

Steel 501

Chapter 501 - A Necessary Demonstration

After traveling around the City of Innsbruck for a good bit, Berengar, Liutbert, and Ishwar had gathered at the Innsbruck Armory. While some of the production capacity for the Austrian Royal Army was conducted here, the overwhelming majority of the goods manufactured in this facility were designed with export in mind. Whether that be to their allies in the form of flintlocks and 12 lb cannons, or to non-allied nations with arkebuses and falconets.

As the men walked through the facility, they witnessed sights of thousands of firearms stacked into pallets dedicated for export. With the victories in Iberia, and the ongoing massacre against the Eastern Coalition, the demand for firearms and gunpowder had increased substantially.

Berengar had not only begun to outfit the entire Byzantine and Granadan Armies with their weapons and armor. But, he had also supplied foreign kingdoms that were non-hostile, such as Wallachia, and the Kalmar union with large quantities of arkebuses and falconets. The value of the international arms trade that Austria handled had grown significantly.

When Ishwar gazed upon the thousands of stockpiled firearms, and the hundreds of cannons, he could hardly believe his eyes. This small Kingdom in the west had such substantial manufacturing ability to make so many weapons, and keep them stockpiled. He wondered why they did not employ them in their own armed forces. Curiosity got the better of him, and he uttered his thoughts unknowingly.

"With so many firearms, why have you not employed them in your armed forces?"

When Berengar and Liutbert heard this they both broke out into laughter, it was only after a few moments where the two men were able to calm themselves and explain their reasoning for not employing these more primitive weapons.

"You see, these weapons are obsolete compared to the ones employed by our armed forces, by several generations of technological advancements. We would never sell our advanced weapons to foreign kingdoms even if they're allies.

Look at this for example..."

Upon saying this Berengar grabbed an Arkebuse, and a Flintlock Musket from their two opposing racks, and inspected them to make sure they were clear before properly handling the firearms. The difference in size, and weight between the two guns was quite substantial, and thus he handed them over one at a time to the Ambassador from the east.

"I suppose you are familiar with the Arkebuse by now. It is a primitive firearm which uses a slow burning match to ignite the powder in the pan, and send a iron, stone, or lead ball down range. This weapon takes anywhere from 30 seconds to a minute to reload in the hands of a skilled individual and has an effective range of at best a hundred feet.

This is the weapon can penetrate through most forms of armor at close range, and your average levy can be appropriately trained in its use in a matter of weeks. Thus, greatly enhancing the capabilities of most feudal armies. However, when compared to the weapons we provide to our allies, it is severely lacking."

Ishwar inspected the weapon and was surprised when he heard it was a primitive model supplied to neutral nations. In his eyes, it was the most advanced handheld firearm he had ever laid eyes on. Thus, when Berengar handed him the rifled musket, he was even more astounded. With a proud smile on his face, the Austrian king explained this weapon's capabilities.

"This is a more advanced firearm. We call it the flintlock. Because of certain classified manufacturing techniques, this weapon has superior range and rate of fire when compared to the matchlock arkebuse. A soldier armed with this weapon, who is trained efficiently in its use, can hit a man-sized target out to roughly three hundred yards. Perhaps even further, if he is a marksman. A skilled operator can reload it in about 20 seconds.

This is the standard arm of our allies, impressive enough in its own right, but two generations behind what we are currently supplying our armed forces with. Come, let us show you how effective the weapons you will purchase really are."

Ishwar could hardly believe what he was being told. Was Austria really so far ahead militarily than the rest of the world? When he remembered the trains he had taken, the ironclad vessels, he considered perhaps Berengar was not bluffing.

Berengar and Liutbert quickly led the man to the testing field, where all weapons were test fired, before being given a proof mark certifying that they were up to spec for combat use. In the hands of a platoon of soldiers from the garrison, many arkebuses were loaded. The men poured the black powder down the muzzle before placing a lead ball in its bore and packing it down with a ramrod.

After doing this, they placed some black powder from their flasks onto the pans, before lighting a slow burning match and placing it on the device which held it in place, the men then cocked the action back, took aim at a series of straw targets set up 25 feet away which wore a steel breastplate in the style commonly worn by Knights of the era, and squeezed the lever that acted as a primitive trigger.

The match landed on the powdered pan and ignited its contents, sending a coordinated volley down range and into the targets, punching many holes straight through the steel plates, and into the straw targets behind it. Ishwar was amazed; just like the old general had said, it truly could defeat western armor.

When Berengar saw the excited look in the man's eyes, a proud smile spread across his lips as he spoke of the grandeur of such weapons on the battlefield.

"Imagine this. You have an army of 5,000 men, each one of them equipped with this weapon. Your enemies are charging at your lines, and your soldiers fire a volley of these weapons down range and into their enemies. At what point do the survivors break ranks and flee for their lives?"

Ishwar was thoroughly convinced that his father's armies needed these weapons if they wished to maintain control over their dying Empire, however a thought occurred in his mind as he was imagining the future conflicts they would engage in. Thus, he asked the question on his mind, hoping for an appropriate response.

"You say these weapons take thirty seconds to a minute to reload? Then what happens when the enemy realizes this and attacks our ranks before our soldiers can fire another volley?"

Berengar did not hesitate to answer this question, instead a smile formed on his face as he whistled to the soldiers of the garrison. In doing so, the men pulled out their bayonets, which looked more like medieval daggers, and plugged them into the bore of their arkebuses. Where they lunged forward in standard drills.

"These are plug bayonets, after you have fired your shot, you withdraw it from your belt, and place that handle of the weapon into your arkebus's bore, in doing so, you have effectively turned your firearm into a spear for melee combat.

A fair bit of advice: ensure that your troops are well trained not to equip their bayonet with a loaded weapon. If you were to accidentally fire your arkebus while the bayonet is in place, it could end poorly..."

The Ambassador from the east had a wide smile on his face. Despite the downsides to such a weapon, it was still superior to standard infantry use than anything he had come across. Truly, the Austrians had thought of everything when designing this weapon.

With this in mind, Ishwar was eager to set an order for the purchase and delivery of these excellent weapons.

"Tell me, how much does one of these arkebuses cost?"

Berengar grinned when he heard this before responding by raising three fingers.

"My standard rate for the arkebuses is three Austrian guldens per arkebus, while the rate for falconets is twenty guldens per falconet. If you buy in bulk, so let's say a thousand arkebuses, or 10 falconets, I'll give you a 10% discount on your overall price.

I only accept Austrian Guldens for trade, so if you have brought your local currency then you will have to conduct a currency exchange with the National Bank of Austria, since I am unfamiliar with the value of the currency you use in your Empire, I won't be able to give you an estimate of the exchange rate. However, you should know there is no debasement in my currency, thus it is extremely pure, and of high value."

The Anangpur ambassador nodded his head in silence. If he truly wanted to gain sufficient arms for his father's army, he would have to consult with the man himself, and explain just how effective these weapons were in person. Otherwise, he could never receive the approval for such an expense. After careful consideration, Ishwar finally conveyed these thoughts to Berengar.

"I will have to return to my homeland and consult with the Emperor about the expense. I am certain it is well worth the price, but I simply do not have the authority to negotiate such a large sum of money. I will convey your asking price to my father and inform him of the effectiveness of these weapons. I thank you for the hospitality you have shown me."

Berengar struggled to maintain a smile as he heard this. The simple thought in his mind was too rude to speak aloud.

Next time, send a delegate who has the authority to complete the transaction, you fucking amateurs.

Ultimately, he forced a cordial smile and nodded his head before responding.

"Very well. I look forward to your return. When we return to Kufstein, I will give you a parting gift for your emperor, make sure to give him my regards."

After saying this, Berengar and Ishwar depart from the city of Innsbruck, leaving Liutbert behind to govern the city.

Chapter 502 - Marching On Warsaw

Eckhard stood at the front of his army. Since the battle which resulted in the death of the Polish Prince, the Austrian General had crushed every armed force he had come across. Now, after weeks of struggle, he had reached the city of Warsaw, the current capital of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

As Eckhard gazed through his binoculars, he released a heavy sigh. Despite his best efforts to coerce the Polish King to surrender, the only thing he could see were signs of resistance within the city. For whatever reason, the madman had chosen to fight until his last dying breath against the Austro-Bohemian alliance.

As the trebuchets were behind the castle's walls and prepared for combat, Eckhard simply waved his hand, in doing so giving his artillery brigades the silent order to unleash hell upon the hostile city. Krakow was a massacre, it was a show of force intending to display what happens when Austria's citizens were attacked. Yet here in Warsaw, Eckhard had no plans to annihilate the city, instead he simply wanted to eliminate the enemy soldiers upon the ramparts.

With an crackling thunder, the roars of the 7.5cm High Explosive shells shot out of the bores of their cannons and whistled in the air. Seconds later, they fell precisely onto their targets, resulting in a catastrophic explosion directly upon the Polish trebuchets. The fiery blasts engulfed more than just the siege weapons. Each shell was capable of annihilate anything within a hundred square meters, thus snuffing the souls of those unfortunate to be within the blast range.

