

Steel 701

Chapter 701 - The Fall of Jerusalem

In the Holy City of Jerusalem, the Sultan of the Timurid Empire stood upon the ramparts gazing at the enemy army gathered below. The Crusaders had attacked sooner than he had anticipated, and the messenger that he and his Byzantine Allies had been captured and eliminated by the Crusader forces before he could reach the shores of the Reich.

Because of this tragic fate, Jerusalem stood on its own, with a garrison comprising Timurid and Byzantine soldiers, who would have decided to defend the city until their last breaths. Months of indiscriminate bombardment had left much of the city uninhabitable. Luckily, the rounds fired by the Crusader's drake cannons were inert, and thus caused far less damage than the Austrian terror bombings of Florence.

Still, morale was low, and those who had put their lives on the line were beginning to feel hopeless. Although their 1417 12-pounder Field Guns were highly effective on the field of battle. Against the enemy's rifled muzzleloaders, they were not nearly as effective in a siege. With their range proving to be severely lacking.

For comparison, the 1417 12-pounder Field Guns had an effective range of 1,536 meters while the rifled muzzleloaders used by the Crusaders had an effective firing range of 4,600 meters at an angle of 20 degrees. The city's defenders could only sit back and wait as their city was bombarded into submission.

After seeing the bombardment continue, Salan descended from the ramparts of the city, and returned to the keep where the Byzantine generals stood with an equal sense of despair on their faces. Salan knew that the moment the Crusaders broke down the door, they would butcher all Muslims in the city and enslave the orthodox Christians. The fate of the Jews who called Jerusalem their home would be equally dire.

Rather than wait until the city was destroyed, he had decided on a course of action, which he did not hesitate to voice to his allies.

"That's it! I'm done waiting around. Our infantry weapons are superior to theirs. If we sally forth through the gates and meet their army in the field, we will have the advantage. How many men have we lost waiting for reinforcements to arrive that are simply not coming? If I'm going to die here in this city, then I will at least do it with my blade in hand!"

The Strategos of Palestine were quick to object against this notion.

"The enemy army outnumbered us three to one. If we go out there now, we are asking to be defeated! The entire army of Egypt is here in this city. If they were to perish here in this city, the region would be undefended. We have fought too long, and bled too much to give up North Africa to the Crusaders!"

Despite this reasoning, Salan was insistent. He did not care about Egypt, as far as he was concerned, if the Byzantines lost the territory it only benefited the Muslims who would swoop in and reclaim it from the Crusader forces. The alliance that Berengar had fought so hard to form between the orthodox and Muslim worlds was beginning to collapse. Ultimately, it was the Strategos of Egypt who spoke up in favor of Salan's words.

"If we do nothing, this city will be our tomb. If we storm the enemy's position, we have a chance of success. Besides, Egypt is in good hands. If my army were to perish here, I assure you, the Kaiser would swoop in and prevent the Crusader army from getting too far in the region..."

Both Salan and the Strategos of Palestine were shocked when they heard this, with both of them asking the same question at the same time.

"How are you so sure?"

A smug smile formed on the Strategos of Egypt's face as he proudly announced the security of Egypt even without the Byzantine Army, which was stationed there.

"Because the Kaiser owns a large amount of territory in the region where he is building a massive canal. I doubt that man would allow his ambitions to be halted because of a few pesky crusaders. If those fools dare to march into Egypt, they will face the fury of the German Army."

When the two men heard this, they were surprised. The Suez Canal was not public information. It was a private endeavor carried out by Berengar and his people. Only the Kaiser, his employees, the Byzantine Emperor, and the Strategos of Egypt were aware of this reality. Upon hearing that Egypt would be safe even if its army was defeated here in Jerusalem, the Strategos of Palestine let out a heavy sigh before nodding his head in agreement.

"Very well. If that is the case, then I have no lingering fears. Alert the troops, we will be sallying forth from the city, and attacking the enemy position in a frontal assault starting at dawn!"

The three generals were in agreement. This battle would either end in total victory or humiliating defeat. Either way, they would not sit idly by and suffer the enemy's bombardment any longer. Hours passed, and the army of Jerusalem was gathered at its gates. Their weapons were fully loaded, and they were prepared to charge forth into the fray, knowing the possibility of certain death was high.

The gates of the Holy City slowly opened, until finally they were open, revealing that the enemy was heavily fortified in their encampment. At once, the three generals issued the order that would end this battle.

"Charge!"

With that said, the city's defenders rushed out of the gates in the tens of thousands and towards the enemy encampment. The moment the gates opened, the enemy artillery focused their fire on the horde of Byzantine and Timurid soldiers who charged forward with their rifled muskets and bayonets without the fear of death in their hearts.

The mixed battlecries of the Byzantine and Timurid forces filled the air as they rushed towards the enemy encampment through artillery fire.

"God wills it!"

"Allahu Akbar!"

The defenders of Jerusalem rapidly approached the enemy position in a giant horde of bayonets. When they got within firing distance they immediately formed ranks and fired on the enemy, who were still equipped with smoothbore matchlock muskets.

The volley fire descended down range and onto the targets who stood behind makeshift fortifications, mostly made of wood. These defenses were easily shredded apart by the minie ball projectiles, who continued on their path into the armored parts of the Crusader's body.

Once the defenders had fired their shots, they charged forth with their triangular bayonets no longer caring about their lives. If they were to die this day, then they would claim the lives of as many crusaders as possible. Unfortunately, the Crusaders were well disciplined, and waited until their enemies were so close that they could see the whites in their eyes.

Once such a scenario presented itself, they fired their own volley, sending lead balls down range and through the armor of the Byzantine and Timurid soldiers. The first wave of Jerusalem's defenders were immediately cut down like wheat to the scythe, but the second wave was undeterred by the loss of their comrades, and stormed past the makeshift defenses, forcing themselves into melee engagements with the enemy.

Bayonets from both armies intermixed, as the two opposing forces sought to dig their blades past the weak parts of their enemies' armor and into their bodies with the hope that they could claim their lives. The defenders of Jerusalem had gained the initial advantage. However, it did not last for long.

The crusader army was overwhelming in numbers, and they abused this fact. Without regard for the lives of his allied forces, King Lawrence of England gave the order to fire on the chaotic melee, which mostly consisted of French soldiers and the enemy forces. Before Aubry could even object, the English musketeers had lined up and fired a volley on the battle that was taking part in front of them.

French, Byzantine, and Timurid soldiers all fell to the gunfire, gazing upon their rear with horror. The French lines quickly crumbled in fear of being betrayed by the English, yet before they could even retreat, a second volley had fired. This time from the Burgundian Forces. It would appear that Duke Marcel had aligned with King Lawrence to eliminate the armies of France alongside the enemies they were facing.

Ironically, this betrayal of the French secured the upper hand, as enough of the Byzantine and Timurid forces were caught in the crossfire. Seeing that the other kingdoms had fired upon the chaotic battle, the other armies that consisted of the Crusader Forces lined up and fired their shots as well.

The two Byzantine Strategos, and the Sultan of the Timurid Empire, gazed in horror as their armies were cut to ribbons by the enemy gunfire. Their men fell by the thousands, and no longer presented enough of a threat to the overwhelming numbers of Crusader. It was at this moment that Salan had decided to abandon the city of Jerusalem, just like he had done to Acre.

"Retreat! Fall back to Ascalon! The city is lost!"

He did not wait for anybody else to hear the orders, only the troops that were protecting the Generals in the rear were able to make it out in time. With Salan and his elite forces retreating, the two Byzantine Strategos were left with two options: die in Jerusalem or flee further southward to the Egyptian border. Jerusalem had fallen, and they had failed in their endeavors to prevent it.

Out of the 25,000 defenders of Jerusalem, at most 5,000 managed to escape from the battle and flee to Ascalon. The losses to the Byzantine-Timurid Alliance were severe. However, the French did not escape

the slaughter. Only a few hundred French soldiers remained alive and capable of battle after the betrayal they suffered at the hands of their allies.

Aubry was left in a precarious position. His allies had betrayed him, and as a result, he had lost his army. Naturally, Aubry had left the battlefield the moment he saw his forces gunned down by the men who claimed to support him. He immediately headed to the ports of Acre where he intended to return to the safety of his homeland.

Chapter 702 - Treating the Poisoned Princess

Ewald stood by the side of the Anangpur Princess with a pitiful expression on his face. He felt overwhelming sympathy for the poor girl, and was elated that he had the means to cure her. Over the past few years, he and his medical staff had developed many treatments for different types of poison. Being the paranoid man that he was, Berengar had put an emphasis on life saving treatments for the most likely assassination attempts he might receive.

This included a variety of medical practices, from surgeries to antidotes. Speaking of antidotes, there were several of such things stored up in the Palace infirmary for a variety of common poisons, but unfortunately, the means that had been used to affect the Anangpur Princess were much more vicious.

By now, the middle-aged physician was well accustomed to most known poisons in the world and how to treat them. It would appear that the girl was poisoned with small doses of arsenic over an extended period of time. The purpose was simple: to feign a death due to illness.

