

# Steel 831

## Chapter 831 Japanese War Crimes in Korea

Itami sat in a building set within the northeast borders of the Ming Dynasty. She had a frustrated expression on her pretty face as she sat across from the Joseon King. Their discussion was being mediated by the Ming Emperor. The trio of Asian monarchs had gathered today to discuss a solution to the ongoing war in the Korean Peninsula.

Six months had passed since Berengar's victory day celebrations had ended, and while the Kaiser was busy mechanizing his armed forces in preparations for his invasion of the Anangpur Empire. Itami was stuck in a brutal stalemate.

Despite her best efforts, the Japanese Empress and her soldiers had failed to push into the north. Every attempt to do so was met with a fierce exchange of gunfire between the Joseon Insurgents and the Imperial Japanese Army.

Tens of thousands of Japanese soldiers lie dead in this campaign, and hundreds more fell with each day. She had even been forced to withdraw her soldiers from the occupied cities in the south and move them northward towards the front lines. A strategy which ultimately backfired.

As her forces redeployed from the south, to support the war effort in the North, the German Empire made use of their Joseon proxies to arm, and supply would-be rebels in the Japanese occupied territory. Fighting an insurgency on two fronts, Itami was forced to withdraw her forces south of what was once known as the 38th Parallel in her past life, and deal with those who dared to rebel against her rule.

Since the Japanese Empress did not have the manpower to fight a two front war, she had begrudgingly met with the Joseon King to settle their dispute in a way that favored her Empire. She sipped from the tea provided by the Ming Emperor with a scowl on her face before pointing towards the map, and the line she had chosen to divide her enemy's kingdom with.

"Everything north of this line will belong to the Joseon Kingdom. As for the South, all shall recognize its annexation into the Japanese Empire. These are the terms I have decided upon, and nothing in this world shall compel me to change my mind. Either take the peace I offer you, or I will crush your pathetic little Kingdom even if it's the last thing I do!"

Though the Joseon King wanted to refuse Itami's offer, before he could do so, one of his delegates, who whispered something into his ear, quickly nudged him in the ribs. He nodded his head in silence three times before agreeing to Itami's terms. An act which ultimately surprised the young woman.

"Very well, if these are the terms you present to me, I shall accept them... For now... However, make no mistake, one day the lands you have stolen from me shall return to my dynasty's hands. I do hope I will be around to see your face when such a reality comes to existence."

After saying this, the Joseon King rose from his seat and bowed to the Ming Emperor before leaving the room along with his delegation. As for Itami, she merely pouted. Though she had gained some territory with iron reserves, as well as other industrial resources, she felt as if she had lost to a certain somebody in the far west.

While her proxy in the Bengal Empire had not yet even begun the conquest of his neighbors, The Kaiser had swiftly deployed his forces to the Korean Peninsula, and countered her invasion. She now needed to fight guerillas in the territory she occupied, all the while ensuring that the iron ore was harvested and successfully shipped back to the Japanese mainland.

For now, she would give up on her ambitions to conquer Northern Korea, and instead focus her efforts on the territory she controlled. The purpose of her invasion was not total victory, but gaining the raw materials she needed to modernize her military. She had succeeded in that endeavor to some extent and thus she could bite the proverbial bullet, so to speak.

Itami thanked the Ming Emperor before leaving the meeting herself. She spent the next few hours on a ship back to Busan, where her control was most secure. Upon disembarking from her vessel, Itami was met with a messenger from her Army who had a grim look on his face. Before the woman could ask him what was wrong, he blurted out the answer.

"Itami-sama, a situation has occurred in your absence..."

Itami could only gaze at the frightened soldier's expression and assume the worst. She sighed heavily before leading the man into a nearby building and instructing him to inform her of what had happened while she was negotiating with the Joseon King.

---

While Itami was busy meeting with the Joseon King and the Ming Emperor to discuss an end to the current hostilities. Her soldiers were conducting anti-insurgency operations in a village outside Gwangju. As with many of the towns in the south, the commoners had taken up arms against their Japanese occupiers.

Germany supplied these arms through their trade routes with the Ming Empire, that had opened up after the Ming Prince Zhu Zhi returned to his homeland and successfully convinced his father to agree to Berengar's terms.

After nearly a year of intense combat operations in the Korean Peninsula, the soldiers of Itami's army were becoming filled with paranoia and angst. A year ago, these men were simple peasants, attending to rice fields in Japan.

Now, they were soldiers, armed with weapons they did not fully understand, and sent to a foreign land to fight against an unknown enemy for the sake of securing iron. Whether it was in the Taebaek mountains or the streets of the cities, these conscripts would randomly come under fire by weapons that rivaled their own.

These men were promised a quick war that would inevitably result in a total victory for the Japanese Empire. And yet now their Empress, a woman who had risen to her position by killing the previous divine Imperial Family, was negotiating with the Joseon King for partial control over the peninsula.

Thus, one might be somewhat understanding when they realized that the Japanese soldiers who were slugging through a random village were drunk from sake, high from opium, and paranoid beyond belief as they marched forward, wondering when and from where they would be opened fire upon.

