-emperor Dharya Tomara to undertake such a journey. Throughout his travels, Ishwar had seen many tremendous sights, from the neighboring Turk-Persian Empire that belonged to the Timurids, to the glistening city of Constantinople, which acted as the gateway to the western world.

However, nothing he had seen until now had prepared him for the technological wonderland that was the Kingdom of Austria. Having landed in Trieste after chartering a ferry from the mighty Empire of Byzantium, the Indian noblemen could not believe his eyes.

The scale of the vessels which sat in the harbor was beyond anything he had ever seen. While the Austrian fleet had not yet been fully retrofitted into a class of iron-clad frigates, there were still several of them on display in the major port city of the western kingdom. Though this new class of warship had yet to be revealed to the world, Ishwar gained a first glimpse of the future that was on the horizon.

It was not only the technological marvels that were the steam powered ironclads that caught the Indian nobleman's attention but also the many factories that existed in the port city, designed to aid in the construction of naval and merchant vessels alike. Every aspect of this city was designed around two facets of life: manufacturing and trade.

The classic German architecture was blended with modern necessities such as plumbing and wood-burning stoves to create a beautifully sculpted and clean city free from the waste and litter commonly found in the streets of other cities around the world.

The translator which had been procured for their journey during their brief stay in Constantinople had a smug expression on his face. This was not his first time visiting Trieste, nor would it be his last. On more than one occasion, he had acted as a translator for those seeking to do business in Austria. Over the years, the man had seen the small realm go from being a backwater duchy, to the most powerful Kingdom in central Europe, and perhaps the western world as a whole.

"Magnificent isn't it? However, if you think Trieste is grand, wait until you enter the Capital of this Kingdom. Kufstein is more than just a city. It is an impregnable fortress protected by multiple layers of walls, each section mounted with fearsome cannons and a full-time garrison numbering in the thousands."

In response to this comment, Ishwar nodded his head in silence, his mouth agape as he gazed upon the city of Trieste. While Trieste was a major port city, it paled in comparison to the grandeur of Kufstein, the capital of the Kingdom of Austria. Something that Ishwar and his delegation were about to understand.

With a smile on his face, the translator led the Indian delegation towards the rail station where they would board the next rail car, and travel to Kufstein in the fashion that had become most common for wealthy visitors. Ishwar and his companions were stunned by sights they saw as they walked through

the streets, however when they witnessed the train pull into the station, they could hardly believe their eyes.

This behemoth of a vehicle operated entirely without the power of beasts of burden. Just what magic had the Austrians conjured to make such a thing. The Indian nobleman was so surprised by the train that he let out a gasp when he first laid eyes on it. For the natives of Austria who boarded the passenger cars, they paid no heed to the foreigner's shock, for such a thing had become a common sight.

Ishwar and his companions had purchased first-class tickets for a substantial sum, thus they were afforded their own train car, however they were not the least bit remorseful for spending so much gold. Instead, they gazed upon the magnificently crafted cabin with wonder. Not only was the car furnished with the finest sofas, but it even had its own personal bar, along with its own personal bartender, and even a few attendants who they could order food from.

This first-class train car was indeed worth the price of admission, assuming one had the money to spend, and was on a long journey. Ishwar enjoyed freshly cooked meals by the kitchen car, and the Austrian delicacies they created with a pairing of fine wines, distilled spirits, blended drinks, and hearty german lagers. He had not even arrived yet at the Royal Palace, and yet he felt as if he had been treated with the luxury that only a King could understand.

Out of all his diplomatic visits, none were more garish than this visit, and he had yet to even meet his host. Truly, Austria had surpassed his expectations in every way. When Ishwar wasn't enjoying the meals, or the drinks, he was gazing out the window in wonder as the fertile fields of Austria, which were maintained by a small amount of farmers and their horse powered machines, passed him by. Even after entering the alps, the mechanized agriculture of the kingdom of Austria continued to display its dominance.

The journey from Trieste to Kufstein lasted a few hours, and by the time the Indian noblemen stepped off the train and into the city, he could hardly believe his eyes. The Grand Cathedral of Kufstein, as well as the other architectural masterpieces that had been created, soared in the sky above the many half-timber tenements and luxurious villas.