Though it had been months since the girl consumed the poison, and her condition was slowly improving, she was still severely ill. After identifying the agent used to poison Priya, Ewald quickly administered an IV of chelation therapy. Which was the use of a chemical designed to seek out and stick to metals and minerals in the bloodstream, creating a compound that the body removes when urinating.

It was the most efficient means to clean the girl's bloodstream of the poison that existed within. After thirty minutes of the treatment, the girl felt immensely better. Which Ewald took notice of. The girl did not speak weakly, like she had done when explaining what she knew about her condition. Instead, there was a wide smile on her face as she used what little German she had learned on her journey to thank the man..

"Thank you, kind sir! I feel so much better now!"

Ewald smiled when he saw that his patient was recovering before speaking further about the girl's condition.

"It's a good thing you escaped your assassination attempt. Had you stayed in the Anangpur Empire, you would already be long dead. Even though you may be feeling better, it is best that you stay in the infirmary for a few weeks. I will give you weekly treatments of the drug I have given you. With your current state, I'm sure you will make a full recovery by the time the treatment had ended.

In the meantime, you should be able to eat solid foods and drink most forms of liquid. Though I highly suggest purified water as the only liquid to consume. Your meals will be arranged by the Palace staff. I am certain you will enjoy our Empire's cuisine, most foreign guests do."

The girl smiled as she bowed her head slightly before thanking the man once more. Her complexion had already recovered substantially, bringing back the healthy glow of her skin.

"Thank you Ewald. I will use this precious time you have given me to perfect my German. It appears I will be staying here for a while."

The physician merely smiled before departing from the room. He figured he would inform the Kaiser and the Emperor of Anangpur about the girl's current status. As such, he followed the corridors of the Royal Palace to the Dining hall where Berengar, his family, and his guest were enjoying a nice meal.

Berengar had a habit of introducing his guests to German cuisine by giving them his favorite meal. This time, there was a slight spin on it. The meat of the jaeger schnitzel was actually the venison that Berengar had personally hunted. It was slathered in a fresh mushroom paste, and served with a side of potato pancakes and Käsespätzle. Since the boy was young, Berengar did not serve him a liter of his favorite beer, instead he gave the boy some fresh milk.

The food that was being served was not heavily seasoned at least when compared with Indian cuisine, instead it was very hearty, something that Dharya was not accustomed to, but found pleasure in nonetheless. When Berengar saw this, he smiled before asking the boy emperor his opinion of the food.

"Do you enjoy what I have prepared? The schnitzel is made from a buck that I hunted myself."

Dharya gazed in shock when he heard the meat was hunted personally by the Kaiser, he was surprised that the man had such a dangerous hobby.

"You hunted this yourself?"

Berengar smiled as he nodded his head.

"Indeed, hunting is an ancestral pastime of the German people. Hunting is legal in the Reich, though it is regulated by the Department of Game and wildlife for the purpose of conservation. The most common tool that German hunters use is a bow, but I grant some people special permission to use rifles. Though the licensing required to own a firearm is extensive."

As far as Gun Laws were concerned, Berengar based them on those enacted by Switzerland from his past life. With so many old rifles in storage that were rapidly becoming obsolete to the point that even the National Militia no longer use them, Berengar needed an outlet to sell them to, and he could only sell so many of the old guns to his allies.

Thus, he had enacted comprehensive gun legislation so that hunters and shooting clubs would have the tools needed to be efficient. While minimizing the risk of the weapons ending up in the hands of rebels, criminals, and those mentally unfit to possess them.

While Berengar was talking about his most recent hunting trip, Ewald walked into the room, which immediately caught the Kaiser's notice. There were only two reasons this man would be walking into the room right now. Either Priya's condition was curable, or it wasn't. He held his breath as he waited for an answer. Ewald cleared his throat before giving the people at the table the answer they were hoping for.

"The Princess will make a full recovery, though it will take some time. Right now, she is resting. I expect that in a few weeks she will be up and about. I just thought I would take the time to inform you of all of her current condition."

Berengar and Dharya both sighed in relief when they heard this. After which Dharya asked for more of the venison Knockwurst, which sat on the table.

"More of the deer sausage, please!"

Berengar grabbed hold of the plate and handed it over to Dharya, who only took the sausage, but not the sauerkraut. Apparently, the boy disliked the taste of the sauerkraut. Berengar did not blame him. Sauerkraut was not for everyone, but he himself loved the stuff. Upon seeing Ewald standing there awkwardly, Berengar congratulated his physician on his efforts.

"Ewald, you're a miracle worker. If you're not too busy, join us for a meal. You have more than earned a treat after all your hard work."

Ewald was about to refuse when he saw Dharya munching on a piece of sausage.

"Eh, I'm busy. Maybe some other- Is that knockwurst?"

Berengar smiled as he heard this before handing the plate over to Ewald before boldly declaring that it was indeed what he thought.

"Venison knockwurst, I made it myself from my most recent hunt. You want some?"

Ewald sighed before sitting down at the table at an empty spot. He thanked Berengar for his kindness as he prepared for his meal.

"Thank you, my Kaiser. I will take you up on your offer!"

After saying this, Berengar whistled towards one of the kitchen staff, and motioned for them to bring out more of the meal so that Ewald could have a proper fill of the feast. Afterward, the feast continued, with a much lighter atmosphere now that everyone knew the Princess would make a full recovery.

Berengar and Dharya discussed trivial matters as they enjoyed the food that was prepared for them. As far as the Kaiser was concerned, talking about politics over a meal was tiresome. He may have entertained such things for the purpose of expediency in his younger years, but now that he was only a couple years away from being thirty, he no longer spoke of such matters at his table. This was a moment for celebration and he would not allow politics to spoil that.

Instead, Berengar planned to have an official meeting with Dharya the following day. There was a time and a place for everything. The matters that pertained to the Anangpur Empire were not so dire that Berengar needed to discuss them at this very moment. Instead, he enjoyed the time given to him with his family and his guests.

After the meal was over, Dharya was escorted to the infirmary, where he had a chat with his little sister. They mostly discussed the meal and the cuisine of the German Empire before he retired to his quarters for the evening. Now that he was in the Royal Palace of Germany, the boy could finally relax. He and his sister were truly safe and sound for the foreseeable future.

Chapter 703 End of an Era

Itami Riyo had a bitter smile on her face as she said goodbye to her darling little sister and her annoying mother. The brief vacation she had spent in her family's lands had been fun, albeit uneventful. She mostly spent her days being pampered by the luxuries her domain produced. Her mother had tried to take her on a few dates with some local men, but she had utterly refused.

Because of this, there was a conflict between Riyo and her mother, but what else was new? Currently, Riyo had gathered her mother and sister together in order to give them a proper farewell. The mature beauty gazed upon her daughter with a smug expression as she criticized the girl for returning to the capital so soon.

"It has only been a couple of months, and yet you're already leaving? I haven't even been able to set you up with a man yet!"

Riyo glared daggers at her mother for mentioning marriage yet again. The woman could not help but meddle in her daughter's affairs. Riyo took a deep breath to calm her nerves before shoving away her little sister, who latched onto her like a lamprey, completely ignoring her mother's comment as she gave the girl some advice.

"Momo, you be good while I'm away. I have eyes and ears across all of Japan. If you dare to make trouble for me or our mother, I will know!"

The girl had tears in her eyes. It was the first time she had seen her elder sister in years, and now they were departing so soon after reuniting. It didn't seem fair to her. However, Riyo had an Empire to run, and her vacation had lasted longer than she had expected.

It had been roughly two months since the young empress first ended the rebellion against her, and yet she had not yet publically declared her victory, nor had she taken advantage of her position to further her imperial agenda.

She realized her family was entirely to blame for this; they had a way of sucking Riyo back into their affairs every time she wanted to leave. This time she had put her foot down, and would not tolerate any more disruption to her master plan. Thus, she glared at her mother and said goodbye.

"Mother, take care good care of Momo, and yourself for that matter. I will visit the next time I am able. Make sure my little sister doesn't get conned by some bastard! You know how naïve she is!"

Momo immediately took offense to Itami's words, but before she could say anything, her mother interjected on her behalf.

"Of course, you can trust that under my guidance your sister will turn into a proper young woman, unlike someone I know..."

Riyo's snow white brow twitched when she heard her mother's shameless comment. She immediately rebuked her mother for speaking to her in such a disrespectful manner.

"Is this how you speak to your Empress?"

However, Mibu Saya retorted with her own snide remark as she spoke to her daughter like a worried mother.

"No, this is how I speak to my errant daughter, who behaves like a member of the opposite sex. You know you will never meet a good man if you continue to act in such an unladylike manner! You should learn from your sister. She already has several suitors lined up, meanwhile you are nineteen and still unmarried. Such a shame to our family!"

Riyo had finally had enough of her mother's talks of marriage and flipped her long white hair before turning around, departing with a single phrase.

"Goodbye mother..."

After saying this, she mounted her horse and rode with her army back to the capital of Heian-kyō. Her prisoners were already waiting for her there, and she planned to execute them publically as a display of her authority.

If her mother knew what her plans were, she would chastise the girl for being so bloodthirsty and vicious. However, she did not. Thus, Itami Riyo had begun the long journey back to the capital. One that would be entirely uneventful.

