

Steel 781

Chapter 781 Shall We Play A Game, You and I?

Pope Julius sat on his throne with his head hanging low. By his side were the various Cardinals of the Catholic Church who knelt with equally depressed expressions. These men were the replacements of the previous College of Cardinals who were blasted to bits in a suicide attack that was commanded by Berengar.

The Papal crown glistened under the light of the sun as the Pope sighed heavily while gazing upon the ring on his finger. It was a golden ring from an ancient era, which depicted the rays of the sun. Truth be told, Julius did not know the exact origins of this primeval artifact, but it had been given to every Pope upon their ascension for the last thousand years.

According to what was written in the Papal archives about the ring, it was said to be imbued with the light of God to protect its wearer against any and all threats. He had worn it since the day he ascended to the throne, and it was thanks to this ring that he had survived Berengar's attack on the college of cardinals.

In truth, the ring was not an artifact of the Abrahamic god, but of the roman deity Sol. However, the Church did not realize this, and considered it a holy symbol of the Catholic religion. It was because of this that Julius kissed the ring before praying to his god for salvation.

News had reached his ears that the German Army, and their allies, had surrounded the Holy See. Rome's defenders had given up without a fight upon realizing the sheer might of the German Army, leaving the heart of the Papacy completely undefended. Any minute now, the Kaiser would walk into this room with his bodyguards, and force Julius to bend the knee.

Thus, the only thing the Pope could do now was pray to his god to deliver him from this evil. Unfortunately, the echoes of Berengar's steps resounded throughout the nearby corridor as he entered the Papal Throne Room, where Julius and the Cardinals lie still, too fearful to move. The one eyed Emperor entered the room with a cruel smirk on his face, flanking him where German soldiers who were prepared to apprehend the leaders of the Catholic Church.

Berengar was not dressed in a field uniform, instead he wore his Imperial Regalia, a golden chain which bore the cross of the Imperial Order of the House von Kufstein hung around his neck which symbolized the man as the Head of the von Kufstein Dynasty. Upon seeing Julius so frightened, Berengar cocked his brow and spoke to the man with a sinister tone in his voice.

"Here we are at last. The Kaiser, and the Pope, two mortal enemies who have been dancing upon the chessboard for years trying to outdo one another. If you don't mind me asking, I wonder how it is that you managed to survive my little gift? Please do entertain me. After all, we have so much time to spend together, and one way or another, I will pry the answer from your lips!"

Julius fiddled with the ring on his finger as he heard this question, which immediately caught Berengar's notice. The Kaiser merely scoffed as he walked forward. With each step, he made it resounded throughout the Papal throne room.

"Come now Julius, you have nothing to say to me after all this time? Since the age of twenty, I have had to deal with two different popes, both of which were fanatically devoted to orchestrating my death. Now that the walls are collapsing around you, you don't dare speak to me with such vitriol, is that it? Do you think I will spare you? No, I'm afraid not.

It is time for the Papacy to come to an end. Do not fret, I will usher in a new era of peace and prosperity for Europe. I have you to thank for that. If you hadn't compelled the entire Catholic World to attack me at the same time, I would not have been able to eliminate so many troublesome monarchs.

I'm afraid to inform you that this war won't end with your death, Julius. I will march my army into your subordinate kingdoms and place my puppets on their thrones. It would have taken me decades of political maneuvering to accomplish this without this little crusade of yours."

Julius continued to fiddle with his ring, hoping it would prevent his fate, and Berengar continued to notice this odd behavior. He sighed heavily before pulling out his pistol, where he aimed it at the pope's hand before pulling the trigger.

The moment the bullet reached the man's flesh, a bright golden light spread from the ring and enveloped him, which shattered the 9mm projectile the moment it impacted the force field. Berengar raised his brow when he saw this, before issuing a command to the soldiers by his side.

"Restrain Him! I want that ring!"

Julius panicked now that his trump card was exposed and tried to flee from the room. However, he was quickly surrounded by the German soldiers and was brought to the ground, where his arm was isolated. Berengar personally walked over to the man and stepped on his hand before taking the golden ring off of his finger.

Berengar carefully observed the ring for several moments where he noticed the Latin markings on it, and the sun's rays were boldly carved in its center. It took merely a moment for Berengar to realize the true origins of the artifact.

The Kaiser scoffed before placing the ring on his finger. The moment he did so, a golden light shrouded his figure before vanishing from his sight. Despite the disappearance of the golden light, Berengar felt an overwhelming sense of security, as if there was a force field around him that nothing could penetrate through.

Berengar immediately broke out into laughter. Everyone in the room stared at him, petrified with fear, including his soldiers, as he continued to laugh maniacally. After a few moments of calming himself, he revealed the truth about the ring to Julius.

"It's too fucking funny... It really is! What did you think this ring was imbued with the power of your god? No, this is a pagan artifact, likely crafted by one of the ancient Roman sun gods to protect the Emperors. To think that the only reason the Pope is still alive is because the powers of a Pagan deity protected him.

It's ironic, isn't it? The sheer level of heresy, according to your faith, is astounding! Well, it's no use leaving such a powerful item in your possession. Consider this payment for all the headaches you have given me over the years!"

For the first time since Berengar had entered the room, Julius finally spoke. His eyes were filled with rage, which echoed in his voice as he screamed at his mortal enemy.

"You lie! That ring has been the property of the Church for at least a thousand years! You dare steal it! The wrath of God shall follow you into the ends of the earth for taking his property!"

Berengar merely scoffed when he heard this, however in the next moment he got a brilliant idea on how to deal with the Pope. After all, there was no point arguing with a fanatic about the origins of the ring. Berengar's lips once more curved into a malevolent smile as he approached the Pope, who was still pinned to the floor, and whispered in his ears.

"Shall we play a game, you and I? I have just thought of a brilliant way to determine how powerful your god really is! If he is truly omnipotent and omniscient as your Church claims, then surely he can save the life of his personal representative on earth and override the power of a pagan deity's artifact?

How about this? I will build a great pyre around us all. You, me, and all your little cardinals. The soldiers in my army, and the citizens of Rome, can bear witness to our little wager. As a representative of Sol, I will wear this ring which holds his power. While you and your Cardinals plea for your god to spare you from the fire and override the power of Sol so that I may perish.

Whoever emerges from the flames unscathed will be the victor to our whole conflict. What do you say? Are you ready to put your life on the line for your faith, like you have ordered thousands of women and children to do in Iberia?"

Julius snarled at Berengar. The level of confidence on the Kaiser's face was overwhelming. Especially now that he had the ring. There was little doubt in the Pope's mind that should he agree to Berengar's game, then he and his cardinals would be the ones to die in the flames. However, it was not like he had a choice, and he would rather put his faith in god, then that of a little ring. Thus, he gritted his teeth before agreeing to Berengar's duel.

"Very well... I will show you the true power of our Lord and Savior, a godless heathen like yourself shall burn in the fires of your own creation!"

Berengar broke out into laughter once again as he heard such resolve in the Pope's voice. Truly, he was a fanatic until the end. Thus, Berengar was proud to give the order which would prove to the world that God had forsaken the papacy.

"You heard the man, go build a great pyre. How about on the balcony of this very building? I will show the world that God has abandoned these fools!"

The German soldiers did not dare disobey the orders of their Kaiser, after binding the Pope and his Cardinals so that they could not escape, they were quick to get to work on the Pyre. Berengar was confident that the ring had sufficient power to protect him. Besides, it would be much more fun to eliminate the leaders of the Catholic Church this way, and that was what really mattered.

Chapter 782 Trial By Fire

It had been hours since the German Army had taken the city of Rome and surrounded the Holy See. Berengar had personally seen to the capture of the Pope and his cardinals. Currently, in the streets of Rome, citizens and soldiers alike gathered below the Papal Palace to witness a spectacular event.

On the balcony, the soldiers of Germany had tied the Pope and all of his Cardinals to wooden posts which stood above a great pyre. These soldiers carried jerry cans which were filled with diesel in their hands and rapidly doused their victims with the highly flammable substance.

While the soldiers were preparing the Pope and his lackeys for their deaths, the German Emperor stepped upon the balcony dressed only in a loincloth. His skin was glistening as if he had received an oil massage, but it was not olive oil that coated his skin, but the same flammable liquid which was now being poured onto the pope.