In the distance, on the hills above the fortress city, was the giant bronze statue of Berengar and his fallen steed Erwin, looking over the city and its people as its eternal protector, its sword pointed in the direction of Rome. With the sun gleaming upon its metallic surface, Ishwar felt as if he had stepped foot into a Kingdom belonging to a fairy tale.

Under the direction of the translator, Ishwar and his delegation received visitor passes to the city, and were permitted to stay for a grand total of ninety days any longer, and the local authorities would imprison them as illegal immigrants. Having been approved for a diplomatic visit, they then found their way to the Austrian Royal Palace, where the guards began to check their documents for verification.

After a few moments, the men confirmed that the Indian Delegation was valid, before checking them for any potential weapons. A thorough search was conducted where they were then approved for entry. When Ishwar finally entered the courtyard of the Royal Palace of Austria, he felt as if his breath had been taken away. Such a large and marvelous palace was greater than anything that existed in his homeland.

Ultimately, he was forced to calm his nerves before entering the Royal Palace, where the servants led him to the Great Hall, where Berengar was seated on his throne waiting for his guests from the East. After witnessing the grand throne of the Royal Palace, and the golden-haired, blue-eyed king who seated upon it, even Ishwar felt compelled to kneel before this mighty figure.

The Indian noblemen was the first to do so, where his delegation followed his actions. Silence prevailed for a few moments before Ishwar was able to gather and express his thoughts in a calm and collected manner.

"Allow me to introduce myself. I am Ishwar Tomara, cousin to his majesty Dharya Tomara, and personal representative of the mighty Anagpur Empire. Though, truthfully, after witnessing the wealth and prosperity of your Kingdom, I feel embarrassed to say such a thing. I have travelled a long way, on behalf of my people, for a single purpose. To engage in trade with your Majesty and hopefully secure the weapons that your people refer to as the arkebuse."

Berengar rested his chin on his fist as he listened to the words spoken by the translator, who acted as a bridge of communication between him and the ambassador of the Anagpur Empire. Truth be told, he was unaware of its existence until relatively recently, when he was alerted by his department of immigration about the request for a diplomatic visit from the Indian Empire.

To prepare for this meeting, Berengar had sifted through many old documents, learning everything he could about this dying Empire in the east. He was impressed by its rich history, and how it differed from the timeline of his past life. However, he was interested in its current politics, which he had little information on.

Thanks to Linde's efforts over the years, his spy network was now vast, and with a little effort he could gather some accurate information about the current court affairs of the Anagpur Empire. Thus, he knew that this young man was the son of the true power behind the Anagpur throne.

It was with this in mind that Berengar put on a gracious facade as he gazed upon the Indian Ambassador and welcomed him to his home.

"I am King Berengar von Kufstein, first of my name. Allow me to welcome you into my home and Kingdom. I am sure your journey was long and tiring. You and your delegation are more than welcome to sit at my table for the coming feast. As far as trade between our two realms is concerned, this can wait for another day when you are all well rested."

Ishwar had a good impression of Berengar, despite ruling over such a wealthy, and powerful kingdom which contained technological marvels he could never dream of, he still acted gracefully in the face of foreign visitors, from a dying Empire a long way from his borders. Thus, he acted equally respectfully as he responded to Berengar's invitation.

"Your hospitality is most welcome, and I look forward to sharing a meal with your family."

Upon hearing this, Berengar smiled once more, and got up from his throne, where he led Ishwar and his delegation to the dining room.. The negotiations between their two realms had only just begun.

Chapter 498 - The Anangpur Delegates Arrive Part II

Berengar sat down at the head of his table. On the opposite side sat the ambassador of the Anangpur Empire. His delegation was surrounding him much in the same way that Berengar's family did to him. The representatives of the two opposing realms made small talk as wine was poured by the servants, and the food was being prepared.

The Austrian king took a sip from his gilded chalice before speaking about inquiring about current events on the other side of the world.

"So tell me, Ishwar, just what is it like living in the Anangpur Empire? I have not been to that particular part of the world just yet, though I very much would like to see the glory of India with my own eyes at least once during this lifetime."