After arriving in Heian-kyō, Itami was surprised to see that everything was calm. She had a track record of being extremely unlucky. She half expected her absence to cause some kind of catastrophe. Luckily, she was able to enjoy her brief vacation in peace, while her subordinates ran her newly established an Empire in her stead.

With the arrival of the Empress and her army to the capital, she expected there to be a grand welcoming, especially after she was absent for so long. However, that was not the case. Instead, the city's people still behaved normally as she and her troops passed by. Though some took the moment to point and whisper, there was no massive celebration.

Itami was skeptical of the reason for this, but decided to press forward to the Palace. Surely her ministers would explain themselves when she met with them. After a brief journey through the city, Itami and her soldiers arrived at the Royal Palace, where she entered alongside her personal bodyguards. The ministers were quick to greet her with a small welcoming party, to which she immediately snapped at them.

"I return from my grand victory over the Mōri rebellion, and you doddering old fools can't even put together a proper welcoming?"

Her lead minister was a man named Akamatsu Takahira. He was an elderly man in his eighties and looked like a stereotypical elder monk. With a bald head and a long white beard, the man looked as if he belonged in a Kung Fu movie. However, he was not a monk, nor a martial artist. Instead, he was an opportunist who previously served the Ashikaga Shogunate as a member of the Bakufu.

However, he had seen the writing on the wall, and ended up siding with Itami, knowing full well that she would be victorious during the closing days of her rebellion. He was the one to clean up the mess of the royal family's execution, and was the man who fabricated her claim as a distant descendent of the Yamato Clan. The man bowed his head towards the enraged young Empress and begged for forgiveness.

"Apologies, Itami-sama, but we have been dreadfully busy cleaning up the remnants of the Mori Rebellion. We simply did not have time to orchestrate a grand welcoming ceremony for you."

Itami had expected there to be remnants of the rebellion. Even if all the leaders were apprehended, there were bound to be those who could not let go of their beliefs that she was unworthy to lead Japan. Still, she did not expect it to be such a large issue.

However, if the remnants of the rebellion were posing a threat to her, then she planned to do something about it. She would execute the leaders of the rebellion in public and then dedicate her most advanced forces into hunting down and eliminating those who swore loyalty to the old world.

"Very well. You are forgiven. I want you to gather the rebel leaders in the public square and have the area secured. Every citizen of the capital should be able to see their deaths in person. I will show those fools who still deny my rule the inevitable result of their misguided efforts."

Akamatsu Takahira bowed his head once more while he accepted his orders before carrying them out.

"As you command, my Empress!"

With this said, he quickly departed and got to task setting up the public execution. It took a few hours to do so, and during this time Itami staved off her boredom with sake. She was an experienced drinker and maintained her sobriety for the big show.

After a few hours had passed, and the sun was beginning to set, Itami was notified by a servant that her public display had been prepared and much of the city was gathered. Thus, she wasted no time as she departed for the town square.

After a brisk walk, Itami arrived in front of the gathered crowds and gazed upon the scene. The various leaders of the Mori rebellion were coated in filth from their months of captivity. They were barely recognizable. She sneered in disdain as she climbed the steps, announcing to the crowd the end of an era.

"People of Heian-kyō, these men who are bound and chained are nothing more than rebels and traitors to Japan. Many of these men fought by my side to bring down the cruelty of the Ashikaga Shogunate, however the moment we did so, they turned on me. Believing that I was unfit to rule our great Nation. Well, they were proven wrong, as I thoroughly trounced their foolish rebellion and brought peace to our new empire.

For rebelling against the Empress, I hereby condemn these men to death. With their deaths, I shall usher in a new era of peace and prosperity. One where one's success in life is determined by their merit, not by the status of their birth! For those who seek to obstruct such progress, let the fate of these men be a lesson to you all!"

After saying this, Itami unsheathed her Katana and brought it over to the first prisoner. The man gazed at her with disdain. He listened to every word of her speech and condemned the young woman in his mind as an idealistic fool. He spat on the ground in disgust as the blade fell onto his neck and severed his head. After claiming one rebel's head, Itami moved on to the others, until all that remained was Mōri Nobuhisa. Itami gazed at the man with a wicked grin on her pretty face before asking him one last question.

"Do you have any regrets?"

The man merely chuckled, knowing his fate was sealed. He sighed heavily before revealing his final thoughts.

"My only regret is not killing you when I had the chance."

Itami merely smiled before bringing her blade down on the rebel leader's neck, severing his head, and spilling his blood all over the stage. The crowd cheered as the rebel daimyo was slaughtered, believing in the words Itami had spoken. No longer would they have to live under the yoke of their feudal lords. Instead, they could pursue their own path in life.

Though it would take a few years of reforms, this would mark the beginning of the end of an Era. Itami would work on industrializing her nation, mechanizing her agriculture, and liberating the peasants from their fields, creating a semi-modern country in the process.

Chapter 704 Afternoon Tea

Weeks had passed since Dharya and his sister first arrived in the Royal Palace of Germany. The two siblings had been well looked after during their stay, and Ewald had recently discharged Priya from the infirmary. Currently, the two siblings were sitting in the dining room enjoying afternoon tea.

Priya was engorging herself on a variety of german sweets like a little glutton. The girl was particularly fond of black forest cake, which was recently added to the list of german cuisine after cocoa beans were transported en masse from the colony of Berenstadt to the Fatherland.

Since Tlexictli returned to the Empire after her trip to her homeland, she had continued to oversee the constant influx of cocoa beans across the atlantic, as well as the processing of the beans into chocolate. It was a massive trade, as chocolate had begun to dominate the sweets market.

As an ambassador to the reich, the Aztec princess now resided in her own chateau located within the palace district. Where she would occasionally visit the Royal Palace and speak to Berengar about important matters of diplomacy.

At the moment, Berengar was seated across from the two Indian siblings with a smile on his face. Priya seemed to enjoy the sweets and tea that he provided, and devoured them as if she had not eaten in months. Which was mostly true, as Priya had suffered from malnutrition long before she was poisoned.

Because of her uncle's cruelty, the poor girl had been severely underfed throughout most of her life. Naturally, when she was poisoned, it became difficult for her to even stomach the paltry portions she was served. Because of this, she had become borderline emaciated.

However, now that Priya was living in the city of Kufstein, she would never go hungry again. While Berengar understood the need to feed the girl so she could get to a healthy weight, he was concerned with the speed that she consumed sweets, and quickly lectured her about her unladylike behavior.

"Priya, slow down! Trust me when I say the food I serve you will not disappear anytime soon. Take your time and enjoy the snacks. There is plenty more of it."

The young Indian princess was slightly embarrassed when she heard this, and wiped her chocolate-covered mouth with a napkin. Having realized her mistake, she bowed her head and apologized for her uncouth behavior.

"I am sorry. It is just that I haven't had so much food available to me in years. I fear as if you're going to take it away from me if I don't eat it all now!"

Berengar felt pity for the girl. Her uncle had starved and poisoned her, and he still did not know the reason for it. She appeared to be a sweet and innocent girl who was no threat to the man's power. If anything, Dharya should have been the man's target. Of course, Berengar didn't speak a word of this, knowing it would be inappropriate to ask the siblings about the difficulties they had endured until now.

As for Dharya, he took several glances at Berengar every few seconds. Though he thought he hid it well, Berengar noticed these strange gestures and was even more curious. He had no way of knowing that he intimidated the boy emperor of India. Not because of his actions. In fact, Berengar had been nothing but generous with his guests. The reason Dharya feared Berengar on some instinctive level was because of his appearance.

Berengar was a one eyed man from the west, just like the ridiculous prophecy that had driven Dharya's uncle Chandra to madness. The boy feared that by bringing Priya here to Kufstein; he had inadvertently made the prophecy come true. Thus, despite Berengar's kindness, the boy could not help but suspect that he had ulterior motives.

Obviously, Berengar had no way of knowing Dharya's thoughts, and just assumed that the boy was socially awkward. He tried to bridge the gap by wearing a pleasant smile while snacking on some wurst and sauerkraut.

The truth was, Berengar's sweet tooth had long since been diminished with age, and he only enjoyed eating sweets on rare occasions. He was much happier eating sausage or jerky as a snack. Priya took notice of this, and immediately inquired why Berengar was not eating the tasty treats that she was so thoroughly enjoying.

"Your majesty? With such tasty treats around, why are you eating meat?"

Berengar chuckled when he heard this. The girl was too young to understand that sweets were a delicacy that one should enjoy on rare occasions. He responded to the girl's question with a tone that sounded as if he were imparting ancient wisdom.

"When you get to be my age, sweets don't seem to hold the same sort of sway over you as they once did... These days, I prefer the savory taste of meat over the sweets that a child like you would enjoy."

Priya had been locked up most of her life and was not very sociable. Because of this, she immediately asked Berengar the question that was on her mind without thinking about manners.

"Oh really? How old are you?"

Berengar did not conceal his age and quickly answered the girl's question with a pleasant smile on his face.

"I'm currently twenty-eight."

The girl did not respond to how he had expected. She had a shocked expression on her face as she uttered her true thoughts without thinking.