The diesel stuck to the Kaiser's muscles and created the appearance of a Golden God. Which Berengar was more than happy to play the role of. More than one woman in the crowd gazed at the man's oiled, athletic figure and blushed. It was not the kind of sight you saw every day.

Even though Berengar was thoroughly covered in diesel, he was unsatisfied with the results. He quickly snapped his fingers, which caused his soldiers to pour even more diesel onto his body, as if he had not been absolutely coated in the substance already. Only after he was fully drenched from head to toe in the flammable liquid did Berengar speak to the crowds that had gathered.

"I am sure you all are wondering what I am doing up here on this balcony. To answer that question, one must go back ten years. It is no secret that I have been at odds with the Papacy. Since I first gained power as a feudal nobleman, it has been the objective of the Catholic Church to silence and eliminate me. Why? Because I dared to challenge their authority over you all.

Throughout this past decade, I have brought the truth of God's will to the people of Germany via my reformation. However, the Pope and his minions have stopped at nothing to get in my way. They have lied; they have cheated, and they have killed in order to maintain their power over Europe and all of its monarchs.

These men, who proclaim themselves the leaders of Christendom, have lied to you about the word of God. They have sent you to die in meaningless wars that benefitted only them. They have slandered my name, and declared the German Reformation to be heretical. Today, I will prove to you all that the Reformation is truly God's will!

As you can see, I have doused myself with a highly flammable oil. This is the same substance that I have drenched the Pope and his cronies with. In fact, I have gone even further and had this oil massaged into every pore of my body.

In a few moments, I will order my soldiers to light me aflame. From me, the fire will spread to these criminals. Why would I do something so insane? Because I believe in all of my heart that God shall protect me. So I will pray to God to save me, and they shall do the same. Who survives this trial by fire is up to God himself to decide!"

After saying this, Berengar took off his loincloth and nodded his head to the German soldiers to light him aflame. The Kaiser knelt down onto the pyre and closed his eyes while he held his hands in prayer, seemingly calling upon God to save him as his soldiers took a burning torch and touched it against his oily skin.

The fire instantly engulfed the Kaiser's muscular figure. Despite this, the man did not scream. In fact, he did not even feel it, because he had a secret weapon hidden on his finger. The Ring of Sol which

protected its wearer from any bodily harm. Naturally, the fire consumed the diesel which drenched his skin, but it did not cause a single burn to appear on the man's flesh.

As for the leaders of the Catholic Church, they screamed in agony as the fire spread to their bodies and burned them alive. The fire rapidly consumed the entire pyre into a burning inferno. The crowd could only look upon the trial with dread in their eyes as they shouted their fears aloud.

Only the German soldiers remained calm as they gazed upon the scene of their Kaiser burning with grim eyes. For whatever reason, a single soldier who stood in the crowd broke the cries of the frightened Italians by shouting the lyrics to Christ ist erstanden.

This was a song that all German soldiers knew the lyrics to, as they sung it every year on the anniversary of Christ's resurrection. Thus, shortly after the man began singing, the other German Soldiers in the crowd joined him. Eventually thousands of voices were in unison chanting the lyrics to Christ ist erstanden while the Kaiser and the leaders of the Catholic Church burned on the balcony above.

Eventually the fire finally faded, all that remained was a pile of ash, and a single man kneeling within it. His hands were folded in prayer, and he appeared to be chanting something, but nobody could hear the words he had spoken. After a few minutes, this man, whose flesh was entirely unblemished from the flame, rose from the ashes and revealed his pale naked body to the public. Berengar gazed around at the results of his trial and smiled before announcing himself to be victorious.

"It is clear that God has forsaken the Catholic Church, and chosen the reformation as the one true Christian Faith! I, Berengar von Kufstein, remain unhindered by the flames! By God's light, I have been saved! Glory to the Reformation, God with us!"

The German Soldiers broke out into cheers as they witnessed their Kaiser emerge from the flames completely unharmed. They shouted out the old battle cry they had used long ago during the early days of Berengar's conquests.

"God with us! God with us! God with us!"

As for the Italian Citizens who witnessed the scene, they were truly shocked. The leaders of the Catholic Church were dead. There was no way to select a new Pope, and even if they somehow managed to do so, the Kaiser would quickly oust the man.

The end of the Catholic Church had come in a fiery blaze, and through its ashes the German Reformation had founded the basis for a new era of Christianity, where faith was completely separate from secular affairs.

As for how the Kaiser pulled off this stunt, nobody knew how he had survived. Most concluded God truly saved him, and as a result, Ludolf would canonize him into the annals of the German Reformation as a living Saint. Where he would be revered by Germans for centuries to come.

German Scientists would come up with all kinds of plausible theories to explain how Berengar pulled off such a miraculous feat. It would take decades for the men to finally agree on a reasonable explanation for Berengar's trial by fire, and in the end, they would explain it as an overly complex sleight of hand. However, this rationalization would not deter the faithful from their religious beliefs.

As for the Catholic Church, they were now leaderless. Though local bishoprics continued to exist throughout Europe, though their numbers would dwindle as the Papacy's many crimes came to light. They would be forced to contend with the German Reformation and its many offshoots that would appear in the coming years, and eventually the Catholic Faith would die a quiet death after centuries of decline.

With the Pope and his Cardinals killed off in the flames, Berengar and his soldiers were free to ransack the Holy See. Among the artifacts that Berengar took for himself were the Papal Crown, the Ring of Sol, and the Papal Throne. He intended to use the Papal Throne as his seat of power within his summer Palace which he planned to construct in Berlin shortly after the war was over.

Despite the Papacy being obliterated in this moment, the War would continue as Berengar had planned to thoroughly destroy the old order, and replace the rulers of Europe with a variety of puppets. Italy would be his first target, followed by Hungary, Poland-Lithuania, and eventually Burgundy. In the end, all would kneel before Kaiser or die with the old world.

While Berengar was waging war across Europe, Itami was finalizing her plans to invade the Korean Peninsula. Berengar would be shocked to find that although he had defeated his oldest enemy, a new rival had appeared on the World Stage just when he thought he had established his Pax Germania. One that was far more dangerous than the Catholic Church and its puppet monarchs.

Chapter 783 The Invasion of Korea Begins

After dousing himself in diesel and lighting himself aflame, Berengar emerged from the fires completely unharmed. Word of this event spread rapidly across Europe, with many reacting in shock and disbelief.

Berengar had eliminated the leadership of the Papacy and was now marching his armies further south into the Kingdom of Naples, to eliminate its King and unify the region under the banner of the Kingdom of Lombardy.

However, on the other side of the world, the Empire of Japan was preparing for a brutal conflict. Itami had gathered her army in Heian-kyō where she stood atop the steps to her Palace looking over them. Tens of thousands of men dressed in military uniforms stood below with their rifles resting against their shoulders.

The fact that the War Goddess had gathered so many men could only mean one thing. War was about to be declared. Because of this, each soldier stood silently as they waited for the speech, which would reveal to them the identity of the enemy they would be facing. p

Itami was dressed in her own military uniform, with all of her imperial honors boldly displayed on her breast. She gazed upon the soldiers of her army with her sword in hand. She unsheathed the blade and pointed it towards the sky in the direction of the Joseon Kingdom before making her bold declaration.

"Far to the West lies a great and mysterious power known as The German Empire. For the past ten years, a man by the name of Berengar von Kufstein has led his people to war, conquering his neighbors and uniting his people into a single Empire.

This man now calls himself Kaiser, and rules over the German people as their emperor. Unlike our neighbors, this Empire is no mere feudal state, armed with swords and spears. In actuality, it is a highly

militaristic autocracy whose advancements in the field of science and industry are beyond even the scale of our mighty Empire.

I won't lie to you. I do not know this man's intentions, or if he will prove hostile to the people of Japan. However, I can say with certainty that should the German Empire declare war on us, we will not survive the tides of war.

It is because I have become aware of this threat in the West that I have decided to expand our Military Capabilities. From this day forward, the Empire of Japan shall dedicate its most brilliant minds to the fields of chemistry and engineering. We shall create an Army that can stand toe to toe with the Germans, and should they bare their fangs against us, we shall be ready to defeat them.