Ishwar looked up from his wineglass with a complicated expression on his face. He knew that his family's Empire was one civil war away from being completely disintegrated, and while normally he would deny this to ensure the prestige of their once mighty empire remained intact in the eyes of foreigners, the sites he had witnessed in Austria had so humbled him, that he could not very well in good faith keep up his usual confident facade. Thus, with a heavy sigh, he revealed an honest answer about the state of his homeland.

"Gone are the days of our Empire's glory, instead corruption is rife within the aristocracy, and my father the Regent is merely living out his fantasy of being a wealthy Emperor while our family's realm collapses around us. Truthfully, he would rather spend the expense of acquiring your weapons on lavish feasts and exotic concubines.

However, the boy emperor still has some degree of authority, and is greatly interested in purchasing your weapons, for what use he has in mind I do not know. Perhaps he aspires to conquer our southern neighbors in one last attempt to restore the glory of our dying Empire.

Or maybe the boy is afraid that the Muslims to the west are planning another invasion, as they have continued to pursue the wealth of our lands for the past few centuries. It should be no secret to a Kingdom as wealthy and powerful as yours that the Timurid Empire is amassing troops. Unfortunately, our spy network is under-funded, and riddled with incompetency, thus we do not know for sure whether they plan to attack our western border or attack their neighbors to the west."

The Austrian King took a sip of his wine as he listened to the Ambassador's story, he was quite surprised that he did not bother to present an image of power and glory even if his realm was really in a state of decline. After all, one should always negotiate from a position of power. Despite this, Berengar felt inclined to give the ambassador a bit of good news to help lift his spirits.

"You do not need to worry so much about the Timurid Empire, at least not for the time being. The troops they are preparing for war are not meant for your Empire, instead they seek to reclaim the holy land from the Byzantine Empire, a conflict my troops are sure to take part in. I promise you that when my armies have finished dealing with this little jihad of theirs, they won't have the strength to invade your borders for another hundred years."

The confidence that seeped from every word that left Berengar's mouth was enough to charm the Indian Ambassador, however there was still a hint of doubt in his minds towards Berengar's words, and thus he inquired about the source of this information.

"How can you be so sure about this?"

In response to this question, Berengar wore a smile before nodding his head towards his Second Wife, who immediately knew what Berengar was implying. She sighed before revealing her esteemed position within the Austrian Government.

"Because my agents have infiltrated every major civilization west of the Indus, when it comes to Austrian Intelligence, we pride ourselves on our ability to obtain and verify accurate information from all over the western world. The Timurid Empire plans to launch a jihad against Byzantium. In doing so, they plan to bring the might of the Mamluk and Jalayirid Sultanates to their side as they make one last attempt to reclaim the holy land from the Orthodox Empire."

It shocked Ishwar to hear not only the King of Austria, but his Queen was so confident in their ability to accurately predict their enemies' movements. Though there was one specific phrase that caught his attention. Thus, he asked for clarification on it.

"Last attempt? How do you know this will be their last attempt?"

Upon hearing this question, both Berengar and Linde began to chuckle. After a few moments, Berengar swirled the wine in his glass before making his stance on the Jihad clear.

"By the time I am through with the Muslim world, they will never again dare to march upon the western world. The price for their arrogance will be paid with the blood of millions of their people. They will understand the dominance of Austria and its allies, or they will face extinction.

The German people do not have the patience to endure centuries of bitter warfare simply because the Saracen's faith dictates that all should bow before their god. Nor should my people be expected to. One way or another, this will be the last Jihad. I will make sure of that..."

Again, Ishwar and the Anangpur delegation were surprised to see the limitless confidence on Berengar's face as he spoke about putting an end to Islam's invasions of the west. For centuries the Christian and Muslim faiths had been bitter rivals, and though in this timeline the Christians had been victorious in the crusades, and in doing so restored the might of their Byzantine allies. The resentment between the two peoples had never ceased, nor had the hostilities.

To so boldly claim that he would be responsible for ending the centuries long feud between Europe and the Middle East would be considered an act of arrogance by anyone else, but after witnessing the technological marvels of the Kingdom of Austria, Ishwar was inclined to believe that Berengar was speaking the truth.

