

Steel 641

Chapter 641 - Linde Learns the Truth

Berengar may have just returned home from a long campaign of subjugation against the Aztec Empire, but he was as hard at work as ever. Currently, he was in his office, where he was looking over a map of the current borders of his Empire. Aside from the fatherland, which was a unification of the German-speaking regions of Europe, there were three small sections across the atlantic Ocean, which were the borders of the German Colonies.

With the subjugation of the once mighty Aztec Empire, Germany now had a settlement on the Coast of Mesoamerica, this created an interesting question in Berengar's mind. Obviously, he could no longer refer to the Americas by the term Vinland. Nor could he refer to the regions as the Americas. Thus, Berengar was now thinking of alternative names for the new world.

Since Berengar had discovered the new world in this timeline, the first thought that came to his mind was naming the region after himself. However, after thinking about a pleasant sounding name for more time than he probably should have, he decided to name the continents of the new world after his two German wives. As he felt their names would be a better substitute.

As he gazed upon the map of the regions known as North and South America in his past life, he decided the most fitting name for the Northern Hemisphere would be Lindeheim. After all, Linde was a redhead, and redheads performed better in colder climates. This came as no surprise, as Berengar had always had strange reasons for naming certain things. As for as the southern continent was concerned, he would obviously name it Adelheim after his first wife.

Having Written the names on the Map that displayed not only his colonies, but the entire Americas from his past life's memories, he realized he had not yet named his newest colony. Thus, Berengar decided he might as well grant himself the honor and jotted down the name Berenstadt. Finally, after much hard work, he had come up with an appropriate terminology for the Americas, and his newest settlement.

The German Emperor was so entranced with his work that he failed to notice the approach of his redheaded wife. She had already wrapped her arms around his back by the time he realized her presence. With a calm smile on his face, Berengar spun around and gazed into his wife's sky-blue eyes.

"You are just-in-time Linde, there is something important I wanted to discuss with you."

Linde had a pretty smile on her face when she heard this. She had spent every waking hour she could with her husband since he came home from his journey overseas. It was almost as if she believed he would disappear in the next moment, and because of this, she needed to be by his side at all times. Berengar had noticed this odd behavior and assumed it had something to do with his previous disappearance.

Just when Linde was about to ask what Berengar wanted to speak to her about, her inquisitive gaze landed upon the map which had explicitly mapped out territory that had yet to be explored. Naturally, this caught the cunning woman's attention, which caused her to inquire about where Berengar received such information.

"Master, I know it is not my place, but how exactly do you know that these are the borders of the New World? As far as I'm aware, we have not sent explorers to such regions yet?"

Berengar sighed heavily. Linde arguably had the brightest mind he had come across in this new world. If someone as simple as Honoria was suspicious about the origin of his knowledge, then surely Linde would have noticed something by now.

There was only one reason Berengar had not revealed the truth to his most trusted companion, and that was fear. Fear that she would flee from his arms the moment she found out he was not the man she thought she knew. While Yasmin was quick to accept him, Honoria had been angered for days, and despite eventually coming around to the idea, she had refused to speak with him for some time.

The reality was that Linde was Berengar's favorite wife, hell she was practically his soul-mate. If she ran away from him after learning the truth, it would absolutely devastate him. He didn't know if he could continue on his path in this life without her.

However, sooner or later, he would have to tell the woman the truth, or else it would gnaw at his very soul. Especially when he already felt guilty for informing two of his other wives before Linde. Thus, with a heavy sigh, Berengar began his journey on a path with no return.

"Linde, it is time you learned the truth.. I suppose someone as bright as you have been wondering for some time now how I know the things I know..."

Linde's heart beat rapidly when she heard the words. She felt as if she could pass out from anxiety at any moment. Naturally, she had suspected the truth about Berengar's origins for some time, and had long since investigated it. However, in the end, she could not find a single clue that would lead her to the truth.

If Berengar was willing to inform her about his biggest secret now, it meant he fully trusted her, and she obviously would pay attention to what the man had to say. However, before she did so, she wanted to make a few things clear, and interrupted her husband before he told her everything.

"Promise you won't be mad, but I may have already looked into your past in an attempt to learn about what you have been hiding from me. However, even with all the resources you have given me over the years, I simply could not find the slightest trail to follow that would lead me to the truth.

It might sound crazy, but I have come up with three theories that explain your otherworldly knowledge. So tell me if I guess one of them correctly. The first is the possibility that the Catholics are right, and you have sold your soul to the devil in exchange for limitless knowledge. This seems unlikely to me, as I know you would never risk eternal damnation simply for some feats in this life.

The second theory is the absurd idea that you are, in fact, a god in the flesh, and you are omniscient. However, this also seems implausible as there is a very clear record of your birth, and you did not begin displaying your keen intellect until you were already an adult.

As for my third speculation, it somehow seems more farfetched than the others, but it has the most evidence to support it. I strongly believe you are a man from the future, where all the information you have brought forth into this world is already common knowledge in your time. The only part that makes

me unable to accept this theory is I can't seem to figure out how you replaced the original Berengar, and so seamlessly blended into his life..."

Berengar's jaw had nearly hit the floor when he heard Linde had already been researching into his secrets. Especially when the third theory she had was close to reality. The woman had an anxious expression on her face as she was practically squirming in her seat, waiting for a response. It was not until she spoke up that Berengar snapped out of his daze.

"Well, which one is it?"

Berengar chuckled softly. He was truly bewildered. In his past life, this woman would surely have been a genius among geniuses. He could only guess how she was leading to such crazy theories. He supposed an old quote from Arthur Conan Doyle may have something to do with it.

"When you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

If Linde had followed such a thought process, then it meant she had exhausted every logical, and rational possibility that she could think of only to come up with three highly improbably, and otherwise insane theories to explain the truth behind Berengar's seemingly limitless knowledge. He could only smile when he thought about how much dedication Linde had put forward to learning more about him. Thus, he had quite the pleasant expression on his face as he revealed the truth.

"Your third theory is the closest to the truth. I'm not a time traveler per se, but I have the memories of a man from the future of a similar, but distinctively different world. The truth of the matter is, I was born in this world as Berengar von Kufstein, and until I was twenty years old, I was a lazy, drunken loser of extremely low intellect.

However, when my brother poisoned me, I fell into a deep coma, and when I finally awoke, I had the memories of a man called Julian Weber, who was an engineer in an unbelievably advanced society. If I told you that in that in my past life, mankind had already been to the moon, would you believe me?"

At first I thought when I awoke in this world I thought I was simply Julian, and that Berengar had died off after my transmigration, but as the years have passed, I found that I have more of the original Berengar in me than I originally thought. Particularly in my cruel and ruthless nature, as well as my personal beliefs. These were not aspects of my personality in my past life."

Linde gazed at Berengar with a twinkling expression in her eyes. Unlike what Berengar had expected, she did not care in the slightest that he had lied to her for years, nor did she ponder the possibility that he was a complete stranger. She was more interested in learning everything there was to know about both of his identities. With an excited expression on her face, Linde demanded to know more.

"Tell me everything!"

This reaction initially shocked Berengar, however he could tell that she was not angry at him, and was genuinely interested in learning about his past life. Thus, he spent the rest of the day telling Linde stories of his past life, everything from his personal life story to the history of that world. He even went as far to describe his favorite snacks and how they tasted.

For the first time in a long time, the couple spent the entire night doing nothing but talking to one another. By the time the morning came, Linde felt as if she had a better understanding of the man she loved, and that she was closer to him than ever.

Chapter 642 - Hans Learns the Truth

While Berengar was speaking with his wife Linde about his past life, and everything he could recall from that world. Another important discussion was going on in a different corner of the house. A young princess was sitting in shock as her fiance had proclaimed the hidden truth he knew.

"So, Veronika, I see you still fancy my father..."

Hans was sipping from a teacup, which was filled with milk while he acted as if he was perfectly calm. A state of being, in which he was anything but. Quite some time ago, the Princess of Bohemia had approached the Emperor of Germany and asked that she be betrothed to him rather than his son.

This was a request that Berengar had denied, something which displeased the young girl. However, she was completely unaware that her actual fiance, Prince Hans von Kufstein, had overheard her, and until now had kept his mouth shut on the issue.

Hans was initially willing to let this request slide. After all, he was rather close to Veronika, and had assumed it was a mere passing fancy one, which she had gotten over. However, Hans had recently spotted his fiancée fawning over his father after the man returned from his expedition, and because of this, the boy could no longer keep his wrath confined.

The Prince of Germany was not even ten years old, but his intellect had expanded rapidly, to the point where he was practically on the same level as the Bohemian Princess who was now a young adolescent girl. Despite this, he had the emotional maturity of a child his age. The fact that he had been able to keep quiet on this issue for so long was a miracle in itself.