"Wow... So old..."

Berengar struggled to maintain a smile as he heard this. Old? How was he old? He had yet to even reach the prime of his life! This girl had seriously wounded his pride by calling him old. Did he appear as if he was some feeble old man? Preposterous!

Dharya could tell that Berengar was displeased with his sister's comments and started laughing. This only further made Berengar's brow twitch with further displeasure. He simply took a deep breath to calm himself before informing the kids about their itinerary for the day.

"After you finish your snacks, my subordinates will take you on a tour of the city. There are many sights in Kufstein that might catch your eye, and I figured if you're going to be living here in exile, you should get to know the city and all it has to offer."

Priya was excited when she heard this, nearly jumping out of her seat as she spoke her thoughts once more without a care for etiquette.

"Really!?! We get to go out into the city?"

Berengar smiled and nodded his head before commenting further on the plans he had for the two kids.

"Of course, I won't keep you cooped up here in the Palace. Naturally, you will have a proper escort to ensure your safety. Not that Kufstein is unsafe. In fact, you will not find a city in the world that is more secure than this one. However, for guests of your position, I would be remiss not to take certain measures to ensure your safety.

Don't worry, the guide will take you wherever you desire, there is no set tour in place. I want you to experience this city on your own terms, not some pre-planned itinerary. So after the two of you have finished your treats, go out and enjoy yourselves. I am certain that you will find Kufstein to your liking."

Even Dharya found himself excited at the prospect, at first he was expecting Berengar to have a very strict path set in mind, to show off the better points of his civilization, but since he was free to dictate the course of his tour, he would make sure that he saw the true state of the city. Though he had seen many technological marvels since he first entered the borders of the Empire, he doubted such things were truly as widespread as the rumors said.

As for Priya, she was overwhelmed with anticipation. Now that she could walk on her own, she wanted to stretch her legs and look at some of those pretty dresses she had seen in the windows of the shops. She wanted to taste the food from the street vendors, to see how it compared to that which she had been served in the palace. There were so many things she wanted to do now that she was no longer confined to a small room.

She could not help but look at the golden-haired emperor of Germany as if he was an exceptionally kind man. He was allowing her to go out and enjoy the city, something she had never been able to do back in her homeland.

Truthfully, Berengar did have ulterior motives. He wanted to show off just how glorious life in the Reich was, to help foster the idea of building an alliance in the mind of the exiled emperor. The best way to show this was not some strict tour of the wealthiest areas, but to show just how prosperous the life of the average German citizen was.

Naturally, the prosperity of Kufstein was spreading across the Reich at a rapid rate. As the years passed, more and more cities were developing into cultural hubs as they became connected via the national railway project. However, Kufstein had the virtue of being the Capital, and because of that, it was still the most impressive city in the Empire.

The two Indian siblings quickly finished their treats and prepared themselves for the tour of the city. They planned to have a good time and enjoy the trip. As for Berengar, he had an Empire to run, and couldn't take the time out of his busy schedule to personally guide the children. Thus, while Dharya and Priya were enjoying a tour of the city, he would be overseeing a mountain of paperwork.

Chapter 705 Tour of the Capital Part I

Having finished their afternoon tea, Dharya and Priya met up with their guide, which was the Princess Henrietta. If there was one thing Dharya had noticed since he first visited the palace, it was the fact that the Kaiser had a lot of beautiful young women by his side. The young woman was quick to greet her brother's guests with a wide smile on her face. She had met them at the dinner table the day they arrived, but had seldom interacted with them since.

"Dharya, Priya. It is a pleasure to be your guide on the tour of my brother's city."

When Dharya heard she was the Kaiser's sister, he felt a bit relieved. It would simply be an injustice for one man to hoard six peerless beauties for himself. However, he did not know that Henrietta was her brother's mistress. Because of this, he wore a happy smile as he greeted the woman.

"Thank you Henrietta. It means a lot to me that you would take time out of your day to escort us."

Henrietta brushed off the notion while maintaining a proper sense of humility.

"It is not that big of a deal. These days my brother has me looking after some minor financial matters. Apparently, I have a talent for such things. Truthfully, my workload is not nearly as much as big brother's. Now, are the two of you ready to head out?"

The two children eagerly nodded their heads, causing Henrietta to smile as she petted their heads.

"Very well, then. Let's get started!"

After saying this Henrietta, led the two kids by the hands while being flanked by an armed escort. The two of them left the palace grounds and entered a carriage as they descended into the city. The kids had wide eyes as they looked out at the hustle and bustle of the capital of Germany. Dharya was curious about its history and quickly inquired about the subject.

"How long has the city of Kufstein been around for? Your ancestors must have worked hard to make such a magnificent metropolis!"

Henrietta giggled as she heard this, causing a look of confusion to appear on the boy's face. She quickly explained the origins of the city of Kufstein.

"Until about eight years ago, Kufstein was nothing more than a small agricultural town. My family were minor noblemen, who relied on the feudal system to pay taxes to our overlords."

Dharya was astonished to hear this. It did not take him long to ask the woman another question.

UPDATE FROM FREEWEBNOVEL. COM.

"What happened? How does a small agricultural town turn into this in eight years?"

Henrietta wore a proud smile on her face as she talked about Berengar's accomplishments.

"Big brother happened. I was only a young girl at the time, but under his leadership, Kufstein transformed from just a small farming village into what you see today. Kufstein is the center of Austria's power and wealth, which has spread to the rest of the Kingdom. It has been less than two years since the German Empire unified, and because of this, the other states are lagging behind.

However, under Berengar's influence, Austria has become the center of the Empire. All of its wonder is being rapidly implemented across the rest of the Reich. I can only imagine what Kufstein will be like in another five years..."

Dharya and Priya reflected upon this as their carriage stopped in front of a large, domed building. Henrietta quickly introduced what this building was and the significance it had for the Reich.

"This is the Reichstag, the House of Commons meets up here, and creates bills. Once these bills are voted upon, they are sent to the House of Lords to review. After the House of Lords has approved the bill, it is sent to the Kaiser to sign into law. The Kaiser reserves the right to veto any bill that comes across his desk.

In the Empire, all law-abiding and educated males can vote in members of parliament who represent their interests. In the House of Commons there are several parties, but the largest of them gets roughly 72% of the vote, and they simply refer to themselves as the Loyalists.

The Loyalists are a political party that believes the Kaiser has the best interest of the people in heart. They are the backbone of the von Kufstein Dynasty's power in the House of Commons, and support the Kaiser's vision for the future.

Aside from the loyalists, there are other parties that represent different interests, but they split a tiny minority of the vote. Naturally, this could change in the future if, for whatever reason, the Reich is cursed with an incompetent Kaiser. However, such a thing is unlikely due to the succession laws in place."

The idea of people voting representatives into office was alien to Dharya. He never would have conceived of such an idea on his own. Priya, on the other hand, was just enjoying the magnificent architecture of the Reichstag and quickly asked the question on her mind.

"Can we go inside?"

Henrietta smiled before shaking her head, explaining the current situation to the two of them.

"The Reichstag is off limits to the public. Unfortunately, I can not get you two inside. However, there are plenty of other places to visit in the Capital."

After saying this, the driver of the carriage snapped the reins, where the horses led the party towards the heart of the city. As they were heading out of the Palace district, the kids spotted a large bronze statue of Berengar in the center of the Palace district. It was not quite the colossus that watched over the city from the hills above, but it was still significant.

The statue depicted Berengar in his Imperial Regalia, and was commissioned in honor of the unification of the Empire. It was very different from the statue that resided outside the city, which showed the man in full armor, pointing his sword towards Rome.

The statue was embedded in the center of a small pond, which was the habitat of several beautiful fish. There was a merchant selling flowers that people could buy and leave by the side of the statue to honor the Kaiser. It surprised Dharya to see how many people paid tribute to the statue in this method.

From Dharya's perspective, the people of Kufstein genuinely revered their leader. He himself was an emperor as well, but the reverence and worship that his servants gave him was out of subservience, not genuine respect. He could not fathom these people voluntarily spending their hard earned coin on a flower, just to place it by the side of a statue as a way of honoring their nation's leader.

After passing by the Statue, the party crossed over a bridge, leaving the Palace district behind, and entering the heart of the city. What surprised Dharya the most was despite entering a more common area of the city, the people who walked by on the streets appeared to be equally well fed as those walking in the palace district. Every person on the street was in remarkable shape, especially the youth.

Not only were the people well fed, but they were well dressed too, with men wearing clean suits, and women wearing dresses and skirts that were tidy and aesthetically pleasing. War heroes commonly wore their medals on their suit jackets as a symbol of their accomplishments. In a martial society like Austria, the people praised veterans and looked at them as ideal members of society.

While gazing upon the German people, Dharya noticed something interesting. There were two distinctive groups of German youth who walked on the streets. Among them were boys who were dressed in black military tunics with matching shorts. They also wore black leather ankle boots, with matching long socks.

Over their necks the boys wore a black tie, while they also adorned a black leather Sam Browne style belt over their tunic. Atop their heads was a m43 pattern Field cap, and on their right arm they wore a black, white, and gold armband with the reichsadler embedded in its center.