As the Artillery crews reloaded their guns, and prepared to fire another round onto the city, Eckhard held up his hand, ceasing their actions.

"Hold your fire!"

The nearby officers relayed his orders to their troops, and the barrage came to an immediate halt. In the distance, a tattered white flag flew above the city's gates. Finally, somebody with some sense was willing to surrender before any further blood needed to be shed.

Eckhard grabbed ahold of a lance, and attached a white flag to its shaft as he rode out with his personal guard, to meet with whichever man had the conscience to end this senseless slaughter before the entire city was massacred.

After meeting the host halfway, Eckhard noticed that the man across from him was roughly Berengar's age; he had a grim expression on his face, Eckhard recognized it the moment he saw it, because it was the same expression he wore every time he looked at his reflection. This was the stare of a man who had endured a hundred battles and was too tired to give a damn any longer.

The young knight unleashed his sword, in doing so provoking Eckhard's guards, who raised their needle rifles preparing for combat. However, before they could pull the triggers, the man tossed the sword away. Upon witnessing this scene, Eckhard could have sworn he heard an echo the moment its steel blade clashed with the dirt below.

The young man spoke with a voice full of bitterness and defeat as his lifeless eyes gazed upon Eckhard with a look of understanding.

"The city is yours, on behalf of the People of Poland, I hereby surrender to the Kingdom of Austria, and its mighty army. Whatever you wish to do with the royal family is no concern of ours. I promise you, we will not halt your advance to the Palace. Whatever our mad king might tell you, we are done fighting. Enough blood has been shed already..."

Eckhard clutched the stuffed rabbit in his hand, which was stained in the blood of the Polish Prince. He gazed upon it softly before looking over towards the young commander with a questioning gaze.

"You would disobey a direct order from your King?"

Surprisingly, the man scoffed as he gazed upon the rabbit in Eckhard's hand. He knew exactly who it belonged to, and could make an educated guess as to how the Austrian Field Marshal came by it.

"Tell me, how did obeying orders work out for our fallen prince?"

Now it was Eckhard's turn to scoff as he responded with a single word.

"Poorly..."

Upon hearing this, the knight snapped his reins and prepared to depart with his men. As he passed by Eckhard, he left one last statement.

"Go, the path towards the palace is clear, do with the royal family as you please..."

Upon hearing this, Eckhard nodded his head in silence, before yelling towards his men

"The city is ours. You know the King's law as well as I. No harm shall come to the civilians now that the city has surrendered."

After making his orders clear, Eckhard rode off towards the palace, as the Polish Commander had said, his path was completely unobstructed. Every soldier within the city had laid down their arms long before the Austrians entered. There was a look of complete and total defeat on the faces of the civilian populace, as if all hope for victory had died with their prince.

After riding through the streets, Eckhard entered the Palace, the guards who once protected the royal family had opened the gates wide for their conquerors. After reaching a certain point, Eckhard dismounted from his steed, and walked through the entrance unchallenged.

He continued to walk through the halls until he entered the throne room where the King of Poland sat with lifeless eyes upon realizing he was totally defeated. By his side was his family, who clung together in fear of what reprisal the Austrian Field Marshal might take.

When the Princess saw the bloody rabbit in Eckhard's hands, she fell to her knees and broke out into tears. Eckhard raised the rabbit in the air and noticed the girl's eyes following it. Upon seeing her bitter expression, he tossed the rabbit to her before making a snide remark.

"I believe this belongs to you... A brave man died, ensuring that it was safe and protected. It is a pity, if you father had only given into our demands sooner, he would still be alive..."

The King could no longer keep his silence, and erupted into a state of total fury.

"You bastards killed my son! Yet you blame me for his death! The nerve you Austrians have!"

Eckhard merely scoffed at the deflection before chastising the man for his own foolishness.

"We never wanted this war. In fact, we gave you some fairly clear and reasonable demands. Hand over the territory that rightfully belongs to the German people, and no bloodshed need to occur. Yet in your

stubbornness, you rejected our consideration for the lives of your people and attacked our civilians. Such criminal behavior can not be tolerated, and so we acted in retribution, and in doing so killed hundreds of thousands of your people.

Even then, we offered you peace once more. All you needed to do was submit to our demands, and yet, undeterred by our might, you sent your son and an army to their deaths. We can't be held responsible for your foolish actions.

Allow me to make this abundantly clear to you, your armies are defeated, what remains of them have abandoned you, and your family. The fact that you are still alive is simple proof that I am not a wicked man, and have no desire to see any further bloodshed. You have two options you can either submit, or you can refuse me once more and I will be forced to remove your head. I will then give your oldest living son the same offer I have given you. Choose wisely..."

The Polish King bit his lips so hard that they bled. He had no desire to do as he was instructed, but he knew he had no choice in the matter. Thus, with a heavy sigh, he calmed himself before nodding his head in agreement.

"Very well, I King Andrzej Jagiellon hereby surrender to the Kingdom of Austria, and agree to all of its demands."

A bitter smile etched itself upon Eckhard's visage as he heard this. After a few moments of silence, he issued a command to guards.

"Seize the girl"

The moment he said this, the guards approached Natalia and her mother where they ripped her away from her parents. She cried miserably as the guards took her away. The Polish King tried to get in the way, but Eckhard ruthlessly punched him in the gut, dropping him to his knees. With a hate filled glare the man struggled to question Eckhard's actions.

"...Why?"

In response to this, Eckhard merely sneered in disdain before turning around and signalling his soldiers to withdraw. As he was close to the exit, he finally answered the man's question.

"Because I don't trust you. The moment I withdraw my armies from these lands, you will turn on me, I am sure of it. By doing this, you will force me to exit my well-earned retirement all so I can clean up the mess you created. Thus, to prevent such unscrupulous behavior on your behalf, I will now take your daughter as a ward for King Berengar. Hopefully, you care more for her life than you do her brother's."

Though Natalia kicked and screamed, ultimately they dragged away her from her family, and brought her back to Austria, where she would live as Berengar's ward for many years. The war with Poland-Lithuania was officially over.. As for the rest of the Eastern Coalition, they would be back with a vengeance soon enough.

Chapter 503 - A Long Forgotten Prophecy

Weeks had passed since the day that the Indian delegation began their long journey home. Currently, the Regent of the Anangpur Empire Chandra Tomara stood within the confines of the Imperial Palace, in the northwestern corner of the Indian Subcontinent. While his nephew was technically the Emperor, he was, in the fact, the one who held all the power that remained within the hands of his dynasty.

In his hands was an ancient scroll which contained a prophecy as foretold by an obscure oracle whose name had been lost to history. However, one thing was certain: every word that this prophet spoke had come to pass throughout the course of history. This included the rise of the Anangpur Empire, the centuries of prosperity they had lived through, and its eventual decline.

As a fervent believer in the prophecies spoken by this oracle, Chandra was worried about one sentence in particular. Though the passage was short and rather cryptic, he believed it was only a matter of time before it became reality. As he read through the lines of the prophecy for the millionth time in his life, the Regent's lips quivered in trepidation.

"In an era of strife and regression, a princess will seduce a one eyed devil from the west. At her behest, this fiend shall bring his endless hordes to bear upon the Indus River Valley, deposing the shadow

behind the throne while placing the offspring of their unholy union as sovereign over all of India. In doing so, the halfbreed will ensure centuries of his people's servitude to their foreign masters."

The moment Chandra read these words, he shivered. He had consulted many scholars over the years, and the wisest of them all had confirmed that they were living within the era of strife and regression, as foretold in the prophecy.

Though the Princess of the Empire was only a little girl at the moment, Chandra knew that one day she would grow into a great beauty and fulfill the prophecy, ensuring that he would ultimately lose the wealth and power he currently held.

There was nothing more important in the Regent's mind than living out a life of hedonism during the last days of his family's empire. In his mind, there was no conceivable way to save them from their current problems. Even the vast fortune that his ancestors had gained was depleting at an astonishing rate.

Yet, the Emperor foolishly wished to waste what remained of their wealth on weapons from the west that held no certainty of functioning as advertised. Thus, the man sighed heavily as he placed the scroll back within the confines of the palace's library. He internally vowed to prevent this prophecy from becoming reality no matter what the cost.

After returning the scroll whence it came, Chandra returned to the great hall where his nephew Dharya sat on the throne. The regent sneered at the boy-emperor. Though he may sit on the seat of power, he held no influence over the Empire's politics, or even the wealth of its treasury. However, when he rounded the corner, he was surprised to see that his own son was kneeling before the boy, and spouting nonsense about his journey.

Evidently Ishwar had taken an Austrian Clipper as transport to the Red Sea, before boarding another vessel on the other side, which brought him back to his homeland. It was the only way to explain the swiftness of his journey between the two kingdoms.

"Your Majesty, the Kingdom of Austria in the west is where those weapons were manufactured. It is a realm like no other. Such wealth and prosperity are truly unfathomable. I rode on a device called a train, which was like a chain of long carriages, that operated entirely without animal power, and at speeds so high I could hardly believe it.