However, it is not only brilliant minds that our Empire needs, but natural resources. Something that our Island is severely lacking. Since we do not have the means to produce steel in our own lands, at least in the vast quantities required to expand our military. Then we will simply have to take it from our neighbors by force.

The Joseon have stood in defiance of our prowess for centuries. They deny us the trading rights to their vast iron deposits that we require. Partially in fear of what we have become. Under my reign, we have advanced in power and technology beyond our neighbors, and it is time we subject them to our rule.

I hereby declare war on the Joseon Dynasty, and intend to invade, conquer, and annex their lands. We shall make use of their iron deposits to fuel our war machine so that the land of the Rising Sun may forever remain independent of foreign influence! Now go forth, my armies, and bring glory to your homeland. Tennōheika Banzai!"

The Japanese soldiers were alarmed to hear that such a powerful state existed in the west, and were instantly driven with zeal towards their new objective. A war for natural resources needed no justification, especially if it was in preparation against a great threat that lie on the horizon.

The rise and fall of nations was a natural consequence of history. Humans would always fight for control over land and resources. However, only the strongest civilizations would survive. Rather than kneel before this Kaiser in the west, the Japanese soldiers decided to fight for a better future, one where they could defend their Empire's borders from all enemies. Thus it was no surprise that they instantly chanted Itami's last words.

"Tennōheika Banzai!"

After saying this, Itami led her troops to the shores, where her ships would ferry them across the North China Sea and into the Korean Peninsula. After landing in Busan, she intended to send forth her various brigades in different directions to capture as many strategic resources as possible.

As for the woman herself, she intended to lead the men on this campaign. Time was running out, and Itami's plans to supply the Bengals to keep Berengar's forces distracted could only last for so long. After all, she was certain the Germans would defeat her proxies. She just did not know how long it would take them to do so.

Itami was also wary of how far Berengar's Empire stretched. Now that the Suez Canal was open in this world, and controlled by the German Empire, his ships could reach the seas of Asia much quicker than it would take them should they sail around Africa.

The young Empress was unaware that Berengar was currently involved in a war with his neighbors, and that it would be a matter of months before he could get involved in India. Because of this, she had embarked on this campaign with far fewer forces than she had initially desired to take with her.

Roughly forty-five thousand Japanese soldiers were sailing to Busan to take part in this invasion. Though it was significantly less than Itami had initially desired to deploy, it was enough to conquer critical regions. Even if it wasn't enough to occupy the entire country.

Itami could only funnel more forces into the region as time passed, and her army grew in number. She simply did not have the massive Army that Berengar had at his disposal. Not yet anyway. Give her five years and she would have hundreds of thousands of troops beneath her command. Ten years and she would have a million.

Thus, the Invasion of Joseon had begun earlier than Itami had expected, entirely because she became aware of Berengar's existence, and was deeply afraid of the rumors she had heard about him. Until her agents could confirm the Bengal Emperor's words to be true, she had to operate under the assumption that the Kaiser was as wicked as he was portrayed.

Chapter 784 A Wife's worry

While the Reich was at war, almost all of its neighbors, the Royal Family was at ease, knowing that it was virtually impossible for the enemy to penetrate their borders. Because of this, Henrietta was relaxing in the Harem room naked while Adela applied oil to her body. The two cousins were enjoying each other's company while their husband was away at war.

At the moment, Henrietta was pregnant, but not noticeably so. It was still too early for her belly to be bulging. However, the fact remained that she was carrying Berengar's child, and because of this Adela spent her free time looking after the girl, making sure she had a healthy pregnancy.

Ever since Adela had undergone Linde's special training, she and Henrietta had grown exceptionally close, they bathed together, ate together, slept in the same bed every night, even if Berengar wasn't there to be with them, and they helped raise each other's kids.

Finally, the two of them had a moment alone, and were being intimate with one another, oiling each other's bodies before spending some intimate time together. Adela took a fat drag from the hookah, which was filled with hashish and shisha tobacco alike, before exhaling it all over Henrietta's milky back.

Henrietta shivered slightly with a smile on her face as she felt the smoke attach itself to her body. Adela applied oil to her chest before pressing her bare breasts against the girl's back, massaging her in a manner that her husband always enjoyed.

It was at this moment that Linde burst through the door with a panicked expression on her face. Word had just come over the wire at the stunt Berengar had played with the Pope, and she was distraught.

Even though she could confirm he was unharmed, the idea of the idiot lighting himself on fire troubled the young woman's mind. She was about to report this news to Adela and Henrietta when she saw the scandalous state they were in.

Normally, the redheaded beauty would take control of the situation and force the two girls to pleasure her, but she simply wasn't in the mood. She could only scold the girls for being so relaxed during a time of crisis.

"Have you two any shame? Our husband just did something monumentally stupid, and you're here fucking like rabbits?"

Henrietta frowned when she saw that Linde was interrupting her intimate moment with Adela and spoke back to the woman.

"Big brother is fine. There's nobody on this planet who can kill him. I'm sure you're just over-reacting. How about you join us Linde, I wouldn't mind burying my head in those lovely tits of yours? Lord knows big brother is madly in love with them. I just want to find out why?"

Linde was not in the mood to deal with Henrietta's flirting and instantly began to speak up about what Berengar had done.

"I have no time for your nonsense, Henrietta. My husband just lit himself on fire!"

Henrietta and Adela immediately stopped the sensual massage and gazed at Linde with shock, speaking at the same time as if their minds were connected.

"He did what?"

Although they were deeply concerned for Berengar's safety, they were more shocked by what he had done. After all, it was such a peculiar thing. Adela was the first to speak up further about the incident.

"Oh my God, is he okay? Why would he do that? Tell us everything!"

Linde immediately sat down beside the two women and began to explain everything she knew about the situation.

"I don't know much. They say he is fine. But apparently to demonstrate a point about God forsaking the Catholic Church, he built a great pyre and doused himself and the Catholic leaders with diesel. He then lit himself aflame and spread the fire to the rest of them. The Pope and all of his Cardinals were burnt to ash, but he remained entirely unharmed. Do you think he had the backing of a god and that was why he dared to do something so stupid?"

There was obvious worry on Linde's face even if she knew the man was alright. Henrietta found this cute, and sat upright next to the woman and hugged her for comfort. She made sure every word she said would console Linde.

"You know how big brother is. He may be fearless, but he wouldn't do something like this without an absolute certainty that he would walk away unscathed. If the report says he's unharmed, then he is fine, and there is nothing to worry about.

I trust him completely. Even if he did do something stupid like light himself on fire, there must be a reason for it. I know you trust him as well, so don't be worried about his safety. There is nothing in this world that can kill my brother. Lord only knows how many have tried."

Linde rested her head on Henrietta's bare shoulder while she sighed heavily. She could never stand it while Berengar was away, however her heart especially bled every time she heard a word that he might have been injured. She did not know how the other girls could remain so calm about this situation. I mean, the man lit himself on fire.

While the woman sulked, Henrietta took a drag on the hookah and exhaled heavily into the air. The atmosphere had turned from amorous to depressing and because of that; she eyed up Linde's perfect body before asking the question on her mind.

"So, are you going to join us or not?"

Linde thought about it for a few moments before shaking her head. She was too depressed to have fun with the two girls and decided she would just go have a drink instead.

"You two enjoy yourselves. I need a drink..."

After saying this, she got up and left, where Henrietta proceeded to lie back down on the mattress and presented her ass in the air with a sultry smirk on her face.

"Now where were we?"

Adela gazed off to where Linde had run off to and sighed. She could always admire just how much Linde cared about Berengar, but it was really nothing to be worried about. Instead, she shook her head, thinking that Linde was really depressed if she wasn't willing to have fun with them. Still, there was not much she could do about that, and decided to apply more oil to her breast before entertaining herself with her cousin.

"Right about here!"

Linde would have a drink or two before getting over the news of Berengar's foolish escapades. She just needed time to sulk and get over the shock that she felt upon receiving the news that the man had lit himself on fire. She would be back to normal in a matter of hours.

Chapter 785 A Desperate Last Stand

The Duke of Burgundy stood alongside the King of Naples. The two men had gathered what remained of their armies and met the forces of the Reich in the field. It was a bold move, but a suicidal one. Frankly, after everything they had witnessed in this war, they had lost all hope of victory. However, rather than surrender to Germany and its Kaiser, they decided to make one last stand outside the city of Naples.