Thus, the ambassador chuckled before taking a sip from his wine. His father would never believe the things he had witnessed on his visit to Austria, nor would he care for the words of hubris that this foreign King spoke. Yet Ishwar was determined to see whether Berengar's words would become reality. He smiled gracefully before responding to this strange man from the west.

"I would very much like to see your vision come true..."

Berengar did not respond to this comment, instead the servants entered the room and brought forth the meal that had been prepared for this occasion. After digging into the fine Austrian cuisine, Berengar realized now would be a great time to get involved in the spice trade. Thus, after taking a bite of his schnitzel, Berengar addressed the foreign ambassador.

"You said earlier that you wanted to purchase weapons from my kingdom. this could be arranged for a fair price, however I also have an interest in establishing trading ties between our two realms, and I mean more than just a mere arms deal.

For quite some time now, I have had to use the Byzantine Empire as a proxy to obtain certain goods from the Eastern World. Now that I am meeting with a representative from the Anangpur Empire face to face, I was wondering whether you are interested in exporting some of your spices to the Kingdom of Austria?"

After hearing this, Ishwar felt excited. Austria appeared to be absurdly wealthy, and establishing a trade with them in terms of spices was a good way to add another stream of revenue to the treasury, which by now was becoming depleted. Thus, he quickly nodded his head before asking the question on his mind.

"This could be possible. Tell me, what kinds of spices did you have in mind?"

Berengar pretended to think about it for a few moments before naming a few spices that came to the west because of British Colonization of India in his past life.

"Off of the top of my head, I would very much like to introduce turmeric, coriander, fenugreek, cinnamon, cumin, black pepper, ginger, and cardamom to the Austrian palette. What do you say? Do you have the authority to begin shipping these to my Kingdom En masse? I assure you that travel to the western world will be much more convenient in a few years."

Ishwar nodded his head with a pleasant smile on his face, before taking a bite out of his schnitzel, though it differed vastly from the cuisine he was used to, he seemed to enjoy it as his smile grew even wider after tasting the fine Austrian Cuisine.

"It is not a problem. I assure you whatever demand your Kingdom has for it, we have the ability to supply. The biggest problem is getting the goods to your lands. Anangpur is a long distance away from Austria, and there is no direct route via the sea."

Berengar shook his head when he heard this while wearing a confident smile.

"Not to worry, I have an alliance with the byzantine Empire. You simply need to get your goods to the red sea, and my merchants will do the rest."

Upon hearing this, Ishwar smiled before nodding his head in agreement.

"Very well. I look forward to doing business with you."

With that said, Berengar and Ishwar would continue to enjoy the feast until late into the night.. In doing so, beginning a prosperous trade between their two realms.

Chapter 499 - A Bit Of Sport

Berengar had awoken bright and early for his morning exercise routine, after a morning of running, and lifting weights, he immediately jumped into training with the sword. Over five years had passed since he first picked up a sword, and though he rarely found himself staring down the blade of an opponent on the battlefield these days, he still committed himself to training with the weapons.

However, as of the last few years, he had introduced a new exercise to his daily routine, and he was in the middle of that right now. Dressed in little more than a pair of boxers, Berengar stared down his opponent with one good eye. The two half-naked men were several feet apart, which Berengar used to his advantage as he closed the distance and dropped to one knee.

In a moment's notice, Berengar had penetrated through his opponent's defenses and grabbed ahold of his legs where he lifted the man into the air and carried him a few feet before slamming him on to the thick padded surface below. However, unlike traditional wrestling rules from his past life, this conflict did not end with a point. Instead, the two men scrambled for a superior position, ultimately resulting in Berengar taking the man's back.

With his legs wrapped around the man's torso as a body triangle, the young King of Austria locked in a rear naked choke, where he compressed around the throat of his opponent like an anaconda. After a single second, the other man tapped out, resulting in Berengar releasing his position of control and rising to his feet.

Wrestling was a staple in medieval Europe culture and was a sport for the nobility of many Kingdoms. However, Berengar had shifted the rules in Austria to be a more efficient means of combat and self defense.