Veronika flushed red in embarrassment as she reflected on the past incident, where she foolishly chased after Berengar. She had no idea that the boy Hans was aware of her crush. However, she had come to terms that she was engaged to the man's son, and took solace in the fact that the boy was equally exceptional in his own way.

Her only complaint was that her fiance was still a young child, and it would be many years before he was an age where they could actually be intimate with one another. Her first instinct was to deny and deflect, which is exactly what she did once she came to her senses.

"What are you talking about? Berengar is a brute. A man who stole my father's crown, and holds me prisoner. How could I possibly admire such a man?"

Despite the princess's words, Hans was having a hard time believing her. After all, her emotions were written all over her face.

"You are a terrible liar..."

Upon seeing that she had been caught red-handed, Veronika finally admitted the truth.

"While I may have had a crush on your father in the past, I realize now that I was foolish, and I just have to be patient until you come of age."

In response to this, Hans merely scoffed as he took another sip of his milk. After doing so, he pointed out the holes in the girl's story.

"If that were true, you wouldn't have been fawning over him the moment he returned home from another one of his campaigns. What were your words... Oh yeah, I think it was something along the lines of "Oh my Kaiser, where did you go this time? Did you claim new land for our Empire? Did you kill anybody? Is there room for one more in your harem? You are so brave and strong!"

Veronika immediately protested the boy as he mocked her.

"I did not say such a thing!"

Once more, the Prince of Germany wore a smug expression on his childish face as he commented on the girl's denial.

"You didn't need to. The expression on your face said it for you..."

The Princess of Bohemia had never been so embarrassed in her entire life. Did she really look like she was harboring such thoughts? She was only admiring the hero who saved her from her mother after he had made another triumphant return. The emperor didn't truly believe she thought of him in such a way, did he? She could only come up with a suitable excuse for her behavior.

"Okay, I'll admit it. I'm a fan of your father, but that doesn't mean I still fancy him!"

Hans did not say a word. He remained silent as he let the girl's protests speak for themselves. Obviously, she could not handle the awkward atmosphere as she once more began defending her actions.

"It's hard not to be a fan of him. He single-handedly united our Empire and has never been defeated in battle. He is fearless, charming, domineering, and cares about his loved ones deeply. I'm not the only one who is an admirer of Berengar. Practically the entire Empire is as well!"

After hearing such praise, Hans felt as if he was about to have an aneurysm. He finally snapped and let out his innermost thoughts on his father.

"My father is a fool who has needlessly put his life at risk too many times to count. For what purpose? Some vain pursuit of glory on the battlefield? He is either a fool or he is a bloodthirsty maniac who can only rest after he has taken someone's life.

Either way, my mother shouldn't have to sit at home and worry about that bastard's safe return every time he goes off to war! My father is more often found on the battlefield than he is at home with his family. It just goes to show his priorities..."

Veronika was taken aback when she heard the prince's true thoughts on his father. Clearly, Hans had become bitter after witnessing his mother in a state of despair after Berengar had gone missing. He was right about one thing, though: Berengar had spent more time at war than looking after his family.

This was a major point of contention for not only Hans but Helga as well, who practically considered her father a stranger. The Bohemian Princess suddenly realized what was going on. Hans was not angry at her; he was angry at his father. Thus, she wore a smug smile as she witnessed the prince pouting.

"You know, Hans, your father is an incredibly busy man. In case you haven't noticed, the man has an Empire to run. I'm sure he simply forgets to spend time with you and your siblings. Communication is a two-way street. Have you ever actually requested that your father spend some time with you? I'm sure he would be willing to do so if you asked politely.

I can't even imagine how hard he is working to secure a better future for you, your siblings, and the German people as a whole. Not to mention he has four wives and a mistress that he has to, erm... satisfy. I'm sure it slips his mind to spend some time with his kids. If you don't ask, then you will never find out if he is willfully neglecting you, or if he simply loses track of time."

Though Hans may be a brilliant child, he was severely lacking in wisdom and maturity. The reason was simple. Those two things usually came with life experience, and he had yet to reach double digits in years, let alone the age of the majority. It had never actually occurred to him to take the initiative. After all, Linde worked equally hard as Berengar, but she always made time for her kids. If that was the case, why couldn't his father?

Fundamentally, it came down to the last reason that Veronika had listed, Berengar had too many lovers to satisfy on both an emotional and physical level. The five of them monopolized his free time, so much so that it was often at the expense of their children. There were only so many hours of the day, and Berengar had too much to do.

Hans had realized that Veronika was right, and felt ashamed of taking his anger out on her and his father. He immediately got up from his seat and bowed to the girl before departing.

"Thank you for the insight. I know what I have to do..."

After saying this, Hans ran off towards his parents, hoping to ask them to spend some quality time together as a family. He did not know what kind of major revelation Berengar was sharing with Linde at this very moment, but he was about to find out more than he had bargained for when he stumbled upon their conversation. By the time Hans had located his parents, they were deep in a discussion about his past life.

"If I told you that in that in my past life, mankind had already been to the moon, would you believe me?"

The moment Hans overheard this statement; the boy stopped in his tracks and hid outside the room, eavesdropping on his parents' conversation. Just what madness was his father speaking? This was a tremendous revelation, and if true, would explain many of the boy's questions about his father. While Berengar and Linde spent the night speaking about his past life, they were completely unaware that Hans had heard the entire conversation.

Chapter 643 - Reminiscing of the Past

Hans sat outside the door to the room where his mother and father were having a shocking discussion. The young boy hugged his knees to his chest as he listened to every word his father spoke, as if it were a commandment from God himself.

He could hear the voice of his mother as she prodded the man's mysterious background with more questions. It would appear that no matter how much Berengar spoke of his past life, Linde was never

fully satisfied. She desired to know everything about her man, and thus she immediately inquired about past lovers.

"So you died when you were in your mid-twenties? You must have had a wife, or a lover then? Here I thought I was your first..."

She could hardly believe Berengar's next words as he spoke about his past life with a nostalgic smile on his face.

"You were my first in both lives. I was not exactly what you call handsome in my past life. I was also an introvert who had a hard time approaching women. There were a few girls I was close to, but they never really saw me as their equal, and because of that, they treated me like a little brother.

Besides, none of them were as beautiful as you. They were all harpies who coated themselves in pounds of makeup to make them appear as if they were princesses. You are entirely different from those hags and are naturally beautiful, a trait most women don't have. You could say reincarnating into this world and meeting you was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. "

Linde blushed in embarrassment when she heard these words. It was rare for Berengar to speak so fondly of her. Though he treated her well, he seldom used such shameless flattery. As for Hans, when he heard his father's words, he took a mental note. He had always wondered how the man subdued someone like his mother. Perhaps it was his kind words that won her heart.

Of course, if the young boy knew the truth of how his parents had come together, it would definitely skew his conception of romance. After all, their relationship might seem like one out of a fairy tale on the outside, but behind the scenes, it was far from it. Luckily for him, Berengar and Linde had seldom spoken the truth about how they became a couple. After all, it was not something you would normally say in polite company.

Linde fawned over her husband after he spoke such sweet words to her, completely missing the point that in his past life he died bitter and alone. It took her several minutes to break away from Berengar's charm and realize the meaning behind his words. After doing so, she only had more questions on her mind, which she quickly voiced.

"You're telling me that in the entire life you lived, you never had a single woman who loved you? What is wrong with the bitches in that world?"

Berengar wore a bitter expression as he reminisced about his past life. In the end, he simply sighed and shrugged his shoulders as if admitting defeat.

"That's just the way things were in that world. The sad truth of the matter is that by the time I died, the prospect of marriage had long since become a joke. Only a foolish man would risk such a union. I'm better off here with you. Hell, I'm not sure that I had much to look forward to, even if I somehow survived my last tour in Afghanistan..."

Linde could not agree more with Berengar when he said that. He was clearly better off in this world by her side. However, she obviously had more questions on her mind about his past life and was quick to voice them.

"You previously said you had no siblings, nor did you have any friends, or girlfriends... Was your relationship with your parents at least decent?"

Berengar sighed heavily as he heard this before revealing more about his past.

"Sure, when I actually saw them. However, they worked long hours, and most days, I had to take care of myself. I would only get to see them for a few hours every night, and by that time, they were too exhausted to really do anything with me. Though I suppose I have a few good memories of them.

This one year, they worked overtime for several months just to pool together enough cash to take us on a family trip to one of the country's major theme parks. I don't think I ever spent so much time with my parents as I did then. I ended up getting sick on the last day and vomited the entire trip home. Still, it was fun... Of course, the moment we got home it was like the trip had never happened; they had to go to work the next day, and once more I was stuck by myself, with nothing but my books to keep me company."