King Balsamo Corsini ground his teeth as he gazed into the distance and witnessed the German Army and their allies marching into the region. He knew he was going to die on this day, but he would be damned if he did so without a fight. Berengar von Kufstein had taken everything from him in the Austrian War for independence. Ever since he witnessed the sacking of Florence, he had lost all strength as a leader and a man.

He would never forget the days he had suffered hiding in his cellar while the Austrian Army pounded his capital with artillery. Luckily, the garrison of Rome was smart enough to surrender immediately, or else the ancient capital of the Roman Empire would have been ground into dust. Still, there were reports of Germans raiding the city, and taking everything of value for themselves, much like that had done during their descent to Florence.

The Duke of Burgundy noticed the anxiety of the Italian King and sighed heavily. His hand was on his sword, and he, too, knew that only death awaited him and his men. However, he desired nothing more than to taste the blood of the Kaiser, and he swore on his lineage that he would have Berengar's head in this life or the next. Ultimately, he spoke of his intent to Balsamo before commanding his men to charge at the approaching Germans.

"Today I will either have my vengeance, or enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Either way, this ends now!"

Balsamo merely scoffed before responding to the Duke of Burgundy's claims.

"Homosexuals don't go to heaven! I am afraid you are fated for a different afterlife...."

The Duke of Burgundy merely ignored this comment and unsheathed his sword before uttering the command to the Burgundian Knights and their Southern Italian allies.

"Charge!"

Upon hearing this order, the thousands of Catholic warriors rushed towards the German Army, who were lying in wait for the enemy with their weapons loaded and artillery primed for battle. It did not take long for them to cross into the range of the German weapons, and when they did, all hell broke loose.

The artillery crews fired the first barrage on the enemy army, which blasted thousands of men into bits. Severed limbs scattered the floor, and the impact of the high explosive shells blew apart torsos. The guns quickly ejected their spent cartridges where another was loaded. Within a few seconds, the artillery echoed in the air once again, claiming the lives of thousands more men.

It did not take long for the Burgundian and Southern Italian armies to break ranks and route. After all, these were not brainwashed crusaders who sought for an opportunity to die in the name of God. These were peasants, rounded up from around their countries, given a musket and told to march towards the enemy or they would be shot in the back.

The moment their fear of the Germans overwhelmed their fear of their commanders, they scattered like flies. The Duke of Burgundy was livid when he saw all the men run away from the field of battle. He was on horseback, continuing his charge towards the enemy when he called out to the men beneath his command.

"Traitors, the lot of you. I hope you burn in the seventh layer of hell for all eternity!"

Eventually, there were only a handful of men that continued to charge towards the Germans. The colors on their tabards displayed that they were from the House of Burgundy and the House of Corsini. Berengar noticed this and immediately gave the order to cease fire.

"Cease Fire! I want these men taken alive! Fix Bayonets!"

The Artillery, immediately halted their fire, while the infantry did as they were instructed. Before long, the riflemen and their bayonets formed a spear wall. Their goal was to surround the Burgundian and Southern Italian Knights, and pierce through their horse's barding so that they could capture the riders.

Berengar was quite astonished by his enemies' willingness to walk into their deaths, but if this is what they desired, far be it from him to deny them. The Catholic Knights rushed towards the German lines, which instantly parted ways for the horses, slowing down their momentum before trapping them on a wall of bayonets.

The Duke of Burgundy swung his sword at the men below him, but they were too agile for him to cause any harm, eventually a bayonet found its way through the gaps in his horse's armor, and claimed the beast's life sending him tumbling to the ground. The German soldiers instantly restrained the man, and all the others who foolishly followed him towards his fate.

After a while, all the Knights were secure, as were the two monarchs who were brought before Berengar, who gazed upon them with a cruel smile on his handsome face.

"Balsamo Corsini, it is has been some time since we last met. I was honestly surprised when I heard reports that your Army was willing to meet me in the field. After all, the last time we met, you had survived several months of bombardment. Have you finally found your balls, or have you simply given up on life and decided to have a courageous death?"

Balsamo merely spat on the ground and ignored Berengar's question, which caused the Kaiser to kick him in the groin. The man instantly coughed up his stomach's contents and kneeled on the ground in pain from the powerful strike. Meanwhile, Berengar shifted his gaze to the Duke of Burgundy. He wore an equally sinister smirk as he glared into the man's hate-filled eyes.

"Duke Marcel de Burgundy, I must say it has been a long time coming, hasn't it? Our meeting I mean. I have got to ask, from one man to another, how was it? You know your time with that French twink?"

Marcel knew better than to spit on the ground in front of Berengar. After all, he had just witnessed the price to pay for such disrespect. Instead, he merely gazed at the Kaiser with a curious glance before asking the question on his mind.

"Why do you care?"

Berengar sighed when he heard this before pulling out a pack of cigarettes. He lit the device aflame before taking a long drag from it. After spewing the smoke into the air, he shrugged his shoulders before answering the man's question.

"I'm just curious, is all. The boy tried to seduce me, and perhaps in another life where I am more open-minded, and he was less of a slut, maybe I would have taken him as one of my lovers. If you don't want to answer the question, you don't have to, but I figured you'd like to confess your sins before I blow your brains out."

Marcel did not answer the question, instead he looked at the cigarette in Berengar's hand. He knew exactly what it was, as Germany had sold tobacco in many forms across Europe. The mysterious crop that appeared out of nowhere was an enormous market.

When Berengar saw Marcel staring at his cigarette, he pulled one out of his pack and put it in the man's mouth before lighting it for him. After taking a heavy drag, the Duke of Burgundy sighed heavily before expressing his last thoughts.

"Go fuck yourself!"

Berengar merely smiled when he heard this before pulling out his pistol and plugging a round in the man's skull. Duke Marcel de Burgundy died as a prisoner after refusing to answer the Kaiser's question about his gay lover. That would be an anecdote that historians would remember for years to come.

After executing the Duke of Burgundy, Berengar walked over to the King of Naples and pointed his pistol toward's the man's forehead. He gazed at the man with a conceited expression on his face before asking the man for his last words.

"Any last words?"

Balsamo Corsini took a deep breath to calm his heart before staring Berengar in the eye and muttering the thought that came to mind.

"Fuck you!"

Berengar merely scoffed when he heard this and lectured the man briefly before blasting his brains all over the ground.

"Real original..."

With that said, the Duke of Burgundy and the King of Naples were dead. Their armies were scattered to the winds. Italy had been unified under the banner of the King of Lombardy, and Berengar would spend the next few weeks gathering his forces to march on Hungary.

As for the Duchy of Burgundy, the Duke's young nephew would come to the throne for the remaining duration of the War. Afterward, Berengar would choose a proper puppet to rule over the region.

Chapter 786 What Could Have Been Part II

Berengar stared at the beautiful woman in front of him with astonished eyes. He knew he must be dreaming, because this was a scene he did not remember from his past life. At the moment, he was Julian Weber and was dressed in his ACUs. He had just returned home from an operation in Afghanistan. It was his second deployment, and the war was still far from over.

Standing in the doorway to greet him was none other than Mizuno Ai, who had recently graduated herself. However, there was something noticeable about the Japanese Beauty, her belly was extended as if she were several months pregnant. She quickly hugged Julian and kissed him on the lips before rubbing her belly with a pretty smile on her face.

"Daddy's home!"

Julian gazed in astonishment at the woman. She was truly radiant, but he did not know how to explain the bitterness in his heart. This was clearly another lucid dream that felt as if it were reality. Ai saw the tears growing in her man's eyes and quickly dragged his head into her bosom to console him.

"What's wrong? Hey come inside and tell me all about it, I prepared your favorite, tonkatsu and takoyaki!"

Julian sniffled as he wiped the tears from his eyes. He did not know why he was having these realistic dreams, but he was instantly suspicious. Perhaps it was an effect caused by him drinking from Urðarbrunnr, or perhaps it was simply the gods playing a cruel trick on him. Whatever was the reason, he decided to enjoy the moment. Because of this, he wore a warm smile as he shook his head and expressed that his tears were a misunderstanding.

"I'm sorry Ai. I just missed you so much. You have no idea what life is like without you. Let me put down my luggage and I'll be right in to join you!"

The woman quickly grabbed hold of Julian's luggage and tried to take it herself.