Meanwhile, there was a group of girls who were dressed in a uniform of their own. This uniform consisted of a white short sleeve blouse with a black tie. They wore black pleated skirts and matching shoes with knee high black socks. On the girl's right sleeve was an embroidered reichsadler.

These two groups of German youth were engaged in different acts of community service, with the boys pulling weeds, cleaning sidewalks, assisting the elderly, and engaging in basic maintenance. While the girls were providing soup to the German public free of charge. The sight of this baffled Dharya, and he was quick to ask his guide about what was happening around him.

"Princess Henrietta, why are those children all dressed like that, and what are they doing?"

Henrietta glanced over to where the boy was pointing and quickly smiled before educating him on the German Youth Corps.

"Those boys and girls belong to the German Youth Corps. The German Youth Corps is a government funded organization that assists the community and teaches boys and girls the skills they need to be productive members of society. As you can see, it is split into two different groups based on sex.

Boys between the ages of seven and eighteen can join the German Cadet Corps, which teaches German boys the skills required to be successful soldiers and productive citizens. Whereas girls of the same age can join the League of German Maidens, where they are taught the necessary skills to become good wives and mothers. Membership is entirely voluntary, but it is heavily encouraged."

Dharya and Priya gazed in awe at the German youth as they assisted their community in different ways. It became clear that the tasks given to the two groups differed greatly. The tour of the Capital had only just begun, and they had witnessed so many strange things. The two kids could hardly wait for the rest of it.

Chapter 706 Tour of the Capital Part II

After having a conversation about the German Youth Corps, Henrietta led Dharya and Priya into the nearby trade district, where they could witness the splendor of Austrian prosperity. There were people from all walks of life entering and exiting stores, and carrying their goods across the street in hemp bags.

The first place that Henrietta wanted to show the kids was the nearest grocery store, and because of this, she led her two guests inside of it. The children reacted with shock when they saw the food that was lined up in the aisles. From fresh produce, to canned goods, and even slabs of meat that were salted, treated with rosemary extract, sealed in waxed paper, and were resting in ice chests.

The abundance of food that was regularly available to the public was stunning to the two children who had never before seen such an abundance of meat and produce in their lives. Henrietta saw their shocked expressions as they excitedly walked through the store, looking at all the different items that were littered across the shelves.

Dharya reacted in shock as seemingly common people took the massive stockpiles of meat, cheese, and eggs, and carried them in their wicker baskets. They would purchase these goods at the entrance of the store, until then they were free to carry them throughout the building. He could not properly comprehend the idea that even commoners in the German Empire could get their hands on meat as if it was a common part of their diet.

Priya was less interested in what this meant about German agricultural production and was more enamored with the variety of foods that were being sold in the store. When Henrietta witnessed Dharya's gaze, she spoke to him with a smile on her pretty face.

"Are you surprised to see so much food? While a grocery outlet like this is a common sight throughout Austria, the rest of the German Empire is slowly producing enough yields to establish stores like these within the cities. After all, it has only been a couple of years since the Empire was unified. It takes a while to export the agricultural technology produced in Austria to the rest of the Reich."

Dharya was even more befuddled when he heard this before asking the question that was most dire in his mind.

"You mean to tell me you have more places like this?"

Henrietta raised her brow in confusion, not realizing that the boy had assumed this store was one of a kind. She did not know how devastating the truth would be to the young Indian Emperor when it escaped her lips.

"Of course! This is just a small outlet. There are even larger grocery stores further into the trade district. As for the other major Austrian cities, like Vienna, Salzburg, Graz, and Trieste, they have a number of their own grocery stores as well."

Dharya felt his heart suddenly grow weak. He had not expected that the agricultural devices he saw on his journey to the Capital could produce such high volumes of food. While the tractors and other mechanical devices made it easier for large plots of land to be farmed by a single household. The true reason for such large crop yields was the implementation of the four field system, irrigation, and advanced fertilizers.

There was also the fact that Berengar had introduced selective breeding as a standard practice in the Empire's agriculture. He taught farmers and ranch hands of the German Empire to select plants and animals with ideal traits to reproduce. Over a span of eight years of this process becoming standard practice, it had attributed greatly to the increase in the food surplus.

Dharya could not bear to look at the sight any longer, knowing very well how his own people were lacking in comparison. He quickly grabbed hold of Priya's arm and led her out of the store.

"Come on, we're leaving!" UPDATE FROM FREE WEB NOVEL. COM.

Henrietta could somewhat understand how conflicted the boy must be. All foreigners who visited Austria for the first time had a similar state of depression. There was a reason merchants typically stayed in Germany until the day their visas expired. They could afford luxuries here in the Reich that they could only dream of back home.

Henrietta did not bother keeping Dharya behind. If he did not want to gaze upon the success of Austria's agriculture any longer, she would not insist. Instead, she led the two children to a street vendor to cheer them up. This street vendor was an ice cream cart, which sold homemade ice cream to citizens of the city. Henrietta approached the merchant and made an order.

"Three vanilla ice cream cones please, and do you mind adding some chocolate sauce?"

With the recent introduction of chocolate to the Empire, different merchants were experimenting in the best ways to make use of the substance. Naturally, Berengar had a bit of influence on the rapid development of chocolate deserts. The ice cream vendor did not mind the request and took Henrietta's payment before handing the three cones to the woman and the two foreign children by her side.

"Enjoy!"

After thanking the man for his service, Henrietta led Dharya and Priya through the city's streets while slowly eating their ice cream cones.

This delicious treat excited Priya. Of course, she had enjoyed everything she had consumed since entering the city. Dharya was still sulking, but he enjoyed the ice cream cone, nonetheless. Upon seeing his mood had improved, Henrietta checked up on him.

"Are you feeling better now?"

Dharya nodded his head instinctively before complaining about the overwhelming prosperity he had witnessed so far.

"I just don't understand how a place like this can exist. It appears as if you have everything in abundance... Your commoners are able to easily afford luxuries like meat, eggs, milk, and treats like this! I thought the abundance of food in your Palace was simply because your brother is the monarch of this Nation. However, it appears that even your commoners are better fed than most of our nobles."

Henrietta merely smiled as she answered the boy's question to the best of her ability.

"It wasn't like this before big brother rose to power. It is because of him, and his ingenious inventions, that the Austrian people, and by extension the German People are able to live such carefree lives. Our neighbors are all envious of our success, but because of the overwhelming power of the German Army, we force them to calm their avarice.

My brother always says that without the proper force to deter our neighbors, having such luxuries is simply asking to be ransacked. We have fought many wars these past few years. If not for the sacrifices of our Kingdom's soldiers, then I dare say we would not have seen such success. Even then, our enemies still eye our borders, and the wealth of the fatherland.

We must forever be vigilant, as the world will always envy us for being so prosperous. If our neighbors were to unite against us, then we will stand our ground, and repel them from our borders no matter the cost.

Luckily, we have forged powerful alliances that are used to help deter our enemies from making a move against us. Though should the day come when it is Germany against the entire world. We will not falter and do our duty to ensure the safety and prosperity of the Reich and its people. That is the spirit of resistance that the Kaiser has instilled in all of our hearts."

Dharya could see this so called "spirit of resistance" in Henrietta's azure blue eyes as she spoke about the Reich, and its Kaiser, with a glint of pride on her face. She was so enamored with her speech that she forgot she was speaking to two foreign children. They could never understand the struggles that Germany had gone through to unify under a single banner. Nor the sacrifices the men of the society had to make in pursuit of this goal.

Thousands of German men lie in the cemeteries across the Reich, brave heroes who had fought for, and gave their lives for a dream of a unified Germany. Currently, the German Empire was in an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity, but Berengar knew that would not last for long. Soon, the entire Catholic world would be united against him. Enemies would surround Germany on all sides, and the peaceful days the people enjoyed would come to an end.

Naturally, Henrietta was not scared of this future, as she knew the might of the German Army would overcome any obstacle thrown before it. The reason for this was simple: the Kaiser, her brother, would

lead their forces to victory, as he always had. After having her moment of propaganda, Henrietta smiled before leading her two guests deeper into the city. She wanted them to see the sacrifices that had been paid in order to ensure the current state of the Reich.

Chapter 707 Tour of the Capital Part III

After feasting on their ice cream, and listening to a bit of propaganda come from the Princess of Germany's mouth, the two Indian exiles followed her on a further tour of the city. They passed through many marvels in the city and admired them in awe.

Initially, the tour was supposed to be decided by the children, but because they were not aware of the exciting places in the city, they ultimately decided to follow Henrietta's judgement. There were three places in particular that Henrietta wanted to show them. Luckily, the first destination was on the way to the other two.

Due to the sensitive nature of the advanced technology used to power Germany's industry, the industrial sectors of the various cities were under tight security. Only those with approved credentials could enter those parts of the city. However, since Henrietta was the Princess, she was given special permission to enter.

The guard verified the woman's identity and those of the two kids beside her before begrudgingly parting for her. Though he was not technically allowed to permit anyone to pass who had not received approval from the crown, Henrietta was a member of the royal family, and because of that, he had to do what she said.