Linde could see the joy on Berengar's face dissipate as he mentioned that last part. It was as if she could feel the pain and loneliness in the man's heart. She couldn't bear seeing her man harboring such emotions and quickly seized his hand to assure him he was not alone in this life. Berengar smiled as he saw the concerned expression on Linde's pretty pink lips. He then assured her he was okay.

"It's alright, I've long since accepted my past. My only worry is that I'm doing the same thing to my own children. I turned out to be just like my father, working from sun up until sundown. By the time I'm finally finished with all my work, I'm too exhausted to spend any time with them. I suppose they are lucky to have multiple mothers who care for them in ways I can't. I wasn't afforded such a luxury in my past life."

When Hans heard these words on the other side of the door, he struggled to contain the tears in his eyes. For some time, he had been resentful towards his father for not being a consistent part of his life. However, the man was simply overworked. After all, he was the leader of the world's most powerful Empire.

When the boy heard his father had suffered through a similar childhood, but with his mother absent as well, he realized how lucky he was to have Linde as an ever present part of his life. Hans was still a young child and couldn't control his emotions very well. He rushed into the room and hugged his father's leg as he apologized for being angry with him.

"Father, I'm sorry, I didn't know!"

It shocked Berengar and Linde to see their eldest child run into the room while crying. Berengar was especially bewildered, as he did not know what the boy was talking about. He quickly picked the child up and set him on his knee while inquiring further about his current state of mind.

"What's wrong, Hans?"

The child continued to cry as he wiped his snotty nose all over Berengar's Imperial Regalia.

"I hated you! You were never there for me, but I know now how good I have it!"

Linde was stunned that the boy was eavesdropping on them the entire time. She quickly asked how much her son had heard of her private conversation with her husband.

"Hans, how much did you hear?"

The boy did not dare hide the truth from his mother and uttered a single word in response to her interrogation.

"everything..."

Berengar and Linde looked at each other with astonishment. Ultimately, the German emperor sighed before flicking his son on the nose.

"Hans, it is not polite to eavesdrop. You must keep everything you have heard today a secret. If such knowledge became common, it could be disastrous for us. There are those who would not understand, and would stop at nothing to harm our family."

The boy nodded his head in silence. He was obviously aware of the dangers such a secret presented not only to his father, but to himself as well. He swore then and there he would never tell another living soul.

"I swear, I won't say a word to anyone..."

Ultimately, Berengar sighed before gazing out the window and realizing it was already morning. The boy had stayed up all night listening to their conversation. Thus, he quickly got up from his seat and carried his child with him towards the boy's room.

"You can't stay up all night. It's not healthy for you. You are going to get some sleep, and we will talk about this tomorrow."

As for Linde, she followed her husband toward's the prince's quarters where for the first time in a long time tucked the child into his bed together as parents. The moment the boy's head hit the feather pillow, he passed out from exhaustion. Linde gazed at her husband with a warm expression on her pretty face.

"It looks like you will need to make some time for our son. It is not good for him to grow up with resentment in his heart, especially at such a young age."

Berengar simply nodded his head in agreement before expressing his opinion.

"Not just Hans, I need to make time for all of my children..."

Having said this, Berengar decided he would cut his hours to a manageable level and begin spending some more time with his family.

Chapter 644 - Acre Has Fallen

The thunder of guns echoed in the air outside the city of Acre. The city's brave defenders continued to fire their rifled muskets onto the enemy formations, creating a wall of death as the minie ball projectiles tore through the iron armor of the crusaders as if it were made of tissue paper. With the echo of every volley, the scent of fresh blood would accompany it.

Though the city's walls were primitive in so far as they were not based upon the star principle that the German Empire used, they held firm against the measly one and six-pound cannon balls which sought to bring them down.

The reality was that the Crusaders lacked the gunpowder necessary to continuously bombard the enemy's defenses. As supplies began to run short, the artillery officer called out to the English King, who gazed upon the scene of the siege with disdain on his lips. He had assumed with the arrival of the Knights of the Red Dragon, things would be easier, however for the past few weeks the Crusader forces had failed to break through Acre's defenses. Supplies were running low, and so too was morale.

If they did not bring these walls down soon, then they would be overwhelmed by the Byzantine and Timurid reinforcements, which were surely on their way to break the siege. King Lawrence of England had no choice but to shift his tactics.

"Target the gates! Use the last of our artillery fire to smash them to pieces!"

Field artillery was still a new concept to most of the world's empires, and though Berengar used them with exceptional results, the rest of the European Kingdoms were lagging behind in their tactics. It was because of this that they foolishly followed the German Empire's example of smashing walls to bits with overwhelming firepower.

This did not work out as planned, as they lacked explosive shells capable of rapidly achieving such results. Sure a solid cannonball could bring down a castle wall, but it required quite a few of them, and with every shot fired that was a waste of precious gunpowder, a resource the Catholics were severely lacking now that Berengar had destroyed one of the largest deposits of saltpeter in Europe.

The crusader's artillery quickly shifted their target towards the thick wooden gates of the City's walls. When the Byzantine Defenders saw the artillery barrage aiming for their gates, they had finally had enough. They quickly ordered their own artillery to target the enemy's guns. Much like in the early days of Berengar's rule, the city of Acre was defended by 24 lb siege cannons, which had a much greater effect than their 12 lb counterparts.

These massive pieces of artillery were refurbished by the German Empire and sold to their Byzantine allies at a fraction of the cost. Though few of them had ever actually been used in combat, Berengar still felt the need to refurbish the weapons, a many of them had been poorly maintained and were pitted with rust.

After these magnificent pieces of artillery were loaded and fired, explosions echoed in the air as the 24 pound cannon balls rained from the sky and onto the Crusader artillery pieces. The pathetic falconet and saker cannons were practically torn apart by the superior artillery of the Byzantine Artillery. Needless to say, they were rendered inoperable. When the Byzantine soldiers saw they had successfully removed a major threat to the city, they cried out in joy. Despite this loss, the Grand Master of the Knights of the red dragon was not the slightest bit discouraged. Instead, he quickly issued orders to his own troops.

"Bring out the Drakes!"

The soldiers of the English, French, and Hospitaller armies were confused when they heard this. However, when they saw the unique field guns gathered beyond the range of the 24 lb smoothbore cannons, they had a hint of excitement on their face.

These cannons differed from the one and six-pound guns the crusaders were previously using. For starters, they were made entirely of wrought iron, and had a giant metal band over the rear section of the gun. These guns were designed to fire twelve pound projectiles that were in the shape of a shell. The only difference was they were inert.

The Grand Master of the Red Dragon had done extensive research on the captured rifled muskets from the Austrian War of Independence and had discovered the rifling in their barrels, and while he had yet to figure out how to replicate such a pattern on muskets he decided to experiment with its principle in artillery. Because of this, the Order of the Red Dragon now had rifled muzzle loading artillery, which fired inert projectiles.

A total of six of these guns, which were referred to as Drakes, lined up far beyond the range of the 24 lb siege guns, and fired their projectiles towards the gate of the city, smashing them into splinters after a single volley. Once the gates were blown apart, both parties stood back in shock. However, it did not take long for the Crusaders to recover. They quickly rushed through the opening of the gates. In response, the Strategos of Palestine desperately called out to the Timurid soldiers below.

"Hold the line!"

However, as the men appeared in the gap, they were quickly gunned down by the volley fire of the Crusader's musketeers, who proceeded to charge into the fray with their socket bayonets. Bodies filled up the gap as the feudal Timurid soldiers clashed with the Crusaders. While this was occurring in the gap, the Byzantine soldiers continued to fire their shots onto the soldiers below. Taking as many lives as possible, hoping to relieve the pressure at the gates.

Aubry gazed upon the scene from afar and decided to place another wager with his English counterpart.

"I wager ten tons of silver that my soldiers kill the most heretics."

Lawrence gazed over at the effeminate prince and scoffed before replying.

"Make it twenty and you have a deal..."

As the two kings gambled on whose forces would kill the most of the enemy troops, the Hospitaller and Red Dragon leaders were engaged in a different conversation.

"Those cannons? They are one of your inventions?"

The Grand Master of the order of the Red Dragon broke out into laughter as he explained himself.

"Indeed. I noticed something peculiar after cutting one of the barrels of a captured musket in half. They have these little grooves on the inside of the barrel. These grooves rotate and help spin the projectile, allowing it to stabilize at greater distances. That is why the German and Byzantine weapons have such a greater range than our own.

However, unfortunately I have yet to figure out how to efficiently cut the grooves into the tiny barrels of a musket. It is much easier with a larger bore, at least for me. This should give our armies vastly superior range in terms of artillery against our foes. Only the German Army will have better artillery than the Knights of the Red Dragon!"