Going off the memory of his combatives training from his years in the US army, Berengar had incorporated his limited knowledge of Brazilian jiu jitsu into Austria's variant of wrestling, and in doing so, created a new breed of martial art for this world. Austrian Grappling had over the past few years become more and more advanced, as many practitioners experimented with submissions in a safe standard set forth by the crown of Austria.

By now, it had been introduced to the youth as a school sport, and could be seen across many of the public and private institutions of learning that had sprawled up across the kingdom as competition. Of course, when Berengar was training with his opponent, he was completely unaware that his guest from the Anangpur Empire had found his way to the gym embedded within Berengar's Palace.

Upon witnessing the fascinating combat sport, Ishwar clapped and whistled when Berengar sunk in the choke. Though he was unaware of how effective such a thing was, it was apparent that the King of Austria's opponent was at his last breath the moment he tapped. When Berengar gazed upon the foreign guest with his one good eye, he smiled before making a comment about his untimely appearance.

"Would you like to join me for a bit of sport?"

Standing beside Ishwar was the translator who conveyed Berengar's words to the man. Upon hearing this challenge, he chuckled. He instantly disrobed to a similar state of attire that Berengar was dressed in. As for Berengar's sparring partner, he took a back step as the two men circled one another. The Anangpur ambassador boasted as he got close to the Austrian King.

"Are you sure about that? I'll have you know I am a master of Kalaripayattu, my country's martial arts."

Berengar struggled to hold back his laughter as he heard this. In his mind were memories from an era where unarmed martial arts were mixed to perfection in a brutally effective combat sport. Though he had little mixed martial arts training, he had extensive experience with the US Army's variant known as combatives. He had even won a few competitions set up by the Army.

When compared with Kalaripayattu, which was known by fighters to be one of the less efficient traditional martial arts, Berengar was unafraid, instead he was brimming with confidence as he boldly challenged the Indian Ambassador.

"He who dares, wins..."

After hearing the translation of these words, Ishwar joined Berengar in laughter before inquiring about the rule set.

"Tell me, what are the rules of our little competition?"

Upon hearing this Berengar was excited, one of his biggest complaints about mixed martial arts from his past life was that there were too many unnecessary rules added over the years, and its predecessor known as Vale Tudo, or no hold's barred had long since been banned in the more civilized countries of the modern world.

Dwelling upon this, Berengar had devised an interesting set of rules. In doing so, he responded with a wicked smile while raising three fingers to his Indian Guest.

"There are three rules to our competition. Rule number one no biting. Rule number two, no eye gouging, and rule number three, no groin shots. Everything else is fair game. The winner will be determined by knockout, tapout, or if one fighter is no longer capable of defending themselves intelligently. As for the referee, my sparring partner here will act as witness.

Ishwar smiled and nodded his head in agreement to these terms, before boasting once more.

"Very well prepare to be beaten!"

The Indian ambassador immediately jumped into a flashy kick as Berengar merely grinned before catching hold of the man's leg and dumping him on his back with a sweep. Rather than follow up for the kill. Instead, Berengar decided to have a little fun with his prey. He stepped back and took up a tall guard as he tucked his chin in his neck.

Ishwar immediately dusted himself off. He no longer had an arrogant smile on his face. Instead, he was quite furious that his attack did not land as successfully as he hoped. He charged towards Berengar before throwing a few punches, which the Austrian King quickly parried before countering with a jab, a right hook, and a leg kick, which instantly caused the man to stumble.

Berengar did not hold back his strikes, and a vicious leg kick was quite debilitating to the uninitiated. Luckily for Ishwar, Berengar was an amateur in kickboxing. Thus, his strikes did not contain the amount of power that a more experienced kickboxer would use.

Still, it was more than Ishwar was expecting. The man quickly tried to get to his feet, however unfortunately for him, as he was rising to his feet, Berengar had grabbed the back of his head and pulled it into a savage knee to the forehead, knocking him to the ground in a dazed state.

Berengar was not so merciful this time, and immediately passed by the man's guard before putting a knee on his belly, where he landed powerful a series of strikes on the man's head. His bare knuckles and elbows pounded upon the Anangpur ambassador's face, each one more vicious than the last, until finally the man was no longer capable of defending himself. When this became apparent to the referee, he pulled Berengar off his opponent, signalling his victory.