"Allow me, you just rest!"

However, Julian wasn't having it. The woman was visibly pregnant, and thus he would not allow her to physically strain herself.

"It's fine, I've got it. You just go grab me a beer, okay?"

Ai wore a pretty smile and pecked Julian on the lips before nodding her head in agreement.

"Okay, don't wander for too long!"

After saying this, she ran off to the Kitchen of their house where she prepared the table for Julian's eventual arrival. Meanwhile, the man had slowly walked around the halls and witnessed the pictures on display. This dream must be taking place after the last one, because there were photos of their wedding, and other important dates they had gone on.

Apparently, after confirming how each other felt during his graduation, they had pretty quickly gotten married. It had been over a year since then, and they were a happily married couple. The sight of these pictures only furthered the agony in Julian's heart as he gazed upon them, thinking about what life could have been for him.

After taking a look at the hallway pictures, Julian climbed the stairs to the bedroom, where he placed down the luggage. There were more photos of the two of them, as well as their friends and family, hanging on the walls and sitting on the desk. He took a deep sigh before deciding to descend the staircase and reunite with his wife.

After arriving in the kitchen, Ai handed him his favorite beer with a pleasant smile on her face before taking a seat at the table. She seemed to be in a very good mood as she said a brief prayer before taking a bite from one of the many octopus dumplings she had made. After enjoying the treat, she quickly asked Julian about his deployment.

"So, how were things over there? I hear the war is not as bad as it once was..."

Julian shook his head when he heard this before answering the woman's question to the best of his ability.

"We've taken a back seat in the war. The Afghan National Army is doing most of the fighting, but they're an absolute joke. If we truly want this puppet state to succeed, then we will be in the region for another hundred years at least.

I'm telling you, half of these guys show up to training, get their gear, and then defect to the Taliban during their first deployment. You would be surprised what those fuckers are equipped with now, thanks to those fucking traitors. I honestly don't even know why we are still in this fucking war. Afghanistan can't stand on its own. It's better to cut our losses before more of our boys get killed."

Those last few words stuck in Julian's throat as he had a sudden flashback of himself getting fragged by a mortar in Afghanistan. Ai could tell something was wrong by the sweat on his brow and quickly inquired about it.

"Are you sure you're alright? You can tell me anything you know that, right?"

However, Julian quickly shook his head and used his chopsticks to eat his ramen. It's not like he could tell the woman that this was all a dream. If he did, it would just end up like his last one, and he wanted to enjoy this moment a little while longer.

"I'm fine. It was just an unpleasant thought. You don't need to worry about me so much..."

Ai nodded her head, before following up with more concern.

"Okay, I understand if you don't want to talk about what goes on over there, but just know I'm here for you if you need to get something off your chest."

Julian chuckled when he heard this before commenting to the woman sitting across from him.

"Who are you, and what have you done with the girl who used to pester me in the library every day?"

Ai immediately blushed when she recalled all the fights she had picked with Julian just to get his attention. The sight of the woman, who was so embarrassed, immediately caused Julian to laugh and tease her more.

"You are so cute when you get embarrassed like that. What the hell did I do to deserve such a wonderful wife?"

After taking a few seconds to calm down, Ai answered Julian's question with a smug grin on her pretty face.

"You were the only man I had ever met who was smarter than me! Naturally, it drew my attention..."

In response to this, Julian could only chuckle once more before teasing the girl again.

"Oh, so you admit that I'm smarter than you? That's a first!"

Ai became flustered once more while she lowered her head and muttered in the cutest voice that Julian had ever heard her make.

"Stop teasing me..."

After seeing such an expression on the girl's face, Julian could no longer make fun of the woman, and thus he took a sip from his beer before commenting on her appearance.

"You look lovely, Ai, so have you found out whether it is going to be a boy or a girl yet?"

The woman rapidly shifted her mood from embarrassed to excited as she nodded her head thrice before answering the man's question.

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"It's going to be a boy!"

Julian did not know why hearing such a thing made him so happy, but a wide grin formed on his face as he responded to the woman's assertion.

"To think I will have a son, Half German, and Half Japanese, huh? I don't think this world is prepared for such a little warrior!"

Ai giggled when she heard this before lecturing the man on his ideas.

"Like hell I'll ever let my son join the military. I get worried enough when you are away at war. I don't think I can go through another eight years of that after my baby boy finally grows up. No, he will be a civilian, maybe a CEO like his grandfather?"

Julian went silent when he heard the last words escape from the woman's mouth. According to the memories he had in this dream, Ai's parents did not approve of him. Primarily because he came from a poor background. Though they were impressed with his ability to climb from nothing, he was still in the military and thus not making as much money as they wanted their son-in-law to have.

He did not let it bother him. This was all just a dream, after all. Still, it would have been nice if he could have gotten along with his in-laws. Oh well, such things were life, and he would have begun to consider the possibility he had died in his sleep if this world was so perfect. However, Julian could tell his time in this dream was coming to an end, and smiled bitterly as he said goodbye to Ai for a second time since he had reincarnated into his current life.

"I had a really fun time. Ai, I want to thank you. The time I have spent with you here and now has really helped me gain some closure. I don't know if we will be able to meet again, but I just want to thank you for everything you did for me. It is just a shame it took me two lives to realize what could have been."

After saying this, Julian kissed the woman on the forehead and walked out the door. Ai only stared at him in shock as he walked away from her. The moment Julian exited the house, he awoke in his tent in Southern Italy.

It took him all of three seconds to realize he was back in the real world, and he could only sigh when he thought about the dream. Well, there was no way he was going to get any more sleep on this night, and because of that, Berengar got up from his sleeping bag and began his day's work.

Chapter 787 Landing in Busan

Itami stood on the bow of her largest warship and gazed into the distance through a spyglass. After a long and arduous journey, her fleet had made it to the shores of Busan completely intact. Though the seas were harsh, the steam powered warships were more than capable of traversing them safely.

While Berengar was marching his troops from Southern Italy to Hungary, Itami had embarked towards the Joseon Kingdom with the intent to conquer and annex the region. There was only one reason that she had chosen the Korean Peninsula as her target, and that was because of the rich iron deposits that existed within the northern half of the land.

Before embarking on her campaign of conquest, Itami had sent word to the Joseon King informing him that she was declaring war on his Kingdom. After all, there were certain rules one must abide by when declaring war, even if her neighbors did not follow them. The last thing Itami wanted was a repeat of Pearl Harbor, which would stain her Nation's history.

The Ming Emperor had granted her permission to invade and annex the Joseon Kingdom, and that meant that the Chinese were simply staying out of the conflict. Which was good, because from a modern political perspective, one might call the Joseon a protectorate of the Ming.

However, despite this status, the Ming Emperor saw fit that trading with the Japanese Empire, which Itami had built, was more valuable than their petty protectorate in the northeast. There were also rumors of Japan's military becoming a major threat, and he would rather not test the might of the Imperial Japanese Army. A wise emperor knew when to concede, and the current Ming Emperor was indeed a wise man.

Itami gazed through her spyglass and looked upon the coastal defences that were established by the enemy. She did not know how they knew she would land in Busan, but The Joseon army had made ample preparation for her arrival. The defenders that lined the coast were armed with bronze cannons and composite bows. The distinctive lack of handheld firearms was immediately noticeable. After all, this was the era of hand cannons, and such weapons were quite rare and ineffective.

Asia had not yet caught up to the West in terms of quantity and quality of firearms. Berengar's introduction of the musket had propelled Europe into a ten year long arms race whose sole purpose was to combat his army. Something the eastern kingdoms knew nothing about. In fact, from the perspective of many outside observers who lived on the Asian continent, this would be the first major conflict fought with a large number of firearms.

One thing immediately became clear as Itami gazed upon the coastal defences, they were set up so that the Joseon bowmen could rain arrows upon Itami's army the moment they landed on the shore. Itami was a paranoid woman and immediately expected this to be the result of leaked intelligence about her weapon's capabilities.

The so called Itami Rifles that the Japanese Empress had issued to her troops had a maximum range of roughly one thousand eight hundred meters, however, they had an effective range substantially less than that. Meanwhile, the Joseon's composite bows had an effective range of one hundred and forty-five meters. It was clear from the layout that they had specifically designed their defences to negate the advantage of the Japanese Rifles.