A young Corporal's dilated eyes were darting back and forth, throughout the village, looking for any sign of potential attack. His heart was racing, perhaps from the opium he had just smoked, as he raised his rifle and clutched it tightly to his chest. As if it were his lifeline. While he panicked, his NCO, who was heavily intoxicated by an entire bottle worth of sake, laughed at him.

"Tanaka-dono, if you keep that up, you're going to get me anxious! The village has already been searched for contraband. We are merely here as a show of force! So quit freaking me out!"

The man named Tanaka did not sigh in relief, instead he continued to look across the village, wondering if what he was seeing was reality. Just as he was about to respond to his NCO, a loud thunder crackled in the air, causing him to raise his weapon and fire aimlessly into the village.

Despite there being no casualties inflicted upon the Japanese soldiers, they panicked from the sound of gunfire and instead fired randomly towards the nearby buildings, hoping to hit the unseen threat. Instead, the bullets shredded through the thatched homes, and killed any living thing that they made contact with.

Women, children, the elderly. The bullets did not discriminate, nor did the men who fired them. The Captain, who was a veteran of Itami's army, tried to rally his forces in a desperate attempt to maintain order, but it was too late. With the first shot fired, men like Tanaka, who were hopped up on some illicit substance, had no rhyme or reason. They simply shot at whatever moved.

While the Soldiers of the Japanese Army fired randomly into the village, the Joseon villagers began to flee their homes. However, the sudden exodus of people caused the Japanese soldiers to panic, and they quickly opened fire upon the unarmed civilians, massacring them on the spot.

Without knowing where the insurgents were, if there even were any, the Japanese soldiers lobbed their newly issued grenades which were modelled on the WW2 era Type 97 into the buildings, blasting anyone who remained behind into meat chunks, and lighting their homes ablaze.

It was only after this massacre was concluded, that the Japanese soldiers investigated the scene to find that there were no armed villagers to begin with, and instead the explosion that had started the aimless killing was the result of a little boy playing with a firecracker.

When Itami learned that her soldiers had slaughtered an entire village, down to the last woman and child for no valid reason, she would personally decapitate the one hundred men involved as a public display of her authority, an act which would only worsen the morale of the Japanese Army.

#### Chapter 832 Japanese Military Advancements

Another three months had passed since the day that Itami's soldiers had massacred an entire village. An incident which sparked an entire new wave of insurgency to appear within the southern portion of the Korean Peninsula.

Itami, perhaps fearing for her own personal security, had returned to the Japanese mainland, leaving the control of the forces in Korea under the command of her lead General Shiba Kiyohiko. Upon her return to Japan, she had instantly begun developing new technologies to increase her industrial output and her military capabilities.

By securing vast deposits of iron, coal, and other major industrial resources within the Taebaek mountains. Itami had immediately shifted her focus to building a powerful fleet of warships that was capable of contending with the Reich.

Though it would be several years before the first of these steel behemoths could set sail, she felt that these battleships which she modelled after the Nagato-class Dreadnoughts of her past life were more than capable of dealing with anything the Reich had built to conquer the seas, and she was right, assuming she could build enough of them to counter the Kriegsmarine's numbers.

She also began the production of Momi-class destroyers, Kongo-class Battlecruisers, and Kaichū VI (Ro-33 class) submarines. Just how many vessels she would be able to create in the coming years remained to be seen. However, unlike Berengar's current fleet of Great War era ships, Itami's would be modelled after those introduced during the inter-war period of her past life, giving her a slight technological advantage.

Naturally warships were more than just steel and turrets, and because of that Itami had established the blueprints for the development of radio, and other important sensors. She knew enough about their design to get the ball rolling, so that in two to three years' time when the hulls of her ships were completed, her scientists could rapidly convert the ships to accept radar, radio-communications, and sonar.

Other military innovations that she designed were new infantry weapons such as the Type 4 semi-automatic rifle. While only existing as a prototype design in her past life, Itami was an expert at mechanical engineering and quickly finished the weapon's design so that it was theoretically a reliably and durable piece of military hardware. She also designed a copy of the Type 99 Light Machine gun, the Type 92 Heavy machine gun, the Type 14 semi-automatic pistol, and the Type 100 submachine gun, making improvements where needed.

Aside from infantry weapons she had also ordered the manufacture of the Type 38 75mm Field Gun which she had previously designed, but halted production of due to a lack of resources, and even expanded upon her artillery by adding larger guns like the Type 92 10cm Cannon.

Though Itami could design the basic blueprints of these weapons, they would require thorough testing and improvements from her own staff of engineers. A process that could easily take a year or possibly even two before they could be manufactured in any functional capacity.

Itami selected these engineers for their intelligence and understanding of mechanics. From the moment she assumed power as the Empress, she had given them a crash course in basic education and engineering principles, and had in the years since expanded their knowledge based upon the information she knew from her past life.