The Austrian King rose from his kneeling position and offered a hand to support the man whose face he had beaten bloody. After regaining his clarity, Ishwar accepted Berengar's kindness and was dragged to his feet. He was less outraged than Berengar had initially expected and instead had a stupid smile on his face as he asked Berengar about the skills he had used to beat him.

"What was that just now? It was as if my Empire's unarmed techniques were entirely useless."

Berengar chuckled as he heard this before informing the man of what he had used to beat him.

"Austrian Grappling, and Kickboxing. When combined, it is possibly the most efficient form of unarmed combat in this world."

Berengar was not lying, though he had limited knowledge of martial arts. There were plenty of martial geniuses in his country who were happy to get paid for beating up other men. Thus, after introducing Austrian Grappling, which was a mixture of traditional European wrestling, and Brazilian jiu jitsu, as well as Austrian Kickboxing, which had rule set similar to Lethwei, also known as Burmese kickboxing from his past life. The various martial artists of his Kingdom had worked tirelessly to improve the rudimentary techniques that their King had introduced them to.

With an emphasis on practicality, rather than tradition, the past few years had caused an explosive growth in martial arts. It would not be long before a truly effective mixed martial art like ancient Greek pankration resurfaced in the heart of Europe.

Ishwar wiped the blood from his nose before asking Berengar the question on his mind.

"Can you teach me?"

In response to this, Berengar sighed and shook his head.

"I am afraid that I do not have enough time to teach you."

This caused a look of dejection to appear on the Indian ambassador's face until he heard Berengar's next words.

"But I know someone who can."

Berengar would later introduce Ishwar to one of Austrian Martial arts gyms that had popped up in the city of Kufstein over the past few years.. When the man returned home to the Anangpur Empire, he would bring with him a rudimentary understanding of more practical unarmed combat.

Chapter 500 - A Brief Journey To Innsbruck

Having fought to their heart's content, Berengar and the ambassador from the Angapur Empire retired from the gym. Berengar took a bath in his royal suite, and Ishwar did so in the bathroom that was attached to his room.

After cleaning the sweat and blood from their bodies, they returned to the Great Hall, where Berengar smiled upon seeing the ambassador, where he laid out the plans he had for the day.

"You said you were interested in purchasing weapons from my Kingdom, well today we will take the train to Innsbruck, which is where we manufacture most of the weapons that are available to export to foreign realms. It won't be a long trip, so there is no need to pack any provisions. We should be back in Kufstein by dinnertime."

After the translator conveyed Berengar's thoughts to the ambassador, he smiled and nodded his head before accepting Berengar's kindness.

"Very well, lead the way."

The Austrian King led his guest down to the railway station, where they boarded the private passenger train there was reserved for the royal family. Berengar had gone above and beyond to ensure that his family had enough space to eat, play, sleep, and bathe on any extended journey they may take across the future German Empire.

This entire train was not only 100% dedicated to the royal family and the servants they took with them, but it was also wholly armored to protect against a variety of threats, including the most modern Austrian small arms.

Despite being armored, it did not look like an armored vehicle from afar. In fact, it looked almost exactly the same as a standard passenger train, making it difficult to identify which train the Royal Family was on at any given time.

After stepping on board the vehicle, it surprised Ishwar to see that they decorated the interior even more extravagant than the first-class train car he had taken to Kufstein just a day prior. In fact, one could actually claim it was a mobile palace, with the expense Berengar had spent to ensure that his family travelled in luxury.

When Berengar saw the man's gawking expression, he simply chuckled before taking a seat on a black velvet sofa. The moment he did so, a beautiful young servant appeared by his side and handed a glass of wine. Berengar smiled and accepted the alcohol gracefully.

"Thanks, doll."

After saying this, Ishwar sat down next to him and received a glass for himself. The King of Austria and the Ambassador of the Anangpur empire made small talk as they continued their journey to Innsbruck. Considering that Kufstein was also within the Tyrolean Alps, it did not take long for the two of them to arrive at their destination.

Upon stepping off of the Royal Train, Linde's elder brother Liutbert, who was the ruling authority over the city, immediately greeted Berengar and his guest.