This made Itami's blood boil as she placed her spyglass aside and sighed heavily. There was a traitor in her midst. She just did not know if her invasion plan was leaked from the side of the Ming, or her own Empire. Either way, she would need to find out who was responsible for this act of treason. However, at the moment, she had more pressing concerns.

Itami had underestimated her enemies. She did not anticipate them to see through her plans and prepare an appropriate defense. The enemy army was vast, tens of thousands of men, armed with as many bows and cannons as they could muster. Their intent was simple: hold off the Japanese invasion here in Busan, or be defeated in a single battle.

Itami had forsaken the use of body armor in her units. After all, she had specifically designed her army with a more deadly enemy in mind. Germany and its modern army posed a significant threat to the Japanese soldiers. One that body armor could not prevent. Unless she could manufacture synthetic materials to equip her soldiers with modern composite plates, then it was simply a waste of natural resources to issue body armor to her army.

When she planned for this invasion, she expected to land unopposed, and use the superior range of her soldiers' rifles to gun the enemy down in the fields further inland. She never expected them to build a large coastal defense that was capable of launching thousands of arrows at her men before they could reach stable ground.

After Gazing upon the enemy formation, she knew that she would lose thousands of men should she land her soldiers in Busan, and thus she was given two options, turn the ships around and invade from another province, where she would have to redesign her campaign strategy from scratch while at war. Or push through Busan and annihilate the enemy army in one go while suffering thousands of casualties in the process.

Victory was certain either way, but it fundamentally came down to how many men she was willing to sacrifice to achieve it. Another major factor was the speed at which she needed to wage her war. Should she turn her armies around, the conquest of Korea would take much longer than she originally anticipated.

Japan was currently racing against time with the threat of the German Empire on the Horizon, and she could not spend what little time she had bogged down by an alternate strategy. General Shiba Kiyohiko could see that his Empress was hesitating with her decision and quickly asked for clarification on what his orders should be.

"Itami-sama, the enemy are loading their cannons. They will be firing upon our ships at any moment. What are your orders?"

Upon hearing this, Itami snapped back to reality and sighed heavily, lamenting the loss of life that was about to take place. She had properly prepared her campaign, and to essentially improvise her entire invasion of Korea was simply not the woman's style. She would proceed with the plan, and eliminate the Joseon Army in one fell swoop, before marching the survivors of her army into the Korean peninsula to occupy its cities and strategic resources.

"Order our ships to bombard the enemy fortifications. I want their cannons taken out. Any left over shells are to be directed onto the defenders to act as cover for our armies who shall land on the beaches. We are taking Busan, no matter what the casualties may be!"

Shiba nodded his head in agreement before responding to the woman's orders.

"Understood!"

After saying this, he relayed the commands to the rest of the fleet, who, via the use of flags, conveyed the order to bombard the shoreline. The Japanese sailors loaded their shells into the rear breeches of their Armstrong guns and aimed the weapons in the direction of the enemy's defenses. With a thunderous roar, they opened fire onto the coast.

Dozens of Japanese naval guns bombarded the shoreline, targeting the enemy artillery as they did so. Though these Turtle ships were well defended against arrow attacks, they were still vulnerable to cannon fire, after all, their hulls were still made of wood. The Joseon cannons opened fire onto Itami's fleet, but the speed at which they fired was simply too slow to compete with Itami's naval guns.

One by one, explosions blasted the bronze cannons into pieces and turned their crews into mincemeat. When the Joseon General witnessed this, he nearly shat himself. He had never seen such destructive power before. Not only was the enemy launching explosive strikes on his defenses, but they were doing so at a rate that boggled his mind.

The Naval bombardment continued to unfold as Itami's ships pounded away at the coastal forts which housed the Joseon Defenders. While this slaughter was taking place, the soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army got on board their boats and rowed their way to the shore. Itami had not designed specialized landing craft just yet, and because of this, the Japanese soldiers found themselves under the threat of arrow fire, the closer they got to the shore.

Still, the explosive barrage of naval guns kept the Joseon army's head down, and few would dare to fire their bows upon the lifeboats that were edging ever closer to the shores. In fact, many of them were now scattered from their defenses, too afraid of the power of the Japanese vessels which launched surgical strikes on their artillery. Thus, the Joseon soldiers quickly abandoned their forts and rushed to the beaches where they intended to fight the Imperial Japanese Army in melee combat.

Upon seeing the enemy scurry towards the beaches, she was worried about the safety of her men. Their bayonets would have to clash with iron armor, while they themselves were unprotected by the blades of the enemy. She made sure to make a quick prayer to the gods of her homeland that her men may safely make it to the afterlife as she sat back and watched the battle unfurl. The battle for Busan had only just begun. Whoever emerged victorious would certainly win this war.

Chapter 788 A New Era of Trade

Sultan Salan Mirza sat atop the back of a camel as he gazed across the Kaiser's Pass with astonishment in his eyes. It had been some time since the Byzantine Empire abandoned him to fight the Catholic Church alone.

However, just when his armies were surrounded by the Crusaders in Alexandria, the enemy suddenly broke ranks and fled for their lives. He had later come to find out that the Pope and all of his Cardinals were burned at the stake by the mad bastard in charge of the German Empire.

The armies of the Crusaders were being decimated across Europe by the overwhelming power of German steel, and those who had been tasked with seizing Egypt for the Kingdom of Jerusalem had fled deep into Africa, hoping to escape the wrath of the German Army. After all, the Germans' influence spread across all the Mediterranean and the near east. There was nowhere in the civilized world for them to flee to where the Germans wouldn't find them and slaughter them.

Salan had marched his army up to the Kaiser's pass to see if these rumors were true, and he was shocked at what he witnessed. Foreign ships from Across Asia were sailing through the massive canal. The German Army and Navy ensured protection of the region, and despite there being a major conflict taking place on the European Continent, thousands of ships sailed through the Canal with intent to dock in Trieste and trade with the mighty German Empire.

It was not only the Indians who were trading with Germany, there was even a Ming Treasure fleet making its way through the Canal in an attempt to gain an audience with this major power in the west they had only recently heard rumors of. As Salan and his army approached the garrison, they were stopped by the Reichsgarde, who investigated the armed force, and why they were at the Kaiser's pass.

"Halt, no army shall enter the land which belongs to the Reich. If you take one step further without surrendering your weapons, we will eliminate you!"

There was only one way for Salan to return to his homeland in the Timurid Empire, and that was to march his army across the mighty steel bridges which soared over the Kaiser's pass. He immediately questioned the mere guard, who dared to oppose his entry.

"I am the Sultan of the Timurid Empire. Who do you think you are to demand that my army hand over our weapons in order to safely return to our lands?"

In response to this, the soldier merely scoffed, before handing the Sultan a pair of binoculars and pointing his view towards the other end of the canal. There was a smug tone in the German soldier's voice as he responded to Salan's hubris.

"If you want to end up like those sorry bastards, by all means keep your weapons."

Salan fumbled around with the binoculars before realizing how they worked. When he gazed into the distance, he saw the rotting corpses of the hundred thousand strong crusader army that had dared to march on the Kaiser's pass.

His mouth fell agape as he realized that there was still a giant red stain on the sands of the Sinai peninsula, where the army had rushed to their deaths. Jackals and carrions had picked apart most of their corpses. However, there were traces of flesh scattered in the painted landscape. The Sultan could not comprehend what he was seeing and quickly inquired about it.

"What the hell is that?"

When the German soldier heard this, he merely chuckled before responding with a smug grin on his face.

"That is what remains of the English Army and the Order of the Red Dragon..."

Salan could barely believe what he was hearing. He had fought with King Lawrence and the Welsh Crusaders on multiple occasions in the past. They had pushed him and his Byzantine allies into Egypt because their armies were so powerful. Now they were merely a giant red stain across the sands of the Sinai Peninsula. He could not fathom the power it took for the Germans to accomplish this, who looked completely unharmed from the battle. He only had one question on his mind.

"And King Lawrence?"

The soldier quickly pulled out a cigarette and lit it, where he took a long drag from it before expelling the smoke from his lungs and into the surrounding air. After doing so, he responded with a completely stoic expression on his face.

"Presumed dead... It's impossible to identify most of those poor bastards, so we just assumed he died with his army. There were no survivors after all..."