Besides, there were rumors of her relationship with the kaiser and if she turned out to not only be the man's sister but also his lover, then he did not want to be involved with her any longer than he needed to. Thus, the man quickly opened the gates and allowed Henrietta to pass with the two Indian siblings in tow. The smell of smoke and steel surrounded the air, like a thick fog.

Due to the overwhelming steel stockpile that Germany currently had, they had limited the hours of operation for the Bessemer converters out of environmental concern, but that did not mean that the other industrial processes were halted. The kids quickly covered their noses as they witnessed the industrial sector at work. Henrietta merely smiled as she informed them of what this section of the city was used for.

"In most of our cities, we have established dedicated industrial sectors where factories of all kinds produce a variety of goods for the Empire and export. The largest of these factories in Kufstein is the Royal Kufstein Armory, owned by the von Kufstein Dynasty. This is an arms corporation funded by the state to develop the best weapons and armor that the world has to offer.

As you can see by these complex machines, the men who work in these factories are well trained in their use. What you see here is the limited production of the newest type of rifle that the Kaiser has designed for use by our armed forces. Currently, only Special Operations Unit are being equipped with these multi-shot bolt action rifles, but they will soon be issued to all soldiers of the Reich.

Priya was not nearly as interested in the industrial machinery as she was in the food and clothes they had passed by that were for sale in the trade district. However, Dharya was the exact opposite. He gazed

in astonishment at the sheer industrial capability of the Royal Kufstein Armory. This one factory was producing thousands of rifles and hundreds of pieces of artillery.

He remembers first gazing on the arkebuse and believing it was the single most magnificent piece of weaponry he had ever seen. Yet it failed to compare in any reasonable sense to these new G25 Bolt Action Rifles. Each weapon had its own complex within the massive factory, including an area for the construction of nylon plate carriers, and the ceramic body armor they used to protect the soldiers from threats.

Of course, Dharya did not know half of what he was looking at. He could only understand that the difference between the German Army and the troops under his uncle's command was as if they were from two separate worlds. They continued on a tour of the facility to the point where they came across the area manufacturing the artillery.

The size of the guns on these cannons was ludicrous in the boy's mind, as until now he had only seen significantly smaller bronze smoothbore cannons. Yet there were not just the 7.5cm and 10cm Field guns being manufactured in this plant, but also the massive naval guns used on the warships of the German Navy. Dharya could hardly believe his eyes, and was forced to ask the question that was at the back of his mind.

"These are all functional weapons?" FREEWEBNOVEL.COM

Henrietta gazed over at the boy's face as he looked at the cannons with a mix of wonder and terror in his eyes. Henrietta nodded and smiled before showing off the shells that these guns used.

"Yes! Though only two of these cannons are used in the field. The larger guns that you see are constructive either for naval purposes, or coastal defense. The guns that are being manufactured here for field use will be dispatched to the borders to be used by the German Border Guard in defense of our lands. My brother has the idea to slowly phase out the 7.5cm FK 22s that are currently in use and replace them with the newer models.

Ideally, the hundreds, if not thousands, of guns we currently have in use in the army will be refurbished and reissued to the National Militia. As they are still far more advanced than our adversaries, but too advanced to be sold to our allies."

Dharya could not believe his ears. They already had hundreds if not thousands of field guns in their army that they were replacing with these new models. He was curious about how effective these old guns were.

"Why are you spending so much effort replacing the old guns? Is there some fatal flaw in them?"

Henrietta cocked her head slightly in confusion, as far as she was aware the weapons used by the military that were upgraded every few years had no fatal flaws, they just became obsolete as new weapons were introduced. Thus, she was able to confidently answer the boy's question with a line of thinking that exceeded his understanding of military matters and politics.

"No, there is no fatal flaw, per se. After all, it is the belief of the Kaiser that it will be decades before our adversaries catch up to our current technology. However, there is significant improvement in recoil,

range, and rate of fire in the newest weapon designs that the Kaiser simply believes it would be best to implement them as soon as possible.

With the scale of production we are talking about, it will still take a few years before the guns are fully replaced with the newest models. As for the old weapons, they can be stored and maintained at minimal cost. We could sell those that are not in use by the National Militia to our allies at a later date."

Dharya felt as if he needed to sit down after hearing Henrietta's explanation. What he was witnessing was already remarkable. The idea that any Kingdom would have hundreds if not thousands of cannons was already unbelievable in his pre-industrial mindset. Yet to hear that it would only take a few years to completely replace those cannons with a newer, more effective model was simply maddening.

To top it all off, Henrietta played it off as if this was completely normal. How could Dharya even compare his family's empire with this upstart from the west? They were both technically Empires, but he suddenly felt as if a new term was needed to refer to the German Empire.

It was no wonder that so many people used the German term "Reich" to refer to this single empire on the other side of the world. It was simply so exceptional that they had to use a different term to immediately make clear the one Empire they were referring to in conversation.

Henrietta noticed that Dharya was feeling a little unwell from the sudden culture shock and offered to take him and his sister elsewhere.

"If you're not feeling well, I know just the place that will clear your head. Come, you two, follow me!"

Dharya and Priya did not resist, and they soon found themselves travelling outside the city's gates. Where they ascended to a hill above where a colossal bronze statue of the German Emperor stood proudly watching over the city as its eternal guardian. Dharya almost did not recognize the man at first as he was missing his eyepatch, and was dressed in more conventional armor.

Priya gazed upon the polished bronze statue with a delighted expression. She voiced her thoughts aloud.

"it is so beautiful!"

Henrietta smiled and gazed at the statue with fond memories.

"I was only a child when my brother commissioned this piece, believe it or not, it was an act of defiance against the Catholic Church. Early on in my brother's reign, the church made his life very difficult. As a result, he commissioned this statue of himself in his old armor, riding on his old steed, pointing his sword towards Rome as a statement that he would not go quietly.

Today, the Kufstein Colossus is seen as a symbol of Austrian Glory by the people who live here. The eternal protector of our great city. It is one of the two most popular destinations for inhabitants of the city when they venture outside the capital's walls."

Dharya was immediately curious about the other most popular destination she spoke of, and quickly voiced his thoughts.

"What is this other place you spoke about?"

Henrietta wore a bitter smile as she thought about how she was going to end the tour. Ultimately, she spoke one final phrase before moving on from the statue, which represented her brother's personal glory.

"Come along, I will show you."

With that said, Henrietta began to lead the two Indian exiles towards the Kufstein National Cemetery, a place which visually displayed the price that Austria had to pay for its current prosperity.

Chapter 708 The Price of Prosperity

Henrietta stood side by side with the Indian emperor and his little sister as they gazed at the scene before them with solemn expressions. They were not the only party that was present in this location, as family members and friends of those who had given their life in service to the von Kufstein Dynasty mourned their loved ones.

The Princess of Germany could no longer smile as she gazed upon the ten thousand plus graves that existed within the Kufstein National Cemetery. This was a cemetery dedicated primarily to members of the Military.

However, it also acted as the permanent resting place for those engaged in intelligence, Law Enforcement, and any government uniformed service where a member gave their life in the line of duty. For many, they considered it the highest honor to be buried in this cemetery.

Though Berengar's campaigns had been fought, and won with relatively few casualties, the reality was that the number of graves that existed in this cemetery accumulated with every conflict. The headstones of these men were marked with the Coat of Arms of the Von Kufstein Dynasty, which was now the Reichsadler of the German Empire as a show of thanks for giving their lives in pursuit of Berengar's ambitions.

There were also other symbols engraved on the headstones, such as prestigious military awards for valor that were granted either in life or posthumously. The most common of these was the Iron Cross, which seemed to mark a large minority of the graves.

Aside from this, there was a special area dedicated to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier which acted as a memorial for every man who had perished in service to the State in such circumstances that their body was unidentifiable, their corpse could not be recovered, or they were simply Missing in Action.

Priya gazed at the sight of the massive graveyard with a hint of confusion in her teary eyes. There was only one question on the girl's mind as she asked Henrietta for clarification.

"Why would you bring us to a graveyard?"

Henrietta was suffering as well, every time she visited this area she would become overwhelmed with various emotions, thinking about the price these men and women had paid for the continued growth and prosperity of the Empire. She had to settle her nerves with a deep breath before she could answer the girl's question.

"Because I wanted you to see the price of prosperity. We did not achieve our current gains overnight, and we did not gain them without bloodshed. Most people come to the Empire, and see only what we

have, not the price we paid to gain it. Every man and woman who has been interned in this graveyard gave their life in pursuit of a unified Germany and a prosperous state.

Thus, I decided the most apt way to end your tour of the city is to witness those brave souls who have perished so that we may all live a peaceful and plentiful life. Without the sacrifices that these men and women made, we would not be where we are today."

Priya could no longer hold back the tears in her eyes and sobbed while clinging on to her brother. but Dharya stood still with a stoic expression. It was not that he was disrespecting the fallen, but he was mentally saluting those who had given their lives in pursuit of victory.

After everything he had seen on this tour that had blown his mind, the most shocking of all was the fact that a seemingly pampered princess like Henrietta would be moved to tears at the sight of those who paid the ultimate price to ensure that she, and everyone else in their civilization lived comfortable, and peaceful lives.