Not only was this device fast, but it was luxurious too, displaying the wealth of the Austrian Kingdom to all foreigners who wished to buy a ticket. On top of this, the King was kind enough to show me around the weapons factory where they manufactured the weapons you saw. They had thousands of them lying in wait to be sold and could produce hundreds a day.

I saw the weapons employed against western style armor, and at a distance of thirty feet, they could penetrate through the thickest portion of a knight's breastplate as if the projectile were going through butter. It is of my opinion that if we wish to quell the unrest within our borders, and defeat the enemies who are at our gates, then we should invest in these weapons."

Upon hearing this last part, Chandra could no longer contain his inner fury, and burst out of his hiding spot where he lectured his son for his overeager behavior.

"Do you honestly expect the emperor to believe such tall tales? A chain of wagons carried across the lands at high speed with no horses to power it? What next, ships made of steel!?! It is simply absurd! Your Majesty, do not listen to the foolishness that your cousin spouts. The boy must have been intoxicated during his stay in this foreign land."

When Ishwar heard these hard words, he reached into his luggage and pulled out a gift that Berengar had prepared for the boy emperor, which was covered in a silk cloth. Ishwar removed the covering to reveal a magnificent firearm that was more a work of art than a weapon.

In his hands was a G-22 rifle, which was far from standard issue. Rather than a blued steel finish, the metallic components were made of blackened steel, which was inlaid with gold damascene in the form of an elephant and floral pattern. The stock itself was hand-carved from polished Ebony which was imported from the Indian Subcontinent, and had an elephant pattern.

A case of specialized .45-70 cartridges were provided alongside the rifle. These were unique, as they were a prototype munition that used solid lead Spitzer bullets. These projectiles were far more accurate than the standardized munitions because of this improvement.

Dharya gazed upon the magnificent weapon with awe in his eyes. This weapon looked very different from the arkebuse he had seen before. Upon noticing the expression on the young Emperor's face, Ishwar smiled before reading the words inscribed on a card that Berengar had entrusted him with.

"For the mighty Emperor of the Anangpur Empire, I gift you this firearm, which is current issue to my armed forces, as a sign of my friendship. I hope this weapon acts as proof of my Kingdom's capabilities, and can at the very least entertain you for years to come.

-Sincerely, King Berengar von Kufstein"

After reading this message, Dharya grabbed hold of the rifle and began to play with it. While this was happening Ishwar relayed another message that Berengar had given him.

"This rifle, aside from all the embellishment, is the current issue firearm in the Austrian Royal Army to their standard soldiers. I must admit, I did not get to witness its effects, but it is a proof of their manufacturing capability. I regret to inform you that these weapons are not for sale, but the arquebuses are still more than capable of providing an enormous advantage on the battlefield.

After witnessing the glory of Austrian Engineering, Dharya was more adamant than ever to spend the funds necessary to obtain their weapons. Despite his desire to purchase the arquebuses, he was not in charge of Anangpur's finances, and thus could not easily do so. Thus, he ignored his uncle and instead inquired about the cost of such weapons.

"Ishwar, tell me, what is the price to pay to supply my army with arquebuses?"

The Emperor's cousin frowned when he heard this response. He knew that the asking price was not something that his father would easily agree to. However, he did not hide this and answered honestly.

"The Austrians were adamant that we use their currency to purchase their weapons. Apparently, in the western world, the Austrian Thaler and Gulden have become the staple of international trade because of their purity and value.

For example, one one Austrian Gulden is worth 490 Austrian Thalers, however, the Thaler, which is their silver coin, is worth substantially more than ours. This means we would have to spend a significant sum of our silver coins to exchange for a single gulden. Your Majesty, I hate to say it, but if you wish to outfit your armies with these weapons, it will be a considerable expense..."

While Dharya was eager to spend the money necessary to outfit his army, Chandra stepped in and prevented the transaction from continuing.

"Absolutely not! I will not allow you to waste so much money on such novelties. For the good of the Empire, I must put my foot down and prevent this transaction. These Austrians are trying to con you out of your family's fortune."

Dharya sneered when he heard his uncle's retort. He knew the only reason the man was preventing this arms deal from occurring was because he wanted to waste that sum on frivolous luxuries for himself. Despite this, he was not in any place to overrule his decision, thus he sighed heavily and admitted defeat. Perhaps he was doomed to lose all of his authority as the Emperor.

However, fate would have it that Berengar left a good impression on the young ambassador, and in doing so, more importantly Ishwar wanted to continue to visit Austria in the future, after returning to his family's medieval Empire he felt an overwhelming sense of depression. Thus, he was quick to negotiate on behalf of the Emperor, despite it being against his father's wishes.

"Father, surely we can spare some funds to update the equipment of the Tiger Guard? It is no secret they are currently issued centuries old equipment that is well past the point of serviceability. How can we expect them to protect the Emperor from our family's enemies if they are under-equipped!?!"

The Royal Guard of Anangpur, also known as the Tiger Guard, was an elite military unit of roughly 1,000 men designed to protect the Emperor and the Royal Family. Unlike the army, which answered to various corrupt generals who were in Chandra's pocket, the Tiger Guard acted solely on the orders of the Emperor. It was explicitly because of this that Chandra had ensured they were under-equipped and under-funded.

Until now, there had been no objection to this lack of funding and supplies. However, it was something that was well known, and if Chandra denied this request, he could not deny his plot to keep the Emperor poorly protected in preparation for the eventuality of his usurpation. Such a thing would easily be considered treason.

Thus, he had no choice but to agree to this request. In doing so, he sighed heavily before responding.

"Very well. If you truly believe these new weapons are suitable for the Tiger Guard, I suppose we can afford the expense. However, if they do not live up to their reputation, and the Emperor is harmed because of this, I will hold you personally responsible. Do you understand my son?"

Ishwar nodded his head in silence. He understood what his father was planning and secretly despised it. Ishwar was a man who still had faith in his Empire's ability to survive its current troubles. However, so long as his father was in charge of the Empire, it will decline rapidly. Unfortunately, there was nothing he could do about such a thing. Corruption was rampant in every facet of society, and anyone who could end Chandra's tyranny was either dead, or paid for by the tyrant himself.

However, if the tiger guard was appropriately supplied with arquebuses and falconets, they could at the very least hold off any attempt to overthrow the Emperor long enough for the boy to escape. A life in exile was certainly better than death.

Ishwar turned and faced his cousin with a look of pity on his face. He did not envy the boy in the slightest, or the burdens he had to bear. However, if there was one person in this world who could invoke a greater sense of sympathy in Ishwar's young heart, it was the princess. Doomed to be locked away from the world at large, a prisoner in her own room simply because her uncle was obsessed with a long forgotten prophecy. Truly, it was a shame....

Chapter 504 - Retaliation Via Proxy

Deep within the confines of the Imperial Palace of the Byzantine Emperor was the personal quarters of the First Prince Quintus. Since his brother's maiming in Austria's retaliation, he had received larger support from the aristocracy than he had previously. With the warrior Prince wounded to such a savage degree, the hawkish faction had declined in power.

Despite this, Decentius' influence over his most hardcore supporters continued to exist, and in doing so, he had infiltrated his brother's allies. While the Emperor had accepted the Mamluk Sultanate's blame for the attack on his son, and was preparing for war, Decentius would never roll over and allow the attack on his life to go unpunished.

If he could not harm Berengar or his family directly, then at the very least, he could empower his enemies. Thus an agent of the Second Prince who had infiltrated Quintus' allies was currently in the First Prince's quarters searching for a critical piece of information, hoping to leak it to the western world.

While Quintus was away on diplomatic business, the perfect opportunity had presented itself for Decentius and what little remained of his faction. Thus, the man in question was frantically searching through the First Prince's quarters, looking for the object of his mission.

However, after a thorough search, he had yet to find the leather-bound journal which Berengar had gifted to the Empire, hoping to improve their agriculture. He was at his wit's end. Of course, until he tripped over an out-of-place tile on the floor.

After rising to his feet and rubbing his head, the spy noticed the damaged flooring, and inspected it. After successfully removing the tile in question, he found the object of his desires. A large leather-bound journal was hidden away beneath the floor.

A look of excitement appeared on the man's face as he grabbed ahold of the book and searched through its contents, confirming that it was, in fact, the journal he was looking for. After obtaining the object, he quickly placed the loose tile back in its natural position before absconding from the First Prince's quarters and returning to his master.

Upon entering Decentius' room where he lay, wounded and disfigured, a smile appear on the undamaged half of the man's face before he asked on his mind.

"Did you get it?"

The spy nodded his head with satisfaction before handing over the journal to his master. When Decentius read through its contents, it filled him with joy. He could finally get back at Austria for what they did to him. Thus, he gave his next commands to his agent with a wicked smile on his face.

"Copy down all the information in this text, then send it to the Papacy anonymously. Those catholic bastards will most likely distribute all the information in this text to the Catholic world. Soon Berengar's stranglehold over the food supply of Europe will come to an end!"

The spy nodded his head before bowing towards his master.

"It will be done, your majesty."