The Sultan could only gulp down the saliva that pooled in his throat when he heard this. He quickly looked back at his army, and then towards the German soldier before handing the man the binoculars with a frightened expression on his face.

"So, who do we hand our weapons to?"

The soldier laughed once more, then he ordered a bunch of guards to seize the weapons of the Timurid Army. It was a simple act of disgrace for them to abandon their weapons in order to return home safely. However, they had no other option. They did not have the ships to ferry them to the Holy Land, and there was now a giant canal in between them and their homeland.

The soldiers of the Reichsgarde collected the weapons that belonged to the members of the Timurid Army before allowing them to pass through the bridges and to the other side of the Canal. They were closely watched by riflemen at all times as they did so. If any of them stepped out of line, they would be dealt with via lethal force. A nobleman beneath Salan's command whispered to the man as he walked by his side.

"This is an insult to our nation. Who does the Kaiser think he is, stripping us of our weapons? What will happen if we come across the crusaders in the Holy Land? They will massacre us all!"

Salan pointed at the red stain that lie across the Sinai Peninsula before reprimanding the nobleman for his words.

"If we do not submit to the Germans, that is the fate that awaits us. Death would be certain, and I would rather take my chances on the journey home, then be turned into that!"

The nobleman immediately understood his place and averted his gaze, which just so happened to land on a massive ship that was sailing across the canal. It was clearly of Chinese Origin and was likely the largest vessel in their armada. The ship was docking at the other end of the Canal where its leader would meet with Heimerich and pay the toll that was required to cross through the Kaiser's Pass.

After all, the second fleet of the German Navy was posted on both sides of the Canal, and had enough firepower to sink any vessel who dared to cross without agreeing to payment. To think that the proud Ming Dynasty would agree to pay the toll, it was truly a sight for the Timurid Emperor to behold.

Though he had limited dealings with the Great Empire in the East, he knew how prideful they were. Asking them to pay a toll was an insult to their prestige, and yet, it would appear that they agreed to do so. After all, how could they compete with ships made of steel? Whoever was in control of their fleet knew to put away his personal pride when he gazed upon the Ironclad Frigates of the German Navy, and the overwhelming number of guns they had on board.

By building this canal, Berengar had ushered in a new era of trade that would see all goods flow through the Reich. Thus, as the Timurid Army limped back to their homeland, they gazed upon the Prosperity that would soon enter German lands.

Chapter 789 Battle For the Shores of Busan

The Battle for the shores of Busan had already begun. Currently, Itami stood upon the bow of her flagship and gazed through her spyglass as she witnessed the chaos of war unfold from afar. After receiving a ruthless pounding from the Japanese naval guns, the Joseon defenders who survived the initial onslaught abandoned the forts that lined the coast.

The men fearlessly rushed to the shores in a desperate attempt to force the Japanese invaders to fight in melee combat. After all, there was no way that the Japanese Generals would fire on their own soldiers. Thus, they figured they'd be safe from the overwhelming power of the Japanese Navy.

The first of the Japanese rowboats, which contained a squad of soldiers, reached the shores, where the men onboard stood up and fired a volley towards the Joseon warriors. The lead projectiles pierced through the enemy's armor and flesh while claiming their lives. However, a single volley from a squad was not nearly enough to put a dent in the army that was approaching.

In retaliation for this attack, hundreds of Joseon bowmen knocked their arrows and loosed them upon the Japanese squad. The bamboo arrows fell from the sky and rained upon the enemy, piercing through their cotton tunics and into their flesh. Before the Japanese could reload and fire another shot, they were turned into pincushions.

Upon seeing such a nasty fate befall their countrymen, those brave souls who rowed towards the shore aimed their rifles and fired towards the gathering army. A plume of smoke filled the air as hundreds of rifles spewed lead towards the Joseon defenders, who now stood upon the shores waiting for the Japanese forces to land.

The Japanese invaders fearlessly rowed towards the shore while taking potshots at the Joseon defenders in between their actions. The closer they got to the shore, the more arrows fell upon them. It was a bloodbath the likes Itami had never seen before.

In her past life, she was never deployed to a combat zone. It was only in this life that she learned what it felt like to claim a life, and how devastating it was to lose the men beneath your command. Her heart bled as she witnessed hundreds of her soldiers pierced by the bamboo arrows of the Joseon Army. She had never suffered such losses before.

She had underestimated the effect of the bow and arrow, and overestimated her own military might. It turned out that the enemy could force her into the range of their weapons, and when they did, her unarmored forces suffered heavily. She had made a mistake by preparing for war with Germany, when she should have been preparing for war with the Joseon, the Ainu, and the Ryukyu Kingdoms who were her immediate targets.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of Japanese soldiers died as they struggled to land on the shores of Busan. However, once they found their footing, they were quick to turn the tides of war. The overwhelming volume of fire provided by the rifles that the Japanese soldiers wielded quickly thinned out the Joseon numbers, forcing the enemy to charge at them with their melee weapons.

However, was the Japanese army so easy to defeat? The Japanese soldiers fired another volley before charging into the grand melee with their bayonets affixed. They shouted their battle cry as they thrust their blades forward and into the torsos of their enemy.

"Tennōheika Banzai!"

With this suicidal charge, tens of thousands of Japanese soldiers rushed forward with bayonets and swords in hand. The fearlessness of death in their eyes as they cut down the enemy quickly overwhelmed the morale of the Joseon defenders. Who, despite inflicting heavy casualties on the Japanese, were rapidly dwindling in number.

With their artillery knocked out, and the Japanese soldiers continuing to pour into the shores, the Joseon General gazed in horror as his army routed. However, Itami's forces were not merciful and immediately opened fire the moment the Joseon turned their backs and ran.

Technically, this would be a war crime in the era Itami came from, causing her to bite her lip in displeasure when she saw her soldiers gunning down the fleeing enemy. In the civilized world, one was supposed to give quarter to a defeated enemy.

However, she desperately needed to end this conflict here and now, especially after suffering such heavy losses. Thus, the albino beauty found her inner resolve to give the naval gunners an order that she despised.

"Fire upon the fleeing army with your 110 pounders. I want these bastards wiped out! If we can destroy the enemy here in Busan, the rest of the Kingdom will fall with them."

With the command given, the crews aboard Itami's fleet loaded their guns and adjusted their aim to fire on the fleeing enemy. The 110 pound shells rocked the shores of Busan as they blasted men into mincemeat. The Joseon who fled the battle were pelted with a mixture of naval bombardment and rifle fire as they were ruthlessly blasted to oblivion. In the end, less than a thousand men escaped with their lives, leaving the entire Kingdom utterly defenseless against the Japanese army.

After the coast was secure. Itami took her own rowboat and landed on the shore where she stepped foot on the bloody sand and gazed upon the gory scene. Tens of thousands of bodies lie hewn on the beaches. If she wasn't already been so accustomed to death, then the woman would have vomited all over the beach.

Nearby, a Japanese man looked like a porcupine with the amount of arrows that were stuck in his body. He had died in a kneeling position, staking the banner of the rising sun into the Korean soil. The banner was tattered and scorched by the fierce battle that had taken place only moments ago.

If one were to look a few feet away, they would see the body of a Japanese soldier who had his head decapitated by a Korean swordsman. That same swordsman lie dead a mere two feet away with a massive hole in his chest caused by the large caliber projectiles used in the Japanese Rifles. He had died with his sword in hand.

Leaning against a rock was a young man no older than eighteen. This soldier had multiple arrows embedded in his torso and was on the brink of death. He gazed upon the Empress in her military uniform as she strode through the death that surrounded her with a stoic expression on her pretty face. He mustered what little strength remained in his body to reach out towards her and call out the title that her most loyal soldiers referred her to by.

"Kami-sama..."

Itami shifted her gaze to the dying man and saw that he was still holding his rifle in one of his hands. Tears streamed down his eyes as he gazed upon the beauty of the War Goddess, who was closer to him than she had ever been. Itami could only sigh as she saw this before kneeling next to the man and comforting him in his last moments. She placed the dying man's head on her ivory thighs, which were concealed by a skirt, before closing his eyes for him and comforting the poor soul who was about to enter the afterlife.

"You have fought well... Rest now, you have more than earned it..."