The Hospitaller Grand Master did not disagree with a word the man had said. He had seen how far away the so called Drakes were as they fired onto the gates of the city. He was thoroughly impressed. Now if only they could figure out how to make the weapons explode like the Germans had. Unfortunately for them, that would require advanced chemicals that would not enter their hands for many, many years.

The city's defenders fought bravely to defend themselves from the enemy, however in the end the city began to fall into the hands of the Crusaders. The Sultan of the Timurid Empire was in a state of panic as he fled to the rear of the city with the Strategos of Palestine.

"We need to get out of here. Tell me there is some way to leave the city without the Crusader army noticing?"

The Strategos was a bit hesitant, however he ultimately nodded his head.

"We can escape through the rear gate, however our soldiers will know what we have done and will quickly surrender the moment we abandon them."

In response to this, Salan spat upon the ground before turning away from his Byzantine counterpart.

"You can stay if you wish. However, I know what happens to a city that falls into the hands of Crusaders, and I will not wait around to have my head removed!"

After saying this, the Sultan had run off, looking for a mount to escape upon. The Strategos gazed upon the chaos, which was spreading into the hearts of the city, and sighed before taking off in the direction of the Timurid Emperor. It was a pity, but Acre had fallen. There was no hope of salvaging this battle.

As for the fate of the city's inhabitants, and the brave men who defended it? That remained to be seen, but history had shown that when Catholics were worked into a religious frenzy, only bloodshed could abate their fury.

Chapter 645 - The German Cadet Corps

Hans stood in formation alongside a bunch of other young boys his age. They were dressed in military-style uniforms, and each held a rifle in their arms. The Prince of Germany was given no special treatment as he trained alongside his fellow cadets in the use of firearms. Since the age of seven, Hans, as well as every other boy in Germany, had begun military training in some small capacity.

They mostly learned things such as marching in formation, survival skills, shooting weapons, hand to hand combat, and physical fitness. The establishment of the German Cadet Corps was loosely based upon the Prussian Cadet Corps from Berengar's past life. However, it was more spartan in nature than it was Prussian.

The Purpose of the German Cadet Corps was twofold. For starters, its purpose was to ensure that the youth of Germany were well prepared for their eventual military service once they reached adulthood. However, it served as another important aspect in German society, and that was the idea that Germany must be militaristic if it wished to maintain global dominance.

The red-haired prince did not care about any of this, and instead, he focused on the task at hand. Hans aimed down the tangent sights of his rifle before acquiring his target at a distance of three hundred yards. After taking a deep breath, he squeezed the trigger, sending the copper jacketed Spitzer projectile

down range and straight into the steel target's chest. An audible clang resounded in the air as the bullet hit its mark.

This was the twentieth target that Hans had hit in the last two minutes, earning him his expert marksman badge. The young boy released his breath as he quickly pulled back the bolt on his rifle, ejecting the spent cartridge, before placing the rifle safely on the rack. The instructor who witnessed the boy's excellent marks could not help but sigh as he handed the boy his badge.

"Corporal Hans, it is my greatest honor to award you the expert marksmanship badge. Make sure to continue training with your rifle, and act as an example to the other boys!"

Hans smiled as he grabbed hold of the badge and pinned it to the breast of his uniform. He had a sense of overwhelming pride in his heart as he saluted his instructor. Unlike everything else he owned in this world, this badge represented his personal worth as a cadet, and not just a pampered Prince.

Despite being Royalty Hans was treated no differently from any of the other boys in the Cadet Corps, having to climb from the same lowly rank to the top. Everything he accomplished in the Cadet Corps was because of his own merit. Despite the sense of fulfillment that Hans felt, he wore stoic expression as he thanked the Sergeant for the award.

"Thank you Sergeant, I will do my best!"

The sergeant nodded his head before giving the prince his next task.

"You can wait around for the other boys to finish, or you can proceed to your next task. Remember, the sooner you complete your daily objectives, the sooner you can return home."

Hans nodded and gazed at the other boys, who were still shooting their targets. Clearly the Prince had a head start in shooting, as his father had personally been instructing him in some capacity since he was five years old. However, there were other boys who concluded their rounds shortly after Hans.

After all, the National Militia permitted men to possess arms in their own homes so long as they served. This meant there were other boys who trained with their fathers on how to shoot and how to hunt at a young age.

Upon seeing that he was beaten once again, a young blonde boy by the name of Claus approached the Prince and congratulated him on another victory.

"Good job, Hans, but next time I swear I will beat you!"

Here in the Cadet Corps, all boys were equal, no matter the status of their families. It was because of this that a commoner such as Claus could refer to Hans by his first name. Hans merely nodded his head in silence before shifting his gaze towards the ongoing shooting competition.

Many boys failed to hit their targets. After all, the targets were set at varying distances. The boys were only allowed twenty rounds to complete the task. In order to reach expert marksman, one had to hit all twenty targets in under three minutes.

After completing his Rifle Assignment, and setting the record, Hans walked off from the area, no longer interested in the results that the other boys in his unit would achieve. Instead, he focused on his next task for the day, which was grappling.

Hans walked into a large gymnasium where he noticed a bunch of boys wrestling for position before working into submissions. The rules were simple: the fight would go on until one boy tapped, or could no longer continue.

Sparing not a single moment, the prince quickly stripped out of his uniform and put on some athletic attire before stepping onto the large mat, where he was immediately greeted by a nine-year-old boy by the name of Johannes. Johannes had a smug expression on his face as he took an aggressive stance.

"Hans, come to taste defeat yet again! There's no way a little runt like you could defeat me!"

Hans was not small in the slightest, at least not for his age, but Johannes was older and larger. The boy always abused his size and strength to get the best of Hans. Despite this, Hans always accepted the boy's challenge and quickly took his own stance.

"We'll see about that!"

The two boys circled one another for a while, grabbing each other's wrists and ripping them away. Eventually the duo tied up, where Hans had one hand on the back of the boy's neck, and one on his forearm, Hans quickly pulled the larger boy forward, forcing him to step towards the Prince. Upon seeing an opening, Hans dropped to his knee and grabbed hold of the Johannes's ankle, lifting it into the air while pushing the boy forward.

A broad smirk appeared on the prince's face as he had succeeded in taking the boy down with the ankle pick he had learned from his father. Hans did not hesitate, and neither did Johannes. The larger and stronger boy realized he had been taken down and quickly tried to catch the prince in a classic guard, however Hans was faster. He grabbed hold of the boy's two legs and used a pressure pass to get by Johannes guard and into side control.

Hans wasted no time as he quickly transitioned into a full mount where he fished for a submission. He quickly grabbed hold of Johannes' forearm and pinned it to the ground in an attempt to lock up the Americana. However, the boy realized what Hans was doing, and grabbed hold of his arm while blocking his leg. He bridged into the air and reversed the position with Hans now on the ground.

Hans grunted as he used his legs to push the boy forward into his guard while clamping his head down with his hand. Johannes struggled to break out of Hans's guard, but in doing so, he left an opening for the prince to snatch a triangle choke on him.

After Hans had sunk the submission in, the boy had two options: tap out or pass out. Refusing to admit defeat to the boy he had bullied for some time, Johannes went to sleep in a matter of seconds, desperately struggling to break out of the choke during the countdown.

It was only after Johannes went limp that Hans released his grip and tossed him to the side. After several seconds, the boy gasped and looked around in shock. The blood rapidly returned to his head as he tried to get his bearings, forgetting how he had passed out in the first place.

For the first time, Hans had beaten Johannes and revealed the boy's weak spot, though he was a good wrestler. Once taken down, the boy's ground game was severely lacking, walking straight into Hans's triangle choke. Despite being defeated, Johannes was not discouraged. He quickly stood up and signalled for the two to start again.

Hans and Johannes grappled for several rounds, however, after the prince had learned his rival's weakness, he only lost once. Having been unable to escape the larger boy's pressure until the coach's whistle blew, and the round was over.

Hans would then switch to a new partner and grapple for several more rounds until the entire grappling session was over. With each defeat, he learned from his opponents, and improved his game, never slacking off in the slightest.

The coach gazed upon the crown prince and shuddered. Though he was only seven, he was quickly learning how to defeat his opponents in hand to hand combat. He knew that by the time this boy concluded his cadet training, he would be ready for combat. Though what the battlefields would look like by then, the instructor did not know.

Thus, Hans continued to fulfill his daily tasks before returning home, while covered in sweat and grime. When his mother laid eyes on him, she quickly ordered the servants to prepare a bath for the Prince where he relaxed after a hard day's work. Thus was the daily life of the young Prince.