After saying this, he departed from the Second Prince's quarters, where he quickly got to work on the task at hand.

Several weeks later, in the heart of the Papacy, Pope Julius sat on his throne with a distressed appearance. The man had practically aged twenty years since he had first taken the Papal Throne a few years prior. Berengar's attempts to put an end to Papal Power in Europe had taken a toll on the man's physical and mental health.

With all the German Cardinals defecting towards the so called German Reformation, he was now in a terrible state. Southern and Eastern Germany had fallen into the clutches of Berengar the Accursed. Only the northern states remained defiant to the self-proclaimed Austrian King, and his heresy.

Catholicism had rapidly deteriorated and the southern and eastern German regions. In response to the Catholic Church's persecution of reformist, The South German Confederation and the states within it had seized the assets of Catholic monasteries and cathedrals alike. With the support of the former German Cardinals, the German Reformation had persecuted its former masters, and by now Catholicism within the borders of Southern Germany was virtually non-existent.

However, though the Papacy was losing power and influence by the day, its many loyal followers in western and eastern Europe had donated a substantial sum of wealth. In doing so, the Catholic Church could now fund the manufacture of firearms for their Crusader Orders.

Though they utterly failed to replicate the flintlock mechanism, because of a lack of access to spring steel, the captured muskets from the war in Italy a few years prior had provided several insights to the Catholic Church where they should focus on developing firearms.

Because of this, they could upgrade the basic arkebuses obtained from the war in Iberia with some of what they learned from studying the rifled flintlock muskets captured during the war in Italy, and could

now create a crude blend of the two designs. Which were being supplied to the Crusader Armies while Julius sat upon the throne of Papal Power.

While Julius was pondering all these changes to his crusader armies, a servant burst through the door, holding onto a relatively thick leather-bound journal. There was an excited glint in his eyes as he knelt before the pope and presented him with the gift.

"Your holiness, an anonymous source has presented you with a gift, it appears to be a journal containing many of the Technological innovations used in Austria's agriculture. The most likely source of this information is a faction within the Byzantine Empire who is hostile towards Berengar the Accursed!"

Pope Julius broke out into laughter as he heard this comments and immediately stood up from his throne and prayed towards the heaven.

"I knew you had not abandoned us!"

After saying this, he snatched hold of the leather-bound journal and began flipping through its contents. This was just the thing he needed to abate the current food-shortage crisis that existed throughout the Catholic World.

Currently, Berengar held a stranglehold over the food surplus, unlike the rest of Europe. Austria had grown a significant surplus, and was currently using it as ransom over their neighbors, who were suffering from famine.

Now Julius had the means to grow a surplus of his own within southern Italy, and after a few harvests use it as a means to restore faith in the Church. Only those loyal to the papacy would receive aid in these dire times. Thus, with this plan in action, Julius handed the journal back to the servant and gave him his orders..

"Send this to Emperor Balsamo, and order him to implement these practices across the Kingdom of Naples and what few lands the Holy Roman Empire still hold in the balkans. Tell him whatever the expense is, the Papacy will gladly pay for it!"

The servant smiled before agreeing to this request

"Yes, your holiness. I will dispatch this to the Emperor immediately!"

After saying this, the servant left his master alone with his thoughts. While Julius sat back down on his seat of power, he smiled wickedly as he thought about the day he finally overcame Berengar and his legions of the damned.

"Just you wait Berengar von Kufstein, when I launch my crusade, you and your armies won't be able to stand against the might of God and his Church! You and your demonic dynasty will perish from this world and spend an eternity in hell. I will make sure of it!"

After expressing these thoughts aloud, the Pope shifted his attention back to the means of arming his supporters with the appropriate weapons. Though he knew Austria continued to advance in terms of military technology at a rapid rate, he was entirely unafraid, for now his soldiers would have the ability to effectively combat the Austrian Army, or so he thought.

It was not just matchlock muskets that were being introduced to the Crusader forces, but bayonets and six-pound cannons. Though they weren't explosive, like the primitive shells launched from Berengar's early artillery pieces, they were far more advanced than anything currently being used by the enemies of Berengar.

The improvements to the Catholic Forces that had been reverse engineered by captured Austrian tech were sure to have an effect on the battlefields across Europe, and the world as a whole. Soon the rest of Europe would be able to create military technology that was on par with the renaissance of Berengar's past life.

Berengar's actions in this world had sparked a desire within the European nations to compete with his mighty Kingdom. In doing so, the renaissance was bound to begin earlier in this timeline than in Berengar's past life. All that was necessary for this revival of culture and science was the collapse of the Catholic Church and its influence over the Western World.

The upcoming Crusade against Berengar would be a turning point in World History, whether it destroyed the Catholic Church, and the caused the unification of a Great German Empire. Or resulted in the death of Berengar, and the collapse of his fledgling Kingdom.. Either way, it was sure to have major consequences on the timeline.

Chapter 505 - A Near Death Experience

The King of Austria stood in the mountains outside of the Capital City of his realm. Beside him was the young Prince Hans, who was the age of five this year. In this child's hands was a rifle, specifically constructed with the purpose of training youth in the operation of firearms.

This rifle was a scaled-down version of the G-22 Service Rifle chambered in a unique center-fire cartridge modeled after the .22 Hornet from Berengar's previous life, the primary difference being its use of black powder. The King corrected his son's shooting stance before taking a step back and instructing the prince in the proper use of the firearm.

"Hans, you must line up the rear notch with the front sight post. After both are in line with your target, take a deep breath and squeeze the trigger. Make sure the stock of your rifle is embedded firmly in your shoulder before firing."

Hans nodded to his father's words before doing as instructed, after a few moments of preparation he took a deep breath, and squeezed the trigger, in doing so a loud bang resounded in the air, and the .22 projectile flew down range and towards the steel target.

Berengar looked through his binoculars to witness the projectile impacting the target and boldly declared his success.

"Hit!"

A smile formed on the Prince's face, as he heard the feedback of his successful hit shortly after his father's declaration. Having achieved his first successful shot, the boy looked over at his father with a wide smile in doing so, shifting the muzzle of his rifle toward the King.

"I did it!"

Despite the boy's achievement, his father was far from pleased, and he immediately reacted by disarming the boy and shoving him toward's the ground. After doing so, he cleared the weapon to ensure its safety before tossing it onto the grass beside his child.

"Never point your weapon towards something you don't intend to destroy! I don't care if you just fired your shot, and you think it to be safe. Do not point your weapon at me unless you intend to kill me, boy!"

A tear formed in the Prince's eye as he gazed upon his father's cruelty, however Berengar merely sneered in disdain before lecturing his son further.

"Hans, you are my son, and one day you will be a man. Listen well to my advice and take it to heart. Men do not cry in the presence of others, we do not have the luxury to show such weakness! If you wish to cry, do so when you are alone... Now get up and prepare to fire another round down range!"

The young Prince immediately wiped the tears from his eyes and nodded his head towards his father, after dusting himself off, he grabbed ahold of his rifle, and pointed it in a safe direction before pulling out a cartridge from his bandolier and placing it in the chamber. After shoving the bolt home, he aimed the rifle down range once more.

However, this time, a white rabbit showed up on the range, and rather than shoot an inanimate object, Hans vented his frustration by shifting his aim towards the furry critter. After acquiring his target, and taking a deep breath, he squeezed the trigger, sending the .22 projectile down range and through the rabbit's eye.

After successfully killing the prey, Hans pulled back the bolt, ejecting the round before shouldering his rifle and staring at his father with a stern expression. This time, Berengar was far more pleased with the boy's actions and patted him on the back.

"Good shot! It looks like we will be eating rabbit for dinner tonight. I'm proud of you, killer!"

Hans smiled as he heard his father's praise before glancing toward the slain rabbit. There was a tinge of remorse in his heart after killing the creature, but after hearing his father's praise, only pride remained.

Berengar ushered his son forward to collect his prize.

"Hans, go pick up the beast and bring it here. Afterward we will send a few more rounds down range and bring this bad boy home for your mother Yasmin to cook!" The five-year-old prince had an excited smile on his face when he heard this, he always enjoyed his foreign mother's exotic cooking. Thus, he did as instructed and retrieved the rabbit.

However, while Hans approached the slain rabbit, he overheard rustle in the nearby bushes, shortly thereafter a wild wolf jumped out from its covering and pounced on him, instantly knocking him to the ground. The foul creature spent no time and immediately tried to tear at the young prince's neck, however the boy reacted on instinct and shove the stock of his rifle into the creature's jaws, preventing it from claiming his life.

Face to face with a wild wolf, which stood atop him, desperately attempting to claim his life, Hans felt his life flash before his eyes. He struggled to prevent injury. His father ran towards him, and grabbed ahold of the wild wolf, picking it up into the air and slamming it into the ground as hard as he could.

Berengar pinned the wolf to the ground, before pulling out his bayonet and ruthlessly slicing its throat. Blood poured onto the ground as Hans gazed in horror at his father's vicious actions. Yet the violence did not end there. Enraged by the beast's attempt to murder his son, Berengar continued to repeatedly stab the creature long after death, until all of his anger was properly vented.