The truth was that Berengar had raised his sister well. Henrietta was not a princess who was locked away from the world in a palace of luxury. She went to school with the common girls. Many of her friends had lost fathers or brothers in the wars. She understood all too well the price of prosperity that had been paid for with the blood, sweat, and tears of the Austrian people. She also knew that she benefitted dearly from it all.

Dharya instantly had a newfound sense of respect for the German Princess, who clutched her heart with a bittersweet smile on her pretty face as she silently thanked those who had given their lives for the Reich. Without realizing it, Henrietta had begun to cry, before quickly wiping her eyes away, in fear that the two children would look down on her.

After taking a few moments to gain control of her emotions, Henrietta smiled before asking the children if they were satisfied with the tour.

"Well, I hope you enjoyed the tour, because this is where it ends. I will be taking you back to the Palace so that you can enjoy the rest of your day."

Dharya was overwhelmed by all the shocking things he had seen on this brief journey, and Priya was still crying over the ten thousand plus graves that sat before her. For her entire life, she had been locked up in the palace, and aside from grieving the loss of her parents, she knew nothing of the hardships that existed in the outside world, let alone the wars that were waged across the globe.

At first, she thought the German Empire was simply lucky to be in its current state of prosperity. Perhaps it was even graced by the gods. However, after seeing the graves of the soldiers who fought and died for it, the girl came to a sudden understanding that the German people did not achieve such results without struggle.

The trio was silent on the journey back to the palace. When they finally entered, the Kaiser greeted them. He immediately noticed their long faces and inquired about just what they had seen on their tour.

"Why does it look like someone killed their pet? Henrietta, where the hell did you take these two kids?"

Before Henrietta could defend her actions, Dharya spoke up on her behalf.

"Your Majesty, do not blame the princess for our current expressions. We had a wonderful time. She just ended the tour on a more serious note. We visited the Kufstein National Cemetery and realized the price that has been paid for the current prosperity of your Empire. It was a very... sobering experience."

It shocked Berengar that his sister had taken these two kids to the military cemetery on their first tour of the city. That was not something he would have done, as he felt the kids should have fun on their trip. Instead, it would appear that Henrietta had subjected the children to a propaganda tour. This caused him to rest his forehead in the palm of his head as he sighed heavily.

"Alright, I understand. Dinner is being cooked as we speak, so how about you two go wash up and prepare yourselves for the meal? Henrietta, I'd like a word with you if I can."

Henrietta bowed her head and curtsied before her brother while showing him the proper respect for his position in front of the two children.

"Of course, your majesty..."

After saying this, Berengar walked off with Henrietta while the maids attended to Dharya and Priya's needs. Berengar brought Henrietta into his study where he inquired about just what kind of tour she had given his two guests..

"Where else did you take them besides the Cemetery?"

Henrietta did not hesitate to answer his questions in a calm and collected manner.

"The itinerary was simple. I took the children to see the Reichstag, where I talked about its purpose. From there, I took them to the trade district, where on the way they witnessed the Youth Corps engaging in their charitable activities.

After that, we stopped by a grocery store and an ice cream stall where we made our way to the industrial sector, where they seemed to have a hard time dealing with the pollution. So I showed them the colossus on the hills above the town for some fresh air, before ending the tour with the cemetery."

Berengar pondered about the tour Henrietta had taken the kids on, and came up with one conclusion: Henrietta went to places that were ordinary but significant to deliberately show off the wealth and power of the reich, before ending on a somber note. He had to give it to the girl. It was quite clever the clever way of flexing to the guests from a foreign empire. There was only one question on his mind that he was quick to ask.

"Did the children enjoy it?"

Henrietta thought about it for a moment before nodding her head with a confident expression on her face.

"Despite the culture shock of witnessing how great our Empire is compared to their homeland, I am quite certain they enjoyed the tour. Even if I spoke a few lines of propaganda to them."

Berengar chuckled as he petted the girl's golden hair before complimenting her for her efforts.

"Good girl!"

Henrietta blushed as she enjoyed the attention her brother was giving her. Though they did not have time to fool around before dinner, she knew that she would be able to convince the man to spend the night alone with her after her actions today. That is, unless one of the other girls in Berengar's harem showed her up in the evening.

With that said, the tour of the city, and the lives of its citizens, had come to an end. Dharya would become greatly affected by the German propaganda that Henrietta had uttered to him, and believe that ties to the Reich were necessary if he wished to reclaim his homeland.

Chapter 709 Finding Traces of the Supernatural

Linde stood in front of the Kaiser's desk with a smug smile on her face. After months of hunting down traces of the long forgotten deities of ancient Germania, she had finally found a trace of the mythical figures. Words could not express the difficulties she had gone through to secure this information.

Her own subordinates had begun to question her sanity as they searched endlessly across Europe for traces of mythological figures. If not for preparing a proper response, they would have petitioned for the Kaiser to remove her from her position due to concerns of mental health.

The reasoning that Linde used to explain these ludicrous searches to her agents was explained as assisting the department of Archeology on fabricating claims to the lands north of the Schleswig-Holstein borders. Luckily for the veteran spymaster, her subordinates bought this line, as the Kaiser had previously used ancient Germanic mythology and culture as a means to persuade the public about some of his more controversial policies.

Currently, Linde presented a map to her husband. On this map was an area circled that had many rumors surrounding it, and though they had not been proven, a mysterious mist would commonly come from its woodlands, much like the case of the forests of Frisia where the goddess Baduhenna dwelled. Berengar studied the map, and the details recorded in the dossier earnestly as he listened to his wife's emphatic speech.

"In Jutland, there is a special wooded area that the locals report to be mysterious. Many who have wondered into these woods have never returned. Others who have survived the ordeal return to their homes speaking of madness. I am certain that there is something supernatural hidden in those woods, and I believe it is related to the so-called gods you have spoken about..."

Berengar admitted the rumors behind the woodlands had some similarity with those where he encountered Baduhenna, but it was difficult to say for sure. Normally he would just send out an expedition to investigate, however, he was uncertain whether they could find anything of value. It was rare for the gods to interact with humans, and they were not likely to bother wasting time revealing themselves to some random field agents.

However, as a reincarnator, Berengar had some kind of connection with the gods of this world. Though exactly what that was, he did not know for sure. Still, it was his opinion that if he visited the area himself, whatever mythical figure that was lying dormant in those woods would reveal itself to him. Thus, Berengar nodded his head and smiled before responding to Linde's claims while hatching a plan.

"I believe it would be most prudent for me to visit these mysterious woods myself. It is funny. I was just thinking that it was about time I revisited my allies in the north. I have not spoken to King Alvar of the

Kalmar Union in some time, and I am concerned about the state of his military. As an ally of the Reich, they are required to maintain a large standing army, however unlike my allies in Al Andalus and the Byzantine Empire, I have not done my part to oversee the establishment of the Kalmar Union's army."

Linde became concerned as she heard the excuse her husband had come up with to visit the mysterious forest in Jutland. There was a major problem with his reasoning that she was more than happy to point out.

"The capital of the Kalmar union is in Copenhagen. How will you convince the man to let you pass through Jutland?"

In response to this, Berengar wore a confident smile. His reasoning was quite simple, and was merely the whims of a foreign emperor, but with the power that Berengar wielded, such petty concerns should be enough to convince the Kalmar King. Thus, he did not hesitate to reveal his master plan.

"I will just explain to Alvar that I plan to take the scenic route. My journey will start by travelling to the Province of Schleswig-Holstein via train and then ride on horse to the shores of Jutland. Where I will then set sail for Copenhagen. He can consider it an act of curiosity on my part, particularly about how much his lands have developed since I gave him such vital agricultural technology."

It was an utterly foolish reasoning for going through the lands of the Kalmar Union, but Linde knew it would be enough to convince King Alvar. Though they had seldom met over the years, the rapport between Berengar and Alvar was decent enough. Besides, if the German Kaiser demanded to take the scenic route, then any neighboring Kingdom would be more than willing to roll out the red carpet. Berengar simply wielded too much power to refuse. Thus, Linde was convinced, causing her to voice her next question on the matter.

"Alright, when do we depart?"

Berengar raised his brow when he heard this before questioning the woman's intentions.

"We?"

Linde refused to allow Berengar to travel to the Kalmar Union by himself, if there were truly deities in these woods, she wanted the same treatment as him, to have her soul brand removed so that she could follow Berengar into the afterlife of his choosing. Thus, she was adamant as she made her point.

"If you think you're going to those woods by yourself, then you've got another thing coming. Whether you like it or not, you are taking me with you on this journey. If there is really a deity there, I won't pass up the opportunity to be with you for eternity!"

Berengar could only smile when he heard how adamant his wife was to spend eternity with him. However, he shook his head before caressing the woman's cheek. He was too worried about her safety, until he could confirm that there really was a deity there, and that the journey was not hazardous. He would not take Linde with him. Thus, he denied her request with a loving smile on his face.

"I'm afraid that is impossible. I won't put you in such a dangerous situation. If I can confirm the path is safe, and that there really is a deity there, then I will bring our entire family into those woods, and have them freed from their fate. You must stay here until I have scouted the region out."