Chapter 646 - Family Outting

Today was a rare day for Berengar. He had taken some time off from his never ending work to spend time with his family. Currently, all four of his wives and his mistress, Henrietta, were pregnant with his children. Most of the girls already had at least one child with Berengar, with the princess of Germany being the odd one out.

Rather than stay inside the Palace all day, Berengar had taken his family into the hills above the capital for a picnic. There were ample amount of Imperial Guards present to ensure the security of the Royal Family.

Berengar sat in the center of the large blanket which was sprawled across the grass where he dined on a few sandwiches which Linde had prepared for the group. By his side was not only the busty redhead, but Adela as well. The two women fawned over their husband as their children played in the field. Hans was currently bullying his little brother Kristoffer while teaching the boy some wrestling.

By now, Kristoffer had grown from an infant child into a young toddler and struggled to prevent his big brother from bringing him to the ground. Adela gazed in shock at the violence that was occurring between the two boys and was quick to intervene, however before she could do so, Berengar raised his hand with a smile on his face.

"Let the boys be. They're just playing around. If they were really fighting, Hans would have thrown some hands already."

Hans had neither thrown any strikes, nor had he used any submissions. He knew well that the small child was too young to practice such things, and instead bullied the boy with his size and strength. Despite putting the boy into a front headlock, he did not execute any attacks, merely holding his brother to the ground, encouraging him to escape the position.

"Come on, Kris, get out of this! You can do it!"

The blonde-haired boy struggled to escape Hans' grasp, as he was pinned to the ground, with his brother's arms wrapped around his neck. Ultimately, the second Prince tried to break free of the

headlock, however, in doing so he had presented his back, where Hans spun around, and sunk his hooks in, putting the boy in a body triangle as he succeeded in taking his brother's back. It was at this time Berengar had seen enough and interrupted the two of them before things went any further.

"Hans, let your brother go. He hasn't even begun training yet. You're just bullying him at this point."

Hans did as he was instructed and released his little brother with a mischievous smile on his face.

"Yes, father..."

Linde could not help but smile as she saw her son dominate Adela's child on the ground. Hans was turning into a fine young warrior, just like his father. As for Adela, she hurried over to her son, who was crying, and picked him up into the air.

"There, there, Kristoffer, one day you will be big and strong, just like your father. When that day comes, you will be able to beat your brother at his own game..."

Berengar also walked over and comforted the child. Unlike Hans, the boy was not an exceptional genius. At least he had not showed the near superhuman intellect of his older brother. However, there were clear signs of being mentally gifted even at his young age. Upon seeing his father also coming over to comfort him, the boy smiled wickedly towards his older brother.

Hans immediately realized that the brat was acting up just so his parents could fawn over him. This made the boy slightly enraged by the little brat's guile. Clearly, he had underestimated his little brother. Linde also noticed the boy's challenging stare towards her son and immediately competed by grabbing hold of Hans and stroking his silky, strawberry blonde hair.

Berengar was forced to choose between his two sons on who he wanted to spend time with, putting him in a precarious situation as both of the boy's mothers competed for his affection. Ultimately, he took the safe bet and walked over to his eldest daughter, Helga, who was in the process of painting the scene of the picnic.

"What are you up to, my baby girl?"

Helga did not shift her focus from the painting, and instead continued her practice. Over the past few years, her talent had showed itself as she was now painting at a level vastly superior to a girl her age. Even Berengar was stunned when he first glimpsed the painting. The girl was diligent not only in her studies, but in her hobbies as well. She was constantly improving her craft as if she were a professional.

When the princess noticed the expression on her father's face, she smiled. It was perhaps the first time Berengar had ever seen the girl smile in her life. Unlike her previous paintings, the current artwork included all of Berengar's lovers and their children, as well. With a pretty smile on her lips, the girl confidently described her work to her father.

"It is such a beautiful scene that I could not help but paint it!"

Berengar gazed up from the painting and towards the scene where the four beautiful women played with their children. In the painting, he was in the center of the family, proudly gazing upon his wives and offspring. He had always known that the girl had talent in the arts, but he was now starting to believe

she had an intellect on par with her brother's. Ultimately, the Emperor smiled as he pat the girl on the head and encouraged her to continue working hard.

"I look forward to the finished product!"

Helga merely nodded her head, continuing to smile as she painted the scene of the Royal Family at its picnic in the hills above the city of Kufstein. Berengar then returned to his family, where Henrietta shoved a sandwich in his mouth. The scene was so endearing that Helga edited the painting to include it. Henrietta had a radiant smile on her face as she commented on Linde's cooking skills. Pa nda

No vel "Linde has gotten so good at cooking. These sandwiches are delicious!"

The sandwich in question was a tuna melt. Because of advancements in maritime technology, as well as food preservation. The business of catching and farming tuna had been booming in Trieste and Malta. As a result, Tuna had now become a popular food item and had been experimented upon in many ways by the German populace.

The tuna melt was made with toasted sourdough slices, melted german butter cheese, and a tuna salad mix containing onions, mayonnaise, mustard, among other things. Being a huge fan of tuna sandwiches in his past life, Berengar obediently took a bite from the delicious sandwich before washing it down with a lager. He nodded his head in agreement with Henrietta's evaluation as he gave his compliments to the chef.

"That has got to be the best sandwich I have ever had. Well done, Linde, you have truly mastered your craft."

Linde flushed slightly red as she heard her husband's compliments before taking a bite of her own creation. She had to admit, it truly was a delicious sandwich. Of course, without the technology Berengar had brought to the world in terms of food preservation, creating such a delicious snack would not be a simple task. Thus, she complimented the man for making the tuna melt possible.

"It is all thanks to your inventions that we can sit here and enjoy such delicacies."

Yasmin was shocked that Linde had found such a way to prepare the canned tuna that lied in their food storage. She was not the biggest fan of the product, but after tasting Linde's creation, she desired to learn how to cook it herself.

"Linde, you must teach me this recipe when we return home!"

The redheaded beauty merely smiled and nodded her head in response to the Moorish princess' request.

"Sure..."

Honoria also complimented Linde's work while looking after her own son in her arms.

"It really is delicious Linde, you should make these more often!"

Berengar was truly in a state of bliss as he gazed upon the scene of his family coming together and getting along so brilliantly. He was beginning to think he was in a dream, and pinched himself to see if

this was really reality. After confirming it was, he took a sip from his lager before making a promise to his family.

"This is really nice. I think I should take some time off from work every once in a while, and enjoy time with you all like we are doing now."

Immediately, all eyes were on Berengar as he said this. His entire family had assumed this was a one-time thing, and he would be back to his usual workaholic self the moment he returned home. To their surprise, he was acting as if he desired to make this a regular occurrence.

Berengar did not bother wasting time waiting for their responses. Instead, he ran off with Kristoffer and Hans and wrestled with the two of them on the grass. He would continue to play with his children for several hours before returning home.

When the Royal Family finally returned to the palace, they were relieved to know that Berengar planned to continue these family outings in the future. After all, there was quite some resentment in the hearts of his children for the lack of time he spent with them. Surely the time spent with his family would create wonderful memories and camaraderie among them all.

Chapter 647: Chocolate And Saltpeter

News had quickly spread of Acre's fall, and Berengar could not care less. The reality was the Byzantine Army in itself was capable of defeating the Crusader army. Still, he was slightly worried about reports of rifled muzzleloaders being used by the enemy. He did not think they would develop that technology so soon. Even then, it was not a major concern, as their range was still vastly inferior to his own weapons.

The young German Emperor was more focused with important matters regarding his own realm. He had just received word of the war that was being waged in the settlement of New Swabia. Emmerich had discovered tomatoes, and as a result, he had begun to fight with the natives over their many tomato plants.

The man had even begun to request an additional brigade of soldiers to assist him in his efforts, which Berengar quickly approved. There were many dishes he could make with tomatoes, and he did not care what the cost was he would have them brought to the Fatherland.

As for the idea of produce from the New World, an interesting idea came to mind, and because of that, he fetched his ambassador to the Aztec Empire. After waiting for a little while, the young Aztec Princess was standing in front of Berengar.

She no longer had the appearance of a savage warrior, instead she wore fine jewelry and a silk dress that tightly clung to her curves. Unlike the frilly dresses worn by German noblewomen, she wanted something short and simple. If anything, the dress that the woman wore was far more modern in design than Berengar had expected.

Berengar was stunned at her appearance and complimented her looks briefly before getting down to business.

"So you have shed the skin of a savage and have become a proper lady? I must say I am impressed. That's not the reason I called you here. I was wondering if you could return to your homeland briefly and negotiate on my behalf."

Tlexictli stared at the man in disbelief. She had only just arrived in the Empire not long ago, and yet despite this Berengar was already asking her to leave. However, she simply sighed in defeat before asking the question on her mind.

"Do I even have a choice?"