By the time he was finished with the mut, the young King of Austria was drenched in its blood, his otherwise handsome face coated in the viscous red substance. It was only then that he gazed over at his son, who looked at him in horror and checked on his condition.

Berengar's expression instantly shifted from a sadistic psychopath, to a caring father as he grabbed ahold of his five-year-old son, who was shivering in fear after what had just transpired. The king searched the boy's body for wounds while inquiring about his health.

"Hans! Are you okay? Did it bite you? Did it scratch you? Are you hurt at all?"

The young prince shook his head. Miraculously, not a single scratch existed on his body after such a frightful counter. In fact, he was more afraid of his father's actions than that of the wolf. Upon seeing

that his son was okay, Berengar grabbed ahold of him tightly, and kissed his forehead, hugging the boy as he struggled to contain the tears in his eyes.

"I thought I lost you... This is my fault. I should have been there with you to prevent something like this from happening. I won't ever let you down again..."

It was at this moment the bushes rustled once more. Berengar quickly pushed his son behind him as he wielded his bayonet, preparing for another conflict. However, in the next moment, a small wolf pup appeared from the bushes, and gazed upon its dead mother.

Berengar picked up the pup and was about to end its miserable existence when his son stopped him.

"Wait!"

When the king heard this, he shifted his gaze towards his son, his knife already at the throat of the infant wolf.

"Hans, this creature won't survive on its own. It is better to kill it now, then let it starve to death..."

A determined expression appeared on the Prince's face as he nodded his head before making a request of his kingly father.

"I will take care of it!"

The Austrian Monarch could not help but scoff when he heard this.

"You? You are but a child yourself. Do you have any idea what kind of responsibility that is?"

However, Hans did not waver. Instead, he brought up solid reasoning to his father about why he should care for the wolf pup.

"I am the reason its mother is dead, therefore the responsibility to ensure its survival falls to me!"

Berengar could tell his son was serious, and thus lowered his blade before tossing the infant wolf to its new master.

"You will feed it, walk it, and look after it. When it dies, you will be responsible for burying it. I will have no part in this. Make sure it has better manners than its mother, or I might just kill it after all..."

Hans nodded his head and grabbed hold of the pup, stuffing it under his arm. As he carried the creature with him. As for the rabbit, Berengar picked it up and slung it across his back before giving his son an order.

"Pick up your rifle. We're going home. I am sure your mother will be furious when she finds out about this, and I am the one who is going to have to suffer."

Hans did not disobey his father's orders, and did as he was instructed. Thus, the King and the Prince made the long trek back to the Palace, this near-death experience, and the violence his father was willing to engage in to ensure his protection would forever linger in the boy's mind.

Such a memory was bound to influence the boy's mind on the lengths a man should go to in order to ensure the safety of his family and his people.. Future Historians and psychologists would look back on this day, as a key event in the Prince's life, one that helped shape his personality.

Chapter 506 - Retirement Ceremony

The sounds of instruments filled the air, as the battle songs used by the Austrian army prevailed throughout the city of Kufstein. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had surrendered. In doing so, Austria gained control of the easternmost portions of the German Empire from Berengar's previous life. The power of the South German Confederation had expanded once more.

Eckhard sat atop his horse at the head of the formation, with the Polish Princess Natalia in his lap. She was the prize he had brought home for the young Prince Hans. He expected to convince her father to make the girl one of his future brides, in doing so securing their place as overlords of the Kingdom of Poland.

However, that was a discussion to be had later. The Austrian Field Marshal and his returning soldiers were heralded as war heroes, and given a grand ceremony upon entering the city of Kufstein. Berengar was always one for pageantry, and though Eckhard could not care less about such endeavors, he was forced to endure them for the sake of the Austria's propaganda efforts.

With the Golden Horde in a state of Civil War, and the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth crushed beneath the heel of the Austrian Royal Army, as well as the ongoing conflict from the various Rus states attempting to overthrow the yoke of their Golden Horde masters, Austria's newfound eastern borders were now secure.

For all intents and purposes the war with the Eastern Coalition was over, and though the other two factions had not officially surrendered, it would be a long time before they managed to get their affairs in order to a point where they could pose a threat to Austria's newly conquered territory.

Thus, this return celebration was more like a victory parade, as young unmarried women gathered on the sides of the streets and flew flowers at the feet of their conquering heroes. The Austrian soldiers had a gaze of prize as they marched down the main street of Kufstein towards the central plaza where their King waited to congratulate them on their overwhelming victory.

Eventually, Eckhard ordered his trusty steed to a halt, and the army behind him followed suit. Standing on a podium above their position, the King in all his glory, stood with a smile on his face. He cleared his throat before beginning his speech.

"I would like to thank all of you brave men for your contributions to the war against the Eastern Coalition, and though peace has been established between us and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, we must be wary of our enemies further east. The Golden Horde and their Rus slaves are still at war with us, and though they currently have their troubles, they will surely return in the future in an attempt to wrestle control of the regions you have conquered for themselves.

For now, rest well, lick your wounds, and prepare yourselves for the future of our mighty Kingdom. For the time being, those divisions who are fresh will take your place on the Eastern Borders, to ensure its safety as the region goes through a great transition under our annexation.

Before you all return to your homes, and loved ones, I want to make one last announcement. After years of service, and his many achievements in battle, Field Marshal Eckhard von Hallstatt will retire from his position. In his spare time, he will take up a position as a professor at the Kufstein Military Academy where he will help instruct the next generation of officers with his vast knowledge of strategy, tactics, and logistics.

For all the citizens of Austria, now is the time to give your thanks to this man and his years of service to our kingdom. Without him, I surely would not have been able to establish the mighty Kingdom you all know and love today."

Upon saying this, the tens of thousands of gathered citizens broke out into cheers and applause as they thanked Eckhard for his service. After silence prevailed, he walked towards the podium where Berengar stood. Allowing the King to present his greatest general with one final award.

"For your years of service, and the endless support you have given your King, and fatherland, I present you with two final honors. I King Berengar von Kufstein, first of my name hereby, award you Eckhard von Hallstatt the position of Grandmaster of the Teutonic Order, which through your efforts has recently been established as a Chivalric Order of our realm. I also Award you and your descendents with the title of Grand Duke of Prussia, to rule over the lands you have conquered in this campaign from now until the end of time!"

Eckhard could hardly believe his ears. He had never desired, nor expected Berengar to give him a higher rank of nobility, or a leadership position in a Chivalric Order, and yet, here he stood the Grand Duke of Prussia, and the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order. It was truly a fitting end to the lengthy military career of the Field Marshal. The middle-aged knight struggled to contain the tears in his eyes as he kneeled before his King.

"From the day I swore service to you, I have seen your infinite potential become reality. I swear on the honor of my name, and house, that my loyalty towards you and your dynasty shall never waver. This humble servant thanks you for your kindness, and presents you with one final gift."

After saying this, Eckhard stood up and whistled where his soldiers brought forth the young Princess of Poland, and handed her off to Eckhard. The girl was pouting as she gazed upon the King of Austria.

"This is Princess Natalia Jagiellon of the Kingdom of Poland. I have seized her to act as your ward, until the day she comes of age, in order to ensure that her father behaves himself."

Berengar was surprised to see this, but put on a friendly smile as he kneeled down and petted the girl's auburn hair.

"Hello, Natalia, I am King Berengar, I promise you, so long as you are under my protection, no harm shall come to you. I know things must be difficult for you right now, but I look forward to looking after you."

The girl remained silent as she walked over to Berengar's side and hid behind him, peeking out over at Eckhard. In her mind, Berengar seemed far more friendly than the old man who ripped her from her home. Berengar chuckled when he saw this timid gesture and rested his hand on her head before making a joke to his now retired field marshal.

"What did you do to the poor girl to make her act so coldly to you?"

Eckhard, never one to engage in childish humor, had a straight face before answering his King honestly.

"I killed her brother."

Berengar's smile sank as he heard this, before nodding his head in silence. After a few moments, he picked the girl up and held her in his arms before giving Eckhard one final order.

"Go now and rest, my friend. You have earned it. Whatever funds you need to establish your palace in your new territory, I will happily provide it to you. If you wish to take up a new surname on behalf of where you settle, you are more than welcome to..."

Eckhard smiled bitterly as he reflected on his past before nodding his head in agreement.

"Very well, since you have said these words, I won't be stingy..."

Berengar chuckled as he placed his hand on his friend's shoulder before sending him off.

"Don't be a stranger. You are always welcome in my palace whenever you feel the need to visit."

With that said, the King of Austria and the Grand Duke of Prussia parted ways. Whether they would ever meet again remained to be seen. One thing was certain: Eckhard's dynasty would become the most ardent supporters of the von Kufstein Dynasty.. In doing so, Berengar had once more forever changed the timeline of this world from that of his previous life.

Chapter 507 - Raising A Prince Properly

The young Austrian King sat in his office. Standing in front of him were his second wife and their eldest child. By all means, the mother was not pleased with the news she had received. Though Berengar had attempted to hide what happened in the mountains, ultimately, he could not prevent Linde from finding out the truth of the matter for very long.