"Greetings your majesty, it has been a long time since you have been in the home of my ancestors. I believe the last time that you graced us with your presence, you punched a hole through my city's walls with your cannons.

Berengar chuckled when he heard this response. It was true. It had been many years since he visited the city that was once been the capital of Tyrol. Ishwar looked at the two men in confusion, he had no idea the recent history the region of Austria had gone through, or how rapid Berengar's rise to power had been..

The years had been kind to Liutbert. As the ruler over one of the most prominent industrial cities in the Kingdom, the prodigal son of the late Count Lothar had received much wealth and prosperity through various means such as renting property which his family owned and opening up his own businesses which now dominated in multiple sectors.

Naturally, after Berengar's political reforms, any taxes collected by the local government were not to be deposited into the treasury of the noble who held the title to the land, but were instead transferred to the Royal Treasury in Kufstein. The crown would then allocate these funds to the various cities and districts across the Kingdom based on the federal budget, and the needs of the people.

Because of this, the nobility of Austria extracted most of their wealth from private corporations, which they used their vast family fortunes to form and invest in. Liutbert was no exception to this rule, and had even started a steel company of his own, which produced a large quantity of various steels.

Berengar had a wide smile on his face as he engaged in further small talk with the count before taking Ishwar to his arms factory.

"Your sister is doing well, by the way. I know you two communicate little these days, but you should at the very least be aware that you have three nieces and nephews."

Liutbert merely nodded his head in silence when he heard this. It was only natural that Linde would have more children after Hans. The last time he saw her, she was already pregnant during her wedding.

Though he had walked his sister down the aisle during the ceremony, he had not done so out of the goodness in his heart.

If it weren't for Berengar ordering him to do such a thing, he would have stayed away from his sister's wedding altogether. There was much resentment in the young man's heart towards his little sister. In his eyes, she was responsible for their father's fate. It was quite likely that Lothar would have succeeded in his attempt to wrest control over the Ducal Throne of Austria from the late Duke Wilmar had Linde not aided Berengar in his efforts.

If not for Linde's efforts behind the scenes, there was little doubt in Liutbert's mind that Berengar would have never succeeded in his early conquests. While Berengar may be a capable commander, whose armies wielded more advanced technology than their enemies, there were many instances where without Linde's help, he would have failed, or even perished long before he could challenge Lothar openly.

Liutbert had forgiven Berengar for usurping his birthright. After all, he could understand the man's reasoning for taking such actions. It was Lothar who had plotted against Berengar in the beginning and had been at least partially responsible for more than one attempt on his life.

Despite this, he could not easily forgive Linde; as her actions were outright treasonous. For the sake of her lover, who she had not known for long, she had betrayed her family, and supported the actions of their enemies, which ultimately resulted in the death of their father, and the decline of their house.

Although the von Habsburg-Innsbruck family was now wealthier than ever, the respect, power, and authority they once commanded had declined significantly. From ruling over the entirety of Tyrol to ruling over the city of Innsbruck and the surrounding villages. There was only one person to blame for this: Linde von Kufstein.

However, Liutbert let none of this cloud his judgement, and ultimately showed Berengar the respect that a powerful Conquerer justly deserved.

"Your Majesty, is there anything I may assist you with while you are here in the City of Innsbruck?"

Berengar clasped his brother-in-law on the shoulder as he described what he had planned for the day in sufficient detail.

"I just plan to show the ambassador from the Anangpur Empire here some wares that he wishes to purchase from the Innsbruck Armory, as well as show their efficiency in battle. If you could rally the local garrison to give him a brief show of the arkebuses and falconet cannons, I would most appreciate it."

Liutbert nodded his head in response to this, before giving the King a proper salute.

"It will be done, your majesty!"

Berengar chuckled when he heard this before commenting on Liutbert's formality.

"No need to be so formal with me Liutbert, we are brothers by law. So I would feel much more comfortable if you called me by my name."

Liutbert nodded his head with a forced expression as he did as instructed.

"Of course... Berengar"

After saying this, Berengar brought Ishwar towards the Innsbruck Arsenal, which handled the manufacturing of most of the arms exported from Austria to foreign nations.