Linde pouted as she heard these words, but she no longer insisted. She knew the logic behind her husband's words. She was not exactly a fighter, and had grown up especially pampered. If the situation were to turn dire in the woods, she would only be a liability to the man. Unlike Berengar, who was accustomed to fighting for his very survival, Linde rarely had faced such dangers during her privileged life.

She was the spider queen behind the web, but she was not a soldier. If any of Berengar's wives could safely accompany him on this journey, it would be Honoria. Thus, she sighed before agreeing to his demands while making an additional stipulation.

"Fine, but you must take Honoria with you. I won't let you go on such a perilous journey with only your Imperial Guard to protect you."

Berengar chuckled when he heard this demand. He knew the real reason behind it and quickly poked his wife on the nose before teasing her.

"You're just worried I will pick up some Norwegian chick to be my next bride, aren't you?"

Linde blushed in embarrassment. Her intentions had been so easily seen through, but she did not admit to it. She merely harrumphed while crossing her arms.

"hmmph"

Berengar found this aspect of Linde's character to be endearing. Thus, he hugged her tightly before whispering in her dainty ears.

"Very well, if it means that much to you, I will take Honoria along with me..."

A pretty smile carved itself upon Linde's beautiful face as she heard this. She did not hesitate to question when her man would be departing.

"So, when do you leave?"

Berengar thought about it for a few moments before responding.

"A week at the most. It should not take long for my messenger to reach Copenhagen and inform King Alvar of my intentions to visit. Once my messenger returns with confirmation, I will depart immediately."

Linde nodded her head in silence as she hugged onto her husband's chest, while pressing her head against his broad torso. A single phrase escaped her lips as she stood intimately with the man.

"Be safe..."

Berengar responded to this worry by petting the woman's silky strawberry-blonde hair before smiling confidently.

"I always am!"

Though he doubted this journey would be particularly dangerous as he was entering allied territory with his own Imperial Guard in tow. It was impossible to know what he would encounter in this shrouded

forest. If there was, in fact, a deity hidden in these woods, perhaps they could prove hostile. Though he doubted such a scenario would occur.

Either way, Berengar took his safety seriously, and would be well prepared for whatever he may encounter in the region of Jutland. As for Linde, she would do her best to support his efforts from behind the scenes, as she had always done.

Chapter 710 Stuck in the Mediterranean

Julius sat upon the Papal throne with his head held in his hands. Since the attack that claimed the lives of the College of Cardinals, he had been on edge. Believing that his life was in the hands of the heretic who sat upon the German Throne. If Berengar could so easily sneak a man into the Holy City and annihilate its leadership with a single attack, then surely he would not live for much longer.

He had prayed to the Christian God for revelation on how to defeat his enemies, and yet the heavenly father had been utterly silent. He doubted if the Lord God Almighty actually saved him, or if his survival was a mere fluke. Though the Crusade was progressing in the favor of the Catholic Church, the enemy had regrouped and halted their advance further south.

While the Catholics currently occupied the Holy City, and a few others along the coastline, it would not be easy to declare this a Catholic victory, especially since the Byzantine and Timurid Empires were still an active threat. He knew that the Crusade in the Holy Land would bog down into a series of protracted sieges until both sides were no longer capable of fighting.

Such a thing was the least desirable outcome as the only true victor in that scenario would be Berengar the Accursed. He could not allow that man to expand his influence even greater than it already had been. While the Pope was dwelling on such dire matters, an archbishop approached him, where he, of course, had nothing but poor news to discuss.

"Your holiness, it would appear the fleet we sent to secure new trade routes further east was sunk at the strait of Gibraltar. It seems that the German fleet posted in Iberia has no intentions of letting any vessels sail westward. Perhaps they have discovered something that we are unaware of and have blockaded all parties to stay within the Mediterranean?"

It shocked Julius to hear this news, and he instantly broke out into a fit of fury as he condemned Berengar for the twenty-seventh time of this day. FREE WEB NOVEL. COM

"God damn that man to the depths of hell. If he thinks he can keep our fleets in the Mediterranean, then he is severely mistaken. After all, we have the English navy on our side. Surely they are not blocked by the strait of Gibraltar!"

The Archbishop had an anxious expression on his face as he tapped his feet on the floor. Julius took notice of this and felt that another shocking revelation was about to occur.

"What is it?"

A jolt of lightning went down the Archbishop's spine as he heard the Pope's chilling tone. He had no choice but to reveal the truth about the matter to Julius.

"Your holiness, the English navy has deployed all of its ships to the Mediterranean as a part of your crusade. They are completely unable to return home. The few merchant ships they have left at England have been sunk by the German North Fleet, which has blockaded the English channel. It would appear they discovered that we wanted to find alternative trade routes to India and have placed an embargo preventing all Catholic Kingdoms from sailing westward.

I don't know what they have discovered, but there are rumors of German ships coming and going from the strait of Gibraltar regularly. Whatever they have found in the west, they don't want anyone else knowing about it."

Julius was furious when he heard this. If it was worth blocking access to the Atlantic, then clearly the Germans had found something spectacular. Whether it was an alternative trade route to India, or something else entirely, the filthy Germans desired to hoard it to themselves.

The more he thought about it, the more the Pope realized it could not be a trade route to India, or else why would the Germans continue to dig their canal in Egypt? Something fishy was going on here, and Julius did not know what.

Enraged by this discovery, Julius immediately demanded something rather foolish, not realizing how disastrous the consequences would be for the Catholic Church if they had actually tried to do such a thing.

"I want every ship we have to break through the German blockade at the strait of Gibraltar. We must discover whatever it is they are hiding from us!"

Luckily for Julius, this archbishop was a man who was wise enough to realize such an attack would be nothing more than suicide and clearly outlined the consequences such a disastrous attempt would have.

"Your holiness! If we use all of our ships in the Mediterranean to attempt a breakthrough of the German blockade, not only will we be stranding tens of thousands of soldiers and the Kings who lead them in the Holy Land. We would also send our fleet to the depths of the sea! The German ships have iron hulls and are impervious to all means of attack that we have discovered.

Worse yet, their weapons have incredibly destructive power, and are capable of superior ranges and rates of fire. Do I need to remind you what happened to the Moroccan Armada? They fought against a handful of ships. Yet there are over twenty-five of such vessels currently blocking the strait of Gibraltar!"

Julius panicked when he heard this, because he realized he had sent the overwhelming majority of the Catholic World's forces to the Holy land, and they were now stuck with only one viable solution to return home. They would have to sail for Hungary and march back to their homes across Eastern Europe.

However, the English would have to pass through German Lands to even attempt to get back to their homeland. It was truly a disastrous scenario. When the Kings of Christendom heard this news, they would lose the will to fight. As they were essentially stuck in the Holy Land where they could only fight until the last man against the enemies who surrounded them.

It turned out that Aubry was fortunate that his allies had betrayed him in Jerusalem, because he was given just enough time to escape this mess and return to Paris. Julius realized that if he did not come up

with a solution, the armies of Christendom would be stranded in the Holy Land thousands of miles away from their families.

There was no solution other than an all out attack that the Pope could think of that would allow him to break the blockade. Even then, such reckless action would just be asking for their ships to be sunk. It was far more viable to just convince the English King and his armies to stay in the Holy Land until they could all march on Germany.

It was becoming increasingly clear to the Pope that Berengar had provoked him into a conflict in the Holy Land, so that he could set up such a trap. Thus making it so his borders would only suffer an invasion from the east. Honestly, the man was giving Berengar too much credit. The Kaiser did not expect his stranglehold over the Saltpeter trade to force the Church to look for alternative trade routes to India.

By blowing up the saltpeter mines in Collbato, Berengar had annihilated the Spanish army, but at the same time, kick-started the age of exploration before he could finish the Suez Canal. Luckily, his navy was powerful enough to prevent the Catholics from heading to the new world. Or else he would soon be engaged in colonial wars with his neighbors.

The Archbishop gazed upon the Pope with a hopeless gaze. He did not have the answer on how to fix this scenario. He could only ask what the Holy Father had planned.

"Your holiness, whatever shall we do?"

Julius gritted his teeth as he decided on how to move forward. He wanted nothing more than to throttle Berengar for forcing him into such a position, but unfortunately, he could not. All he could do was sigh and give the orders he had in mind.

"We will try to prevent this information from leaking to the crusaders for as long as possible. When they have finally claimed enough of the Holy Land to declare a victory, we will inform them of what Germany has done, and rouse them to attack the Reich. Only by ending Berengar's reign do we have a chance to put an end to this blockade!"

The archbishop gulped his pooled saliva when he heard this before nodding his head. It would appear the final showdown between the Catholic Church, and the German Reformation was around the corner. He had long since waited for this day, but it would appear to him that the situation was rather hopeless.

However, Julius had made up his mind. Since I forced him into a corner, he would not hesitate to resist and bite against those who had forced him into this hopeless situation. If the Reich sought to prevent him from finding out what they had discovered west of the Mediterranean, then he would not hesitate to fight back. By the time Berengar got back from his trip to Jutland, he would realize the desperation of the Church.