The redheaded beauty was crossing her arms beneath her substantial bust, with a scowl on her face. Despite her unpleasant appearance, she was still quite beautiful. Thus, Berengar was far from intimidated as he sat behind his desk with a calm expression, his hands pressed together in contemplation. It was at this moment that Linde chastised her husband for his behavior.

"You brought our son into the mountains alone, so that he could learn to shoot? You do realize he is five, right? On top of that, he was attacked by a wolf under your watch. What if he got hurt!?!"

Berengar had been dreading this conversation since the event first happened. He knew it was only a matter of time before his spymaster found out about their child's near death experience. Rather than address the woman's concerns, Berengar glared at his son with a troubled expression before interrogating the boy about how his wife knew about this incident.

"You told your mother what happened?"

Hans stared at his feet, unwilling to meet his father's gaze. Though he had initially attempted to lie to his mother about how he obtained the wolf pup, under the inquisitive gaze of his conniving mother, the boy quickly broke down and revealed everything that had happened in the mountains.

Upon seeing her son's defeated expressions, Linde kneeled down and hugged the child, embracing his small head into her substantial bosom as she stroked his strawberry blonde hair while glaring at her husband for his overbearing attitude.

"Don't lecture my son for telling the truth about the matter. What did you think I would not find out about this? Even if he had not revealed what had happened to him, I would have become aware of this incident, eventually. Are you not ashamed of yourself for putting your eldest child in danger?"

Berengar did not back down, and instead stood up from his seat and gazed down at his wife with a tyrannical expression, he did not feel like he was in the wrong, and he refused to apologize to the woman simply because she felt that he was. Instead, he defended his actions vehemently.

"As you have said, the boy is five. It is time for him to learn the fundamentals of handling a rifle. How was I supposed to know that a wolf would pounce on him? I did everything I could to defend the boy. I even wrestled with a wolf!

Look at him! There is not even a scratch on our son, and yet you chastise me for rushing to his defense? It is you who should be ashamed. I understand your fury as a mother, but to blame me for an act of god, is utterly nonsensical. I expected more of you, Linde...

Your son, despite being a mere child, showed bravery in face of death, and has learned a valuable life lesson, that most boys don't come to understand until they have marched to war. You should be proud that he showed such fierce resistance against a stronger opponent which sought to claim his life.

In fact, because of this incident, I have realized that it is time for the boy to learn martial arts, I will enroll him in Austrian Wrestling, and Kickboxing, so that if he ever finds himself in harm's way without protection, he will have the knowledge to defend himself."

Linde immediately pouted as she protested this statement.

"He is too young to learn such things! Let him enjoy his childhood some more!"

However, Berengar remained defiant. His will be ultimately greater than the boy's mother, thus he walked towards the woman and grabbed ahold of her perfectly sculpted chin, and looked at her in the eyes, with a fierce gaze.

"Because of my love for you, I have allowed you to pamper our son, but the world is cruel, and he needs to learn the skills to protect himself and those he cares about. I know about your conspiracies, how you scheme behind my back to place Hans on the Throne, despite my wishes for the most competent of my successors to inherit my domain.

If you want your son to succeed me, then he needs to learn some discipline. The sooner he comes to understand this virtue, the better; and there is no better way to teach him than through the struggle of conflict! The boy will learn martial arts, and that is final!"

The second Queen of Austria did not meet her husband's gaze. Instead, she continued to pout. It surprised her to hear that Berengar was aware of her schemes. Perhaps he was more formidable than she had initially estimated. Despite her actions, she deeply cared about both her husband, and her son, and Berengar's words made sense.

In fact, the more the woman thought about it, the more she realized Berengar was trying to help Hans in his future struggle to obtain the throne. Thus, a sultry smile formed on her luscious lips as she wrapped her arms around the King's neck and whispered in his ear.

"To think you would show favoritism to our son. I wonder what Adela would think if she found out about this?"

Berengar merely chuckled and grabbed ahold of his wife's plump, but toned bottom with both hands as he kissed her passionately. After unlocking his lips from her own, with a slight hint of drool upon his pink tongue, the king whispered in his wife's ear.

"This will be our little secret..."

Hans witnessed the intimate display between his parents with a stoic expression, throughout his entire life, he had become accustomed to seeing his parents act in such a manner, to him it was a normal part of life, thus he thought nothing of their brief conflict, and intimate display after making up. Instead, he was more curious about what his father had said about learning martial arts.

Until now, Hans' greatest talent was his superior intellect over other children his age. He was five years old, and yet he had practically finished his elementary education. Now his father planned to enroll him in martial arts. Now was the time to prove that he was not only an intellectual prodigy, but an athletic one as well.

Thus, the boy had a hint of determination in his eyes, as he nodded his head in agreement with his father's words. Discipline was necessary for character growth, and despite his young age, he looked forward to the man he would one day become.

As for Berengar he released his hold over his wife, and sent her on her way, he had much work to be had, with the formation of the Grand Duchy of Poland, and its annexation into his Kingdom's borders, there were many reforms that needed to be enacted, and Eckhard was the man to institute them.

Linde ultimately left the King's office, in a much happier mood than when she had entered. She was even humming a song while walking down the halls with her son in hand. As if after a brief conversation, she had replaced all the anger that she held towards her husband with undying love. She no longer cared about the incident with the wolf, and instead saw it as a way for her son to grow into a man capable of succeeding his father.

Hans looked up at his mother with a smile. It was good to see her so happy. She was such a terrifying woman when she was angry, and he would rather not be involved with such feminine wrath. Ultimately, he concluded that his father's actions of refusing to kneel and beg to forgiveness was in fact the appropriate response for when a woman was angry with you.

How the old man changed his mother's attitude so swiftly, the boy did not know, but clearly it was a skill he would need to learn for the future. Thus, after a brief bout with death, the boy had learned many life lessons that would help him on his quest to become his father's successor.

As for Adela's children, they were still much too young to even begin to comprehend their own sentience, let alone worry about such future power struggles. Whether Berengar would show his children with his High Queen the same degree of discipline and training that he had afforded to Hans; that had yet to be seen.

Perhaps Berengar would take a different route of parenting for Adela's children. After all, their mother had a very different attitude and morals than that of Linde.. The possibility of the High Queen accepting such a harsh and rigid upbringing was likely non-existent.

Chapter 508 - Exploring Unknown Regions

Honorias stood atop the bow of her vessel, with her pirate crew. It had been quite some time since they had seen action. Sworn to Secrecy by the confines of Austrian law, the woman that followed the Pirate Queen was looking for adventure, and she knew just where to go.

Shortly after returning home, Honorias had spent some time with her infant child, however she was quick to leave him and her husband behind as she pursued adventure and riches in the unknown lands across the atlantic.

Berengar had promised to allow her to explore the depths of the Americas, and she was keen to do so. Equipped with the most modern weapons available to the Kingdom of Austria, Honorias and her crew were now venturing to the new world by their lonesome.

After their exploits in the War of Austrian Succession, and Reconquista, Honorias's crew had become exceptionally popular in the folklore of the Mediterranean, attracting more crew and personnel who swore their allegiance to the Byzantine Princess and her crew of salt lasses.

These women were now dressed in a pattern of attire similar to that of the Austrian Navy, the difference being the use of skirts and thigh high socks. They had been at sea for well over two weeks now, and were getting close to the new world.

The chart of their course was actually far south of where Berengar and Honorias had initially landed. Under the King of Austria's direction, the Third Queen set sail for what was as South America in his past life.

His aim was to get her to explore the land that was known as Venezuela in his past life. In doing so, mapping out the region, and allowing Austria's future colonial endeavors to have a general idea of the layout of the land, and the factions who inhabited it.

Currently Honoria was cleaning her 1422 Service Revolver, though this was not a standard model. Instead, it was heavily embellished with gold damascene in a pattern with skulls and bones. The grips were made of mother-of-pearl, while the trigger and hammer were gold plated. Overall, it was an extravagant weapon, fitting for the wealthy Pirate Queen.

As she wiped the oil onto the functional parts of the weapon, she overheard a loud shout from the young woman stationed in her crow's nest.

"Land Ho!"

Honoria quickly finished cleaning her revolver before loading it. After doing so, she stashed it away before clambering to a better position on her vessel to get a view of the unfamiliar landscape. In the distance was a tropical beach, which led to the Andes Mountains behind its sandy shores.

Honoria had already questioned whether Berengar was aware of the New World before discovering it, but this new landmass far to the south of where she had landed previously only further confirmed her suspicions.

Eventually, the ship made its way into the bay, where the crew dropped the anchor and lowered the row boats into the ocean. At the head of the first boat, Honoria stood as her lasses rowed the boat closer to the shore.

With her naval cutlass in hand, she waited for the moment she stepped on the sandy shores, and entered the new world once more. After strenuous effort, the boats made berth on the beaches outside of the mountain range set in its background.