A smug expression appeared on the German Emperor's face as he shook his head and informed the woman of her task.

"Afraid not. What I need you to do is return to your father and ask him to prepare large quantities of cocoa for me. I have plans for such a crop, and I need large supplies for it. If he is willing to do this for me, I can promise him some benefits in return. What do you say? Are you up for the task?"

The young Aztec Princess could not believe her ears. The man wanted her to travel across the Atlantic just so she can bring back vast quantities of cocoa beans? She had no idea what it was that he had planned, but clearly it was something important. She would never believe that Berengar wanted to prepare German Chocolate cake for Adela's upcoming birthday. Thus, she naively bowed her head before responding to his request. Pa nda

Novel "Very well, if it is so urgent, I won't mind returning to my homeland. However, I will miss the Empire. I have grown quite fond of how pleasant it is here."

When the emperor heard this, he broke out into a fit of laughter before giving the girl hope.

"It's not like you're going to be away forever. You will be gone for a little over a month. Trust me, I need Cocoa for my plans, and you're the most reliable person I have to negotiate with your father."

Tlexictli smiled and nodded her head. She truly feared Berengar was kicking her out of the fatherland. She had come to realize why Berengar was so condescending towards her people during his invasion. Germany was an advanced civilization with trains and factories. How could her people even compete with the quality of life that the people of the empire lived in?

"I understand. Perhaps do you wish for me to tell my father that his gods demand cocoa?"

When Berengar heard this suggestion, he chuckled once more before giving the Aztec Princess free rein.

"If you think that's the most effective solution. However, I trust you enough to not screw me over. After all you of all people should be aware of the consequences of betraying my trust."

Tlexictli shivered in fear when she heard these words. She had witnessed Berengar's conquest of her people first hand, and was well aware of his complete and total disregard of human life. The last thing she wanted to do was end up on his bad side. Thus, she obediently followed her orders and quickly set off on a journey to the New World, where she intended to negotiate with her father on matters of trade.

As for Berengar, he was quickly interrupted by one of his many wives. The redheaded spy master quickly entered his office, not even needing the permission most would require, where she placed a document on the desk of her husband. It was a dossier about the ongoing information her spies had gathered on the Timurid Empire.

"Our spies report that the Timurids are suffering heavy losses in the crusade. They simply have not had the time to adapt to the rapid development of firearms that have come as a result of your interference

in this world. They are requesting to purchase some firearms in order to ease the burden they are currently under.

As we speak, the Timurid Armies are being used as meat shields for the Byzantine Musketeers. Acre is only the beginning. It is acting as a staging point for the other Catholic Kingdoms to muster their forces. Soon there will be tens of thousands of crusaders in the Holy Land. We have two options supply the Timurids with firearms, or disrupt the gunpowder supply of the enemy.

Berengar reflected on this issue carefully for several minutes before inquiring for further details.

"Do we know where the catholics are getting their saltpeter from?"

Having heard this, Linde laid out a map of the suspected trade routes from where the Catholic World was getting their hands on the necessary component to create gunpowder.

"We suspect it is coming from India. The trade is not flowing through the middle east, but through the Golden Horde. The political situation within the horde has stabilized and a new khan has been selected. Their new leader suspects we are responsible for the infighting that has been going on in their ranks, and he is correct in his assumption.

The new khan is not the kind of man to recklessly charge into our lands, especially after what we did to the Eastern Coalition. However, he has decided to supply our enemies with the saltpeter so he can use them as a proxy against us. If we can disrupt the trade routes that the Golden Horde uses to bring saltpeter into Europe, we can cripple the Catholic's efforts to invade the Holy Land.

Berengar thought about this issue for several moments in silence before nodding his head in agreement with Linde's assessment.

"I agree, something needs to be done to disrupt the Catholic's saltpeter supply, however for the time being, they are a powerful tool to be used against the Byzantine and Timurid forces. Dispatch some spies to the Golden Horde to monitor things. As for taking action, we will wait until the crusaders and Timurids kill each other in larger numbers for interfering in their conflict."

Linde's eyes widened in disbelief as she heard Berengar's words and immediately asked for clarification on his stance.

"The Byzantine Empire is our ally. Should we really be allowing them to suffer such losses?"

In response to this question, Berengar nodded his head before elaborating on his plan to Linde.

"Of course, the more losses the Byzantines suffer, the better it is for me. Whether we support them or not, it doesn't matter in the end the Byzantines will win the war. However, the losses they suffer, should they be severe, will cripple the foundation that Vetrans has sought to maintain. By the time of his death, the Empire will be in a poor state, allowing for Alexandros to become a prime candidate to succeed him. Especially since the only other option is that fool Quintus.

As for the Catholics, they are destined to lose this war, so the more of them that die, the less pressure we will be facing when they finally turn towards our borders. Either way, it is in my interest to drag this conflict out as long as possible, ensuring all sides are in a feeble state after the war is over.

If the Byzantine Army calls upon our alliance to end the threat that the crusaders pose, then we will answer, but until then, let the war run its course. At most, you can provide intelligence on behalf of our allies. Yet, direct intervention is out of the question for the time being."

Linde nodded her head in response before obeying her commands.

"I understand. I will make sure that Imperial Intelligence does as you have instructed."

After saying this, the young Empress left her husband be, where Berengar quickly got back to work on other important matters.

Chapter 648 - Expansion of German Culture

Within the streets of the city of Kufstein, there was a large group of peasants, nobility, and foreigners alike gathered to witness a spectacular event. An art exhibit was displaying the newest pieces created by Germany's most talented artists. It was such a grand event that both the Emperor and his wife Adela, who was the minister of Cultural Identity, had decided to host it.

While Berengar may be most infamous internationally as a warlord who united the German people via conquest. In the Kingdom of Austria, he was also known for several other traits. One of these was a major patron of the Arts. For some time, Berengar had been sponsoring talented artists to fulfill their dreams. Giving them the knowledge and tools to make realistic paintings. He had even gone so far as to dedicate certain schools towards the arts.

Berengar was no artist himself, but he had gone through a few art classes during his high school years of his past life. It was because of this that he had basic knowledge of critical techniques, such as the different points of perspective, shading, coloring, etc. Over the years, he had imparted these tools to the artistic minds of Germany. Naturally, being sponsored by the crown, these artists took his knowledge and improved upon it every step of the way.

It wasn't simply a matter of talent that would get one to be sponsored by the Crown. They also needed to toe the line. Though it wasn't outright enforced, the crown heavily emphasized that the artists should focus on nationalistic topics. This could come in many forms, such as showing off the natural beauty of the German landscape, the magnificence of its architecture, or the glory of the German people's past accomplishments. There were even a few depictions of Germany itself as a beautiful blonde woman.

The culture of Germany was being refined through Berengar's lense which was largely inspired by the Kingdom of Prussia in his past life, and while Berengar may be pursuing the martial path for his society, he also inspired the arts. Thus the two often blended into one concept as many of the paintings revolved around Germany's militaristic nature.

Among these paintings was one drafted by a former soldier of Berengar's army who stood with him during the Austrian War of Independence. The painting in question was called "A Dominating Aura" and it depicted the young Emperor standing above his army in the alps giving them the rousing speech that led them into Italy.

Adela gazed upon the scene and was impressed at how well the man had captured her husband's brilliance. The artist in question was among the crowd, gazing at his own work and listening to the comments from the viewers. He was quite delighted when he heard the Empress commend his painting.

"Amazing, whoever the artist of this painting is, they did an incredible job displaying your suffocating aura. I actually feel compelled to kneel before this painting of you. Did such a thing really occur?"

Berengar gazed at the painting with awe. In his mind, he reversed the perspective of the painting to his point of view and knew the exact moment the man had captured. It was truly impressive and brought back many enemies. He wore a proud smile on his face as he declared the painting to be a masterpiece.

"Truly, this is a masterpiece. I must say it is interesting seeing my past accomplishments from another person's perspective. Whoever painted this had to have been a soldier in my army in order to properly understand every little detail that he included. I never thought I'd see the day where an Austrian soldier became such an incredible painter."

Novel The painter was incredibly humbled to hear the Emperor personally declare his work to be of such fine quality. He wanted to kneel before him and thank him then and there, but he had decided to be incognito during his visit to the exhibit, and thus restrained himself.

As for Berengar and Adela, they continued to gaze upon the work of art for some time before moving onto another interesting piece. This was no mere painting, but rather a marble sculpture of Berengar prior to his eye injury. It was a sculpture of him in a bath towel with only his lower half covered. He could immediately tell somebody relatively close to him had made this piece, as there were only a few people who would be able to understand every line of his muscles with such precision.

Just when he was about to ask who had made such a fine marble statue, a woman approached him, she was dressed rather lavishly despite being a mere commoner. Though Berengar had a vague notion of who she was, the woman quickly introduced herself as the sculptor.