Shortly thereafter, the man passed away with a bitter smile on his lips. At the very least, his goddess had given him a lap pillow before he passed away from this world. Despite the man's death, Itami stayed still with his head in her lap for some time.

Eventually, her lead general approached the scene and saw the distressed look on the woman's face. She was very clearly trying her best not to cry. After all, she needed to project strength to her soldiers, who were licking their wounds after a hard fight. Shiba placed his hand on the young woman's shoulder and attempted to comfort her as she stared lifelessly at the dead men who surrounded her.

"Itami-sama, it's over, we have won the battle... The Joseon Kingdom has no soldiers left to fight against us. These men died so that their homeland could prosper. So that you could lead their families to a better future..."

Itami nodded her head in silence before gently placing the deceased soldier's head on the ground. She rose to her feet and wiped the tears from her eyes before responding to her general.

"You're right. I don't have time to lament the loss of life. This is war, and we are so close to victory. I shall honor the fallen by annexing this Kingdom. If our civilization has a chance at becoming a global power, then we need the iron that the Joseon have buried away in their lands.

I want our dead brought back to Japan and entombed in the lands of their ancestors. As for the Joseon corpses, or the ones that remain intact, bury them. After we have disposed of the dead, we shall advance forward and take the city."

Shiba nodded his head before responding in affirmation to Itami's orders.

"As you command!"

After saying this, Itami took a few moments to collect her thoughts and harden her heart. She had never witnessed so many deaths on her own side before. However, unlike Berengar, she was not angry at the enemy for inflicting such fierce casualties on her army, instead; she respected their strength and determination.

She had not anticipated such losses when she planned this campaign, and the simple fact that she suffered so much proved the Joseon were a capable Kingdom even if they were centuries behind in military technology. The enemy had suffered enough, and she would not act with vengeance when she finally ruled over them.

Chapter 790 Dethroning the Hungarian King

The King of Hungary sat in his throne room. Disturbing news had reached his ears about the defeat of the Papacy. In this failed bid to defeat Germany, the Catholic world had sent hundreds of thousands of men to their deaths. It had barely even been a month since this war began, and already more than half of Hungary's army was dead.

Hungary was already suffering from an economic breakdown after the sanctions that were put in place against Germany, however, the losses they suffered in this war was an unmitigated disaster. It was only a matter of time before famine took hold of Hungary and killed millions.

In hindsight, the Hungarian monarch realized he should have never answered the Papacy's call to crusade in the Holy Land. He had spent the entire duration of that brief war stuck in the Dinaric Alps, where he was unable to get past the Palladius army before the war with the Byzantine army even came to an end. However, another opportunity for glory appeared shortly after, and within 72 hours of marching on the German border, Hungary had lost over four hundred thousand men.

The King had personally witnessed his men march into the death trap that was the German border. He could only watch with horror as his men blown to bits by artillery, shredded to pieces by machine gun fire, and fragged by land mines. The question he asked himself, even now, was just what kind of sadistic cunt would design such insane border defenses?

The Hungarian Monarch could only sigh heavily as he rested his weary head in the palm of his hands. Berengar von Kufstein was indeed a sadistic cunt, but it was not as if he was born that way. No, the man had been driven to such ruthless action. After all, he was surrounded by hostile nations that were just waiting for the opportunity to pounce.

It was only now that the Hungarian King realized the Catholic Church should have united against Berengar when he was simply a small count. That was their only chance to defeat him. However, years of infighting and proxy wars had weakened the Papacy's power and treasury to the point where they were now relying entirely on peasant levies to attack the German Empire. To think a man who was born to inherit a lowly barony was enough would cause such problems to the Catholic World.

The King of Hungary had to admit, Berengar von Kufstein had played the Catholic Church like a fiddle in the last ten years. He had bought time by creating a series of proxy wars within Christendom. He had

empowered the Church's enemies and diverted their attention from the real threat to their power. All while strengthening his army and uniting the German people into a single cohesive Empire. The truth was, the game was rigged from the start. From the moment Berengar had made an enemy of the Church, he had forced them to play by his rules.

What was the result of this massive chess game? The Papacy was gone, the Kingdom of France was weakened beyond repair. The English army and the Order of the Red Dragon were obliterated in Egypt. Balsamo Corsini and the Duke of Burgundy were dead and buried in an unmarked grave somewhere in southern Italy, and the Polish King was presumed to have drowned to the bottom of the Mediterranean along with his entire army. All that truly remained in this fight was Hungary, and yet they were surrounded on both sides by Germany and their Byzantine allies.

Berengar von Kufstein was marching his army towards his eastern border in an attempt to invade Hungary with a pincer attack. No matter what solution the King of Hungary thought of he could only see his imminent death. He was frantic, and had suffered hair loss due to his tendency to pull hair from his head when he was stressed. By now, all that remained were a few clusters of hair randomly spread out throughout his otherwise bald head.

While the King of Hungary was brooding in silence, the door to his throne room opened, and an unexpected visitor appeared with several armed men in tow. The King of Hungary gazed upon his guest with shock in his eye. It was the son of one of his recently deceased Generals. The man was surrounded by what appeared to be other men of note within the kingdom, all of which were armed with German revolvers. Before the King could express his shock, the man spoke to him with a stern tone in his voice.

"Your majesty King Tamás Balázs, the time has come for you to step down. The people of Hungary no longer support your rule, and have moved to replace you before the Germans invade our lands and sack our cities. If you surrender willingly, I promise that you will be given a fair trial! Resist and you will die here today!"

The man in question was none other than Noemi's elder brother, Vászoly Viktor. Upon hearing of his father's death on the German border, the young man had assumed all power in his family, and had secretly conspired with Imperial Intelligence to unite the various wealthy families of Hungary against their King.

Now that Berengar was marching his army to Hungary, Viktor realized time was of the essence and had forced his way into the Royal Palace in order to apprehend the current monarch and hand him over to the Germans. It was a coup d'état in every sense of the word. The Hungarian King was outraged when he saw that his own nobility had conspired against him. He quickly ordered his Knights to attack the intruders.

"Bring me these filthy traitors' heads!"

Before the Hungarian Knights could unsheathe their blades, the rebels opened fire upon them with their revolvers riddling every bodyguard the King had full of bullets. Blood poured out of the steel armor that the Hungarian Knights wore like water in a sieve before they collapsed lifelessly to the floor. The Hungarian King was shocked at how quickly they had been defeated and instantly knelt in surrender before Viktor could execute him.

"I yield! I yield!"

Viktor scoffed with disdain when he heard this before ordering his men to bind the King and drag him away.

"Take him away, boys!"

The rebels quickly did as they were commanded, and placed steel bindings on the King's wrists and ankles before dragging him off to the dungeon. After the previous monarch was removed, Viktor picked up his crown, which had fallen to the floor during the chaos. He gazed upon it intently for a few moments in silence before one of his comrades questioned his actions.

"What now? Who will become the new King?"

When Viktor heard this, he chuckled lightly before tossing the crown aside as if it were a common Frisbee. He then replied to the man's question with a grim look on his face.

"That is not for us to decide..."

The rebel looked at Viktor with a concerned expression on his face before protesting.

"What do you mean? Shouldn't the Hungarian People decide who is King now that we have removed the old one?"

In response to this, Viktor merely scoffed and placed a hand on the man's shoulder before lecturing him on what was about to happen.

"In an ideal world... yes! However, this world is far from ideal. It is a world where we are now ruled by the Reich. For the first time in a millennium, the seat of power in the western world has shifted from Rome to another city: Kufstein.

Make no mistake, under the rule of the Reich, no man shall be crowned King unless they first have the approval of the Kaiser. Just as the Papacy used to crown emperors in the past, now the Reich will crown the Petty Kings of Europe.

This is the new world order, and you better get used to it. Because with the power of the German Military, there is nobody on this Earth who can defeat them in an armed conflict. So, I will hand this worthless crown to Berengar von Kufstein when he arrives on our borders, and I will sit by like an obedient dog while he crowns whoever it is that he wishes to be his puppet. Hopefully, we can rely on the Reich for assistance, because with all the young men who have died in this foolish war, the future of Hungary is looking bleak."

The rebel did not say a word to counter Viktor's opinion. After all, everything he said was true, instead he bowed his head and prayed to God that Germany would provide aid to Hungary or else subservience to a foreign power was the least of their worries.