After all her girls had gathered, Honoria checked to see if they were all properly equipped. With G-22 rifles in hand, and 1422 Pattern web gear over their torsos, along with black leather bandoliers which contained spare .45-70 cartridges, Honoria was certain that her crew could handle any conflict they encountered.

Thus, under the lead of their Captain, the privateers of the Queen Honoria's Revenge set out to explore this foreign landscape. With Honoria at the head of the crew, they entered the mountainous Andes. Completely unaware that some locals had spotted the arrival.

The higher Honoria and her crew climbed, the more exhausted they became, until finally they made an encampment on a plateau overlooking the bay below. Not all of her crew had deployed into the mountainous region. Instead, a fair portion of them stayed onboard the vessel.

Though there was no threat to the safety of the ship in these primitive waters, one would be foolish to leave behind an iron-clad warship with no protection. Thus, Honoria marched with a small company of privateers into the unknown regions of the Andes mountains.

As she gazed upon the bay through her binoculars, the Byzantine Princess smiled when she thought about the freedom she now had when compared to her previous life as the Byzantine Princess. Eventually, she put away her tools and lied down on a bedroll. As she gazed up at the night sky above the Andes mountains, she smiled before passing out.

Not even thirty minutes had passed since the moment Honoria closed her eyes, to the instant gunfire resounded in the air, the Byzantine Princess quickly rose from her position, to see her encampment was under attack by some local savages, these tribesmen wore little in terms of clothing, and were painted from head to toe in war paint.

Honoria quickly reached for her revolver and her sword as she joined the fray. The thunderous echo of gunfire had instigated a sense of dread in the hearts of the natives as they pounced on the strange pale skin women who had come from the sea.

Honoria pulled back the hammer on her revolver and aimed it with her right hand straight at a native warrior's skull, squeezing her trigger and in doing so blasting his head apart. She did not hesitate to pull the trigger again as she shifted the muzzle of her weapon to a nearby savage. This time, the bullet tore through the opponent's torso, leaving him dead on the spot.

She had not been expecting an attack so soon after arriving. Despite this, the Byzantine Princess was calm as she rallied her girls by her side.

"On me, form a firing line, and defend the camp!"

Though these girls weren't professional soldiers, they were experienced enough in combat to follow commands. They quickly did as they were instructed, and formed their ranks by Honoria's side, where they lowered their rifles toward the oncoming attackers. Their bayonets formed a spearwall that skewered those foolish enough to rush forward. In the next moment, Honoria gave the command to annihilate the enemy..

"Open fire!"

With this said, smoke flew out from the muzzles of the rifles, and with it, the lead projectiles went down range and into the bodies of the enemies, causing their blood to splatter across the plateau. Without needing instruction, the girls who belonged to Honoria's crew pulled back the bolt on their rifles, and inserted a cartridge into the empty chamber, before slamming it home and firing another shot.

They continued this action until the native war band had completely scattered up the mountains, too afraid to pursue the pale-skinned foreigners who commanded the element of thunder. After they had disappeared into the dark night, Honoria spat upon the nearest corpse and issued a command to her troops.

"From now on, I want sentries posted at all entrances of our camp. I did not expect to encounter hostiles so soon, but now we know there are natives to this land, and they are hostile to us. Prepare for combat, because we are not leaving until we chart this strange land!"

The girls nodded their heads as they flipped the safeties on their rifles towards the safe position. They would have to be on high alert from now on. Who knows what terrible fate could have happened to them if one girl had not spotted the shadowy figure of a savage warrior?

Thus Honoria and her crew had contacted the local population, and unlike in New Vienna, this was not a friendly encounter. She knew by the native's reaction that she and her girls were in for a long, and bloody struggle to chart the region's topography.

However, despite these worries, she would press on. Berengar had plans for the region, and though she did not know how he knew of its existence, she was faithful to her husband, and would do as she had promised. Which thoroughly records her encounters and sells the information to the Austrian Crown as viable intelligence for its future Colonization Efforts.

As for Berengar, when he received news of the locals hostility he would plan accordingly for his future attempts to control the region. The Austrian King planned for Venezuela to be the first of his southern colonies.

After all, there were many desirable natural resources in the region, such as oil, gold, iron, bauxite, rubber, and, of course, potatoes. Berengar would have a hard time containing his desire in the coming years to set sail and immediately colonize the region.. Patience was a virtue, however, the King of Austria was far from a virtuous man.

Chapter 509 - Creation Of Synthetic Fibres

Aldo von Passau was currently within the Chemistry lab, with a team of chemists by his side. For quite some time now, he had been experimenting with two chemicals that he had recently discovered. Diamine Acid, which was made from Austria's limited crude oil deposits, as well as the water based dicarboxylic acid. At the moment, he was carefully pouring an equal mixture of the two substances.

In doing so, the Diamine Acid rose to the top of the mixture due to it being based upon oil, causing the two substances to create an obvious divide. However, an interesting reaction occurred in center of the two substances as the mixture settled.

A small film of a new material appeared. Aldo von Passau did not know it at this time, but he had just created Nylon, which was an important material in the manufacture of military equipment. Upon seeing the strange reaction, the man barked orders at one of his subordinates as he witnessed this strange reaction.

"Bring me tweezers now!"

The other chemist did as he was instructed and brought his boss the tools that he had called for. Aldo quickly grabbed hold of the device and played with the small film in the middle of his chemical mixture.

As he did so, he pulled the nylon up revealing a small string, the more he grabbed ahold of and dragged away the more material he would obtain.

As he did this, a wide smile appeared on the man's face. He had quite possibly just discovered something very important. Thus he began dispatching his orders for more of the mixture to be applied, in doing so the Chemists in Kufstein began experimenting with the creation of Nylon, they would not reveal the results of their findings for several weeks, only after they had thoroughly tested this new substance, and the best ways to harvest it.

Berengar was sitting in his office. Weeks had passed since Aldo and his team of Chemists discovered Nylon, however he was utterly unaware of this feat, instead he sat upon his leather-bound chair, with one of his wives sitting in his lap.

This woman was none other than Yasmin. While Berengar was trying to get some work done, the Moorish princess had insisted on spending time with her husband, and thus she played with his chest as he struggled to stay focused.

By now, the tan-skinned beauty had a well-developed belly, signifying that she had entered the later stages of pregnancy. Despite this, Berengar was still very attracted to the woman, and had spent many nights with her. After all, of all his wives, she was the most exotic, and was the only one he had brought back from a conquest.

The Moorish Princess prodded the Austrian King's chest as she gazed into his sapphire blue eye with a longing expression. Just when she was about to kiss her man, she heard a knock on the door, interrupting her actions. She pouted as her husband coughed and called out to the mysterious intruder.

"This better be important!"

A familiar voice resounded on the other side, one which Berengar had not spoken to in some time.

"Your Majesty, I believe I have found something that will impress you!"

Berengar scoffed when he heard this. Aldo von Passau was always a kiss ass, but he was damn good at his job, and thus Berengar tolerated his sycophantic personality. With a heavy sigh, the King of Austria allowed entry into his office.

"Very well. It is open. Do not waste my time..."

When Aldo entered the room, he had a humble smile on his face as he instinctively bowed before his King.

"I wouldn't dream of it..."

In the next moment, he noticed the intimate nature of Berengar and his Moorish bride. He realized why the King was in such a foul mood. Perhaps he had intruded upon something he shouldn't have. Despite this, he was here now, and he would not waste the monarch's precious time.

The middle-aged chemist immediately withdrew a large spool of nylon from his jacket and handed it over to the King. Berengar did not immediately take notice of the substance until Aldo boasted about his achievements.

"Your majesty, this is a synthetic fibre that my lab has created from a mixture of diamine and dicarboxylic acid! It appears to be quite flexible and resilient, at least when compared to fibrous materials found in nature. We can also use it in things other than fabric. It is my suspicion that this product will be very useful for many applications in our Kingdom's future."

Berengar was shocked to see that his chemists had accidentally come across plastic so soon. He truthfully knew little about chemistry, and because of this, he could not contribute much more than an undergrad's understanding of the subject to his people.

However, in every generation, there were exceptional geniuses, which, when taught properly, could create things beyond imagination. Clearly, Aldo von Passau was one of these aforementioned geniuses. As for the application of this technology, Berengar had a very specific use in mind.

Despite its discovery, production of the material would remain limited for a very long time, at least until Berengar could produce enough chemical manufacturing facilities and chemical engineers to operate them.

However, in the meantime, he could make use of his limited supply of the newfound material to ensure a new generation of body armor was issued to his Special Forces, thus he was quite pleased with his Chemistry Department's results. With a wide smile on his face, Berengar nodded his head before giving the man his approval.

"Aldo, you never cease to amaze me with your ingenuity. I want as much of this synthetic fibre as you can produce within the next year. I have plans for it that will benefit our special forces and ensure improved survivability among their ranks."

Though Aldo did not know what Berengar had planned for such a fabric, he could tell by the expression on the King's face that he had at the very least earned himself another massive bonus. Thus, he wore a humble smile as he bowed before his King once more.

"I thank you for your compliments. I can always rely on you to know how best to use my resources."