"Apologies, your Majesty, I don't believe you ever learned my name. However, I was once a servant of your parents during my youth."

Berengar chuckled when he heard this as he came to a sudden realization.

"That would explain how you know my figure so well..."

Adela immediately looked at the two with a hint of fury in her eyes. Did her husband sleep with this servant girl when they were engaged?

The man in question immediately noticed the cold stare his wife was giving him and he quickly cleared up her misconceptions.

"Do not fret, my dear. Nothing happened between us. In my younger years, I simply had a habit of walking from the bath to my room in nothing but a towel."

After saying this, he shifted his gaze towards the sculptor and politely inquired about the piece.

"So what is this sculpture called?"

In response to this, the woman blushed slightly before giving her answer.

"I call it Rebirth! It was inspired from the first time I saw you shirtless after you had improved your health. You were practically skin and bones for most of the years that I worked in your parents' service."

However, I remember seeing you walk out of the bath one day in nothing but a towel, and the sight was captivating. It was as if you had been reborn from the brink of death."

Berengar nodded his head in approval. It was a fitting name. After all, he was reborn in more ways than one at that time. A single phrase escaped his lips as he gazed upon the piece of art.

"It's perfect..."

After saying this, Berengar chatted with the woman for some time before going on his way to observe other pieces of art. Adela had played a large part in the country's cultural affairs. In fact, it was her main job outside of raising her kids. The Ministry of Cultural Identity was nothing more than a propaganda department, and it was her job to ensure that everybody followed the will of the crown. Because of this, artists who were critical of Berengar's reign rarely found their work being appreciated.

However, the next painting that the couple witnessed was definitely controversial. How exactly it had made it into the art gallery, Adela did not know. The offending piece was a painting depicting the scene from the night Henrietta was wounded in an assassination attempt on her brother's life.

More than a few people had witnessed the Princess kiss her brother, and though Berengar had never made their relationship public, there were rumors going around that the girl was his mistress. Thus, the painting was the moment Henrietta confessed her feelings to her big brother while bleeding out.

Berengar and Adela stared at the piece with awkward expressions, Berengar was uncomfortable witnessing the painting, as he had never informed the people that Henrietta was actually his aunt by blood. Thus, when people saw the painting, they thought the Emperor and his sister were involved in a serious taboo.

The piece was even named "Forbidden love" and aside from the controversial nature of the piece, it was exquisite. Of course, nobody dared to comment on what they truly thought while Berengar was nearby. They knew the temperament of their emperor, and it was not risking making the man their enemy. Even if they believed the rumors regarding Berengar and his sister, they would never speak them aloud.

Naturally, to maintain their secret relationship, Berengar had hidden Henrietta away in the Palace while she was carrying his child. It would be very troublesome if such news made it to the public. Thus, she was not able to witness the painting of her confession.

Not wanting to be the center of everyone's attention, Berengar and Adela quickly moved onto another piece. Adela whispered to him an apology for such a thing being in her art gallery.

"I'm sorry. I don't know how that painting got in here. I will severely admonish whoever is responsible for it."

Berengar merely nodded his head in silence. Such memories were bitter, and simply gazing upon the scene of his sister's near-death experience soured his mood. He no longer cared to see the rest of the paintings, but he continued his work, regardless. After all, he was hosting the event, and it would be improper for him to abscond so early into the night.

Chapter 649 - The Royal Wedding of Prussia

Shortly after the art exhibition, Berengar visited Prussia, where he was not standing at the altar of a particularly large cathedral. By his side was none other than King Eckhard von Marienburg. It was the first time in a long time that the two men had seen each other, and despite the years going by, Eckhard remained the same stalwart veteran he had always been.

No, today was not Berengar's wedding day, and at the moment he had no real prospects for his final wife. Instead, today was the wedding of one of Berengar's oldest friends. Eckhard had climbed from the ranks of being a lonely, landless knight, to a mighty General in the Armed forces of Austria. Now, after years of service, he was the King of Prussia, which was a state founded as the cornerstone of German hegemony in the Baltic.

The bride was a particularly loathsome bitch who Berengar held utter contempt for. After learning the extent that she and her father went towards to dethrone his dearest friend, Berengar had even thought of having the cunt executed. However, Eckhard had other plans for Martha.

Despite the woman's character flaws, Eckhard had insisted on marrying her. Why? Mainly as a matter of pride. He said he was going to marry her and he was a man who followed through with his promises. However, there were two other reasons that he chose to follow through with his engagement; one of which was simply a matter of spite towards the bride's family.

The other major factor for Eckhard marrying Martha was the political stability it provided to the German Empire. After all, he was afforded up to five wives, and he didn't mind having a loveless marriage with his first wife. There was bound to be some other young woman who would fall in love with him.

Eckhard was not a man like Berengar, he did not have a mind hellbent on conquest of land, and the hearts of beauties, he was a far more simple man. If not for the fact that Martha was such a disappointment, he never would have considered having more than one wife.

Berengar was selected as the best man for the wedding. After all, one could most certainly say that all of Eckhard's other friends were either dead, or in active combat zones. Besides, he had grown close with the Emperor through his years of service, and because of that, he was glad to have the man hold such an esteemed position at his wedding.

The Bride entered the chapel, and walk down the aisle with her brother leading her towards the altar. After all, her fiance had in fact killed her father in combat, or at the very least gave the order to do so. She had a stern expression on her face. Though she wanted to rebel, she knew she had no choice in the matter. After what happened to her father, her brother immediately submitted to Eckhard's demands and grew fearful of the man.

Though Eckhard no longer commanded his own personal army, he was a close friend of the Kaiser, who acted as Reichsmarschall over all of Germany's forces, as well as a former General in the Austrian Army. Needless to say, if he requested help from the Kaiser to deal with the Hohenzollerns, then things would be bloody.

The man in question gazed upon his emperor and the King of Prussia with a complicated expression as he handed off the bride. The long white dress that belonged to the woman contrasted nicely with the Prussian Royal Regalia.

Even though Eckhard was now retired from military service, he still wore a military style uniform with all of his accolades. He even wore the chain that belonged to the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order. He was quite the imposing figure and was several decades older than the bride.

The ceremony proceeded without incident, where Berengar watched with a pleasant smile. Eventually, the couple said their vows and kissed, sealing their matrimony. Afterward, the party was led into the Palace of Marienburg, where they dined on dishes prepared for the reception.

Berengar sat by his friend's side and quietly informed him of some secrets that were being kept from the other monarchs.

"Colonization of the New World is going as planned. I have even subjugated a Native Empire."

When Eckhard heard this he smiled for the first time in a long time, life had been pretty dull since he retired from the military, and though he no longer wished to see bloodshed, it was still a joy to hear about his former comrades achieving glory in war. Thus, he could not help but pay more attention to Berengar's tales than to his new bride.

"Really? A native empire? Were they powerful?"

In response to this, Berengar merely drank from his chalice before shaking his head.

"Hardly. They were a bunch of stone age primitives engaging in human sacrifice. However, they built some impressive structures. It is truly hard to believe they accomplished such feats without bronze or iron tools. Still, I only brought five hundred men with me on campaign. The weapons we have nowadays tore the savages to shreds. It truly was a magnificent sight to behold."

Eckhard was eager to learn more about this native empire, and the Emperor's plans for colonization and thus he quickly inquired further about the topic.

"So how many did you kill? Did you annihilate the Empire?"

Berengar shook his head before informing Eckhard of the info he requested.

"No, I simply don't have the means to control such a vast Empire across the atlantic. Get this, I told them I was a divine envoy of their gods, and that the gods were angry at them. That the German Empire was a divine empire requesting their servitude. After witnessing a few gory scenes, and the spreading of a plague, their emperor was practically on his knees, begging me to make him a protectorate. His daughter, though, she was smart enough to realize we were not gods, but said nothing. After all, she and I had some history."

Eckhard scoffed when he heard this. Of course Berengar was going into foreign countries and taming their beauties he was not surprised in the slightest, instead he made a smug remark.

"Oh, you had history did, you? Is that what you're calling it now?"

Berengar feigned offense as he scolded Eckhard for making assumptions.

"Hey, I'm an emperor with four gorgeous wives. Do you really think I'm the kind of man to sail across the ocean and get distracted by a native beauty?"

In response to this, Eckhard raised a brow before asking the question on his mind.

"Do you really want me to answer that?"

The two men immediately broke out into laughter. Meanwhile, Martha noticed that her husband was being awfully chummy with the Emperor and decided to introduce herself to the man in question.

"Your Majesty, I believe this is the first time we have met. You are as impressive as they say. Pardon my rudeness, I am Martha von Hohenzollern, or well, I suppose that would be Martha von Marienburg now..."