After saying this, Berengar dismissed the Chemist, and got to the drawing board. Truthfully, the body armor currently issued to his special forces was plagued with a variety of issues. Trench Armor was inherently a stopgap in Berengar's plans until he could develop synthetic fibres. Now that such a material existed, he could create a far superior body armor for use by his soldiers.

With the creation of nylon, Berengar could create velcro, which was instrumental in the establishment of lightweight, slick plate carriers. Plate carriers were a form of modern armor that could use ceramic, steel, or composite plates to protect against not only primitive arrows and bolts, but also modern gunfire.

As for other uses, he could create a more modern set of camouflage web gear that would go over these slick plate carriers, in doing so replace the use of leather for this application. There were plenty of other applications for nylon that could apply to both the civilian and military sectors. However, for now, Berengar planned to use what limited supplies he had to ensure that his best troops were protected against all threats.

After all the cost to raise Jaegers, and Jagdkommandos was no small expense, years of training were required to produce a single Jagdkommando, and he would spend whatever price was necessary to ensure their safety on the field of battle. Thus, he quickly jotted down the details on the creation of velcro and plate carriers.

Though it would be some time before such equipment was crafted, tested, and fielded to his troops, it was better to get to work on such designs early, rather than later. The future was looking up for the Kingdom of Austria, and Berengar fully intended to make use of the latest inventions.

As for Yasmin, she continued to play with her husband, interrupting his work every so often to get some sign of affection from him. Berengar was happy to entertain the woman, and thus, his work for the day was rather slow.

Ultimately, he would finish his designs for improved body armor and tactical equipment late in the evening, where he would finally take his bride to the harem room and enjoy some alone time with her. By the time the couple emerged from their solitude, dinner was already prepared, thus Berengar and his newest wife joined the rest of their family.

As for the Chemistry department, they would be hard at work producing Nylon in as vast a quantity as they could manage for the foreseeable future. With such a few chemists available, they would have to have a small but dedicated team to the research and development of synthetic materials.

It would take some time before the production levels of Nylon fabric were high enough to begin construction of Berengar's newest body armor, thus in the meantime his special forces, and other advanced troops were forced to endure the faults of their trench-style armor.

Chapter 510 - Mountain Warfare Part I

Deep within the Andes Mountains, the Privateers of Queen Honoria's Revenge were camped. Weeks had passed since they first landed, and they had suffered constant ambushes throughout their journey. For whatever reason, the native peoples of this strange land seemed more dedicated to violence than a peaceful approach to the strange foreigners who trespassed on their soil.

Without a means of communication, Honoria and her girls were forced to endure constant onslaught. Despite this, they were well supplied, and had brought sufficient ammo with them to endure a long campaign of discovery and exploration. At the moment Honoria had three .45-70 cartridges in her fingers, and one in her mouth as she rapidly reloaded her rifle and fired on a nearby enemy.

The sound of gunfire echoed in the air as the bullet tore through the torso of her opponent, dropping him to the ground, where she mercilessly finished him with the 10 inch steel blade of her bayonet. So far, her girls had suffered limited casualties, as it was more common for the enemy to break ranks than continue to fight until their utter destruction.

Still, the weeks had not been easy. As women, they were not as strong as their male counterparts, who would normally do the heavy lifting of supplies on this mountainous trek. Exhaustion had set in, and with each assault, her privateers' morale sank. Until now, they had discovered no treasure. Thus, in the eyes of many who took this job in search of fortune, things had become beyond the point of despair.

While they had skillfully mapped much of the territory they had crossed, and thoroughly journaled their encounters with the hostile natives. Honoria was far from pleased with the results. If she did not bring back a token of her triumph, then she would not feel easy with the losses she had suffered.

At the moment, rations were running low, and Melissa was by her side, in the thick of battle. Another echo resounded as Honoria reloaded her weapon and fired once more at the enemy. With this wave of gunfire, they had slaughtered enough of the native war band, causing the survivors to break ranks and route.

With a sigh of relief, Honoria lowered her gun and ejected the empty cartridge. She grabbed the round held between her lips and place it into the gun, slamming the bolt home, before flipping the safety to ensure that a misfire would not occur during her climb. With the death of the savages, Honoria and her crew finally had some breathing room. Melissa walked up to her captain and made a status report.

"Captain, the crew is tired and hungry. If we don't head back soon we will starve out here... I suggest we cut our losses and return to Austria. Surely, the information we provide to the Crown will cause a bountiful reward."

Honoria bit her lip, she was not yet resigned to suffer defeat, and turn back when they had come so far. With a bitter smile, the Pirate Queen responded to her first mate's claims.

"For now, we will rest. Send out some girls to forage for food. There has to be something edible in these damned mountains!"

Melissa sighed heavily as she nodded her head. If they did not find some food soon, then there would surely be a mutiny. Thus she dispatched her orders, sending Elfrun and a squad of privateers out into the mountains to search for food.

While on their journey, Elfrun began juggling her stick grenades as she and her team walked through the mountains, the sight of which brought a sense of dread to her squad members. Could this girl be any more obsessed with explosives?

After appearing over a ridge, the team noticed a small native village. In this village appeared to be small farms. As for what plants they were growing, that remained unknown. However, this clearly meant that they had found some much needed food for their unit.

Elfrun and her girls remained undiscovered, and made a stealthy exit as they reported back to their captain. When they returned, they found that a large argument was occurring between some members of the crew who were agitated over the journey, and those who remained loyal to Honoria.

"You have led us into these mountains promising us fame and fortune, and all we have encountered is endless combat. We have already lost twelve girls in our company! Tell me, will you continue this mad pursuit into this unknown land until we have all passed away? We are running out of rations, and we are far from the shores where our ship lies! If we wish to survive, we must turn back!"

Honoria frowned. She knew that her crew was growing discontent with her actions, but she still believed there was something in this land worth discovering. Thus she refused to turn back until now, a mutiny had occurred. If not for the threat of violence, and the fearsome reputation she had, Honoria's crew would have already overthrown her.

Right as armed conflict was about to occur, Elfrun fired her pistol into the air, gathering everyone's attention. The crew looked over at the location where the shot had been fired to see the explosives expert with a wicked smile on her face..

"Have no fear, for I have found the solution to our problems. About three miles west of here, there is a farming village. If we take it not only will we have a defensible position to set up a base camp, but we can also engorge ourselves on whatever they are growing!"

Honorias gazed at the mutineers with a smug expression before commenting on their behavior.

"You see, I knew it was only a matter of time before we found something of value. What do you say? Will you lower your weapons and fight to take this village? Or will you betray men, and in doing so ensure the pursuit of the Austrian Crown for the rest of your miserable lives?"

Upon hearing that they had access to a defensible position, and a food surplus, the women who were so keen to rise up against their Captain, willfully lowered their weapons and nodded their heads in agreement.

"Very well, we will take this village, but after we have done so, we need to have a serious discussion about our next move!"

After saying this, the leader of the mutineers departed, not willing to endure the vicious gaze of her vengeful captain any longer. As for Honorias, she lowered the hammer to her revolver, and placed it back in its holster, before grabbing ahold of Elfrun and hugging the girl tightly. With a wide smile on her face, the Pirate Queen petted the girl's hair before commenting on her arrival.

"My little hero! You showed up just before things became bloody. I owe you a reward for your actions! But first, tell me about this village. I don't want to lose any more girls when we besiege it."

Elfrun wore a proud smile as she discussed everything she witnessed, from the farms to the defensive measures taken to ensure the survival of the village. Everything was primitive, as one would expect from a stone age civilization.

Thus, Honorias was quite certain with the support of their mortar squad, they would be able to bring down the small agricultural village easily. With a cruel smile etched upon her lips, Honorias made a bold proclamation to her privateers.

"Prepare yourselves. We march within the hour to lay siege to this village. Do whatever it takes to seize this town, even if it means the slaughter of everyone inside it!"

Honorias crew nodded their heads in response to their captain's orders. Here in the new world they were not beholden to the Austrian Rules of Engagement. They could do whatever they wanted to the local villagers, and nobody would be any the wiser. After several weeks of constant battle, these women had grown rather cold towards the native people, and desired vengeance for their fallen comrades.

Thus, when they finally encountered the village, they would be less than merciful with the people inhabited it. Honorias, personally did not care for the lives of the natives, she had shed too much blood on this journey so far, and if this village did not have some kind of treasure she could take back home, then she was liable to massacre its entire populace just to appease her wrath.

As promised, within the hour the crew of Privateers set forth on the brief journey towards the village, its inhabitants completely unaware of the wolf that lie on the horizon. If they knew that an enemy force of roughly one hundred women, armed with firearms and mortars, was about to descend on their village, they would likely abandon their homes and flee with their lives intact.

Unfortunately, they were unaware of Honorias presence, or the might which she and her crew of salty lasses commanded. Thus, it will be a bloody and ruthless conquest. The first of many that Austrian Explorers, and privateers would engage in when knowledge of the New World became public.. Such things were unavoidable when men and women alike were held unaccountable for their actions.