Despite his internal feelings towards the woman, Berengar choked down his nasty words, and instead responded with a forced smile. After all, it would not be good for his public image to start a scene. Nor would it help his friendship with Eckhard, thus he responded kindly to the woman despite his detest for her.

"A pleasure. I am certain that Eckhard has made the right decision in forgiving you for your transgressions. Truly, he is a better man than I."

Eckhard glanced at Berengar with a hint of caution. He knew the man was forcing himself to be polite, which was not his style in the slightest. He could only imagine what the man thought about his new wife. However, in order to secure the peace of the realm, he had gone through with this sham of marriage, even if he wasn't fond of Martha himself.

Martha, on the other hand, was not pleased with the tone Berengar had used with her. She was about to comment on it when Linde interrupted. Berengar took one date with him to this wedding, not wanting to complicate matters with his entire family, and decided to take Linde, who was on better terms with Eckhard than the others were.

"It is a pleasure to finally meet you, Martha. I am Linde. I have heard so much about you!"

Apparently, the Empress was more cordial, or so Martha thought. She had no idea how terrifying the statement Linde just made was. The woman was the director of Imperial Intelligence, but few people knew this. So when she used a phrase like "I have heard so much about you" what she was really saying was something more akin to "I know everything there is to know about you, watch your step."

However, due to her ignorance, Martha assumed the woman was being friendly and decided to converse with her throughout the wedding reception. Thus, taking her attention off of the important discussions Berengar would be having with his old friend. Berengar and Eckhard would continue to get drunk while catching up well into the night, to the point where Eckhard nearly forgot to consummate his marriage. Luckily, Berengar gave him a reminder, and thus they were the last two people to retire for the night.

Chapter 650 - Uncovering an Ancient Prophecy

At the moment, Berengar was seated in his office, drawing out a series of blueprints designed to create a significant improvement in his country's technology. There were a lot of devices that he could create that were powered strictly by electricity. Many of these devices were simply for convenience, but others were necessary for the growth of his Empire.

It was because of this that the young German Emperor planned to make use of the natural energy resources that were abundant across Austria and Germany. One of these energy sources was the bountiful rivers that flowed through the realm. It was his intention to start his energy production via hydroelectric dams. After all, such power plants only needed resources such as earth, concrete, and steel, all of which Germany had an abundance of.

The basic function of a Hydroelectric dam was actually quite simple. In summary, the River would flow through the dam until it hit a turbine. The pressure of this water would turn the turbine, and the turbine would start the generator above, which would then send a current through long distance power lines and into the city. As for the excess water, it would escape safely out the other side of the dam and back into the river.

Berengar intended to set up his first Hydroelectric Dam in the inn river outside the city of Kufstein. The reason for this was he had always favored introducing new inventions to the capital first, and then slowly spread them across the Empire, thus making the Capital the most desirable place to live among the citizens. It was a matter of convenience that a large tributary of the Danube flowed through the city of Kufstein.

Now, with the future of electricity on the horizon, Berengar could begin introducing a better public transportation system across the growing metropolis. Chiefly in the form of trolleys and subways. This would solve one of his biggest recurring headaches. After finishing the design of the simple yet effective Hydro-electric dam, Berengar laid back in his chair and pulled out a glass chalice which he filled with fortified wine. He believed he had earned the right to enjoy himself on this day.

As he was taking a sip from the alcohol, a knock resounded on his door. Berengar didn't even have time to answer as the doorway was opened, revealing the pregnant figure of his wife, Linde. The woman quickly walked over to Berengar and laid a report down on his desk. The folder was stamped Top Secret and contained critical information that had shocked Linde when she read it. There was a look of fury on her face as she asked the question on her mind.

"Did you know?"

Berengar quickly grabbed hold of the folder and skimmed through its contents, however before doing so, he has for clarification on the matter.

"Did I know what?"

Linde only responded with a harrumph before letting her husband read through the documents. After taking a look at the document, it was from his recently established department of archeology. They had been digging diligently through the German Empire in search of anything of historical value.

They found a lot of interesting items in the time since they were established, but recently the archeologists uncovered an old runestone in the black forest of ancient Germania. The runestone appeared to be written in the blood of humans and contained a prophecy.

The historians had some difficulty translating the elder futhark ruins into the current variation of the German language, but after a year's worth of progress, and a massive budget, they finally cracked the code. If the stone was to be believed, then the prophecy appeared to have been written by the norms, which one might consider the Germanic version of the Greek sisters of fate.

This prophecy contained a story eerily reminiscent of Berengar's journey so far in this life. In summary, it stated that in an era where a foreign religion had replaced the ancient faith, a godless man would arrive from another world and would unify the Germanic people in an act of rebellion against the Semitic god.

Whether this was literal or figurative, Berengar did not know. Rebellion against god? well it was true he had started his own branch of Christianity that could be considered a heresy, but he had no intentions of actually waging war against the Abrahamic deity. How would that even be possible?

Linde could tell by the confusion on Berengar's face that he was as stunned as she was. However, she was convinced that he knew something she didn't and began to interrogate him for answers.

"What aren't you telling me?"

Berengar wore an awkward smile as he tried to explain his circumstances to her.

"Look, I already told you I have no idea how I came into this world, or who brought me here. However, I may have left out the fact that I have stumbled on some clues during my journeys. Granted, I still don't know if these were reality, or delusions..."

Linde was not amused. She wanted to know everything about Berengar so much so that it was bordering on the obsessive. Since Berengar had revealed the truth to her; she had been coordinating with the Department of Archeology in order to find some clues about Berengar's unique existence. She did not know that the runestone they discovered during the early days of their search was such a critical component. Thus, she was frowning as she inquired further into the details.

"What clues?"

Berengar poured himself another drink before answering the woman's question.

"So, you remember when I went to the border in Frisia quite some time ago?"

The woman nodded her head in silence, causing Berengar to continue his story.

"On my way back, we stopped next to this mysterious patch of woodlands which was covered in fog. When I fell asleep that night I awoke inside the woodlands, where a small girl claiming to be the ancient goddess Baduhenna approached me. She told me some very vague notions about my fate and gave me a boon of courage."

Linde bit her lip in displeasure. Why was she not surprised there was another woman in Berengar's life that he managed to keep a secret from her? She could only calm her wrath and continue investigating this matter.

"Is there anything else about?"

Initially, Berengar didn't want to inform Linde of this next part as he thought it would make her worry, but he decided to anyway now that she was asking him directly.

"Remember when I went missing in the colonies? Well, during that time I came across these ancient ruins, which supposedly housed an ancient goddess whose name is forgotten in history. She told me that there are gods who have plans for me, and she said she removed the claim that the Abrahamic god had over my soul due to my baptism at birth..."

Linde was shocked when she heard this, and instantly became anxious. She spared no second to ask the question on her mind.

"What do you mean by that? What claim? Do I have a claim on my soul?"

Berengar nodded his head silently before revealing his thoughts on the matter.

"The gods I've come across have been deliberately vague, but I think so. After all, you were baptised as a baby just like me. Basically, think of it this way: there are multiple gods, multiple afterlives, etc. Most of these gods have their own realms, which they bring the souls of their followers to after death. But the Abrahamic god is an asshole. He had me destined to go to hell. Can you believe that?"

Anyway, from my limited understanding, it takes another deity to remove the claim of another god. I don't know how they do it, and it hurts like hell. However, once it's removed, I pretty much have the freedom to choose whatever afterlife I want to go to. Or so I think, like I said, the gods are deliberately vague..."

Linde was completely stunned when she heard all this. It sounded like the ramblings of a madman, or perhaps some shitty fiction made by a terrible writer. Either way, she had a hard time believing it, but if it was true, there was one serious matter on her mind that worried her more than anything.

"So we're not going to be together for eternity?"

The crazy look in Linde's eyes shocked Berengar. She was serious about being with him for eternity, the idea that they would be apart after death weighed heavily on her conscience. Berengar had to think of a way to calm the woman, or she might do something foolish.

"Unless we can find another god to remove the claim on your soul... Even then, I don't know if it costs the deity anything to do it. It seemed the great goddess of Teotihuacán removed mine on a whim, so I really don't know if there are any rules behind this."

Linde sat down in her chair in disbelief. She had firmly believed she and Berengar would be together for eternity, even after death. It was the only thing that made her somewhat believe in the christian faith. However, this news like a like a bombshell, dropped on her heart. It took her a few moments to cope with it. In the end, she gritted her teeth and walked out the door. When Berengar saw this, he called out to her with a hint of worry in his tone.

"Linde, dear, where are you going?"

A single response resounded on the other side of the door, one which shocked Berengar to the core of his being.

"To hunt down a god!"