Since gaining the iron and coal needed to fuel her growing industry, Itami had focused on the expansion of her armed forces, and equipped them with the latest uniforms, modelled after those issued to Japanese soldiers in WW2 of her past life.

The young Empress knew it would be some time before she secured the oil deposits necessary to create modern vehicles, and had outlined an invasion plan for her rapidly growing armed forces to take Hokkaido, the Ryukyu Kingdom, and Indonesia within the next two to three years.

With the introduction of modern weapons onto the battlefield by the German Empire, Itami no longer had the nerve to lead her troops into battle, and would instead focus all her efforts on administration, ensuring the proper growth of the Japanese Empire.

However, before she could reform the Empire into a more modern state, she needed to eliminate the traitors in her midst who had leaked her invasion to the Joseon King, and had alerted Berengar von Kufstein to her presence. Though she did not know who the men were that had betrayed her, she ordered her Kempeitai to conduct a secret investigation into their identities.

At the moment, Itami had been up for three days straight working on her technological innovations and government reforms. She had not showered and had barely eaten. It was only now that she had a moment to think for herself that she realized how badly she stunk. With this, she decided to visit her personal hot spring and wash away the filth that had accumulated on her otherwise pristine body.

After grabbing a proper change of clothes, Itami entered the hot spring, where she scrubbed herself clean before descending into the steaming pool of water. She could not help but exhale heavily in relaxation as she leaned back against the onsen's edge while gazing up at the stars above.

Now that the young woman was finally alone with her thoughts, she could not help but reflect on the disaster of the Korean invasion. She kept repeating a name over and over again in a slight whisper as she tried to understand the man she was fighting against.

"Berengar von Kufstein... Berengar von Kufstein.... Just who are you?"

The more Itami had time to think, the more she realized that an all-out war with the Reich was a losing battle. Though she could make the Germany army bleed, defeat was all but a certainty. If she was really dedicated to fighting with Germany, she would need to make them suffer to such a point that they would be forced to negotiate with her. If she wanted to achieve such an outcome, she needed to force them into a campaign similar to that which America fought in WW2.

Itami still did not know exactly how advanced Berengar's armies were, but she had a decent idea because of rumors that were floating across the Ming Dynasty about a faraway land with rigid airships and armored vehicles propelled without the need of steeds.

Zhu Zhi was so astonished by the Victory Day parade that he often boasted of what he had seen. Because of this, Itami had some semblance of an idea of where Berengar was at technologically speaking. In the words of Sun Tzu know your enemy, and know yourself, and you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.

Itami knew that She had started her reign later than in this world than her rival, and because of this, she was far behind him. However, was that truly the reason Berengar had beaten her in Korea? After all, aside from a few minor engagements with what she assumed was his special forces, most of her defeat came at the hands of the local insurgents armed with the same military capabilities that she herself had.

When she thought about this, Itami felt conflicted. Berengar had beaten her at her own game. When nobody else in this life had. Though she felt bitter towards her losses, she also felt something else, respect for the man she was fighting against. Just as she thought this, the doors to the hot spring sprung open, and two feminine figures revealed themselves. Itami was stunned when she saw the sight of her little sister, and her mother enter her bath, and she could not help but voice her disbelief.

"Momo-chan? Mibu-san-"

Before she could even question why they were in the capital, Momo jumped into the bath, and hugged Itami, her own substantial bust pressed against the pale bosom of Itami creating a sight that any man would enjoy to see, as the teenage girl smothered her elder sister with affection.

"Nee-sama! Are you surprised to see me?"

Itami Riyo was indeed surprised to see her little sister Itami Momo in her private, secluded hot spring. She could only glare at her mother, who gracefully sat down in the steaming pool of water next to her two naked daughters, and condemn the woman for violating her sanctuary unannounced.

"Mibu-san, you should have told me you were coming..."

The mature beauty glared back at her errant daughter before lecturing her on her choice of words.

"How many times do I have to tell you to call me Okaa-san? I brought you into this world, and yet you are always so cold to me! Besides, I did inform your servants that your sister and I were arriving in the capital, and they were the ones to lead us into the palace. How do you think I found you in here?"

Itami's brows raised when she heard this. Her own servants had not bothered to inform her of her family's arrival. Then again, she had given very explicit orders not to disturb her study. She only had herself to blame for this outcome. Perhaps it was a mother's intuition, but Mibu Saya could immediately tell something was up with her daughter, and she accurately guessed what it was based upon the girl's flushed cheeks.

"Were you perhaps thinking of a boy before we walked in? Go on and tell your mother all about it!"

Momo instantly looked over at her elder sister with an excited expression and asked her all about this mysterious man before Riyo could even deny her mother's claims.

"You found a man! I'm so happy for you! Who is he? Can I meet him?"

Itami could only growl in frustration as she tried to convince the two nosy women that there was not a man in her life.

"There is no man. I was just thinking about the enemy I currently face, and the defeat I suffered at his hands!"

However, these words did not convince Itami's mother in the slightest. Instead, a cunning smile formed on the woman's lips as she repeated the words Itami had always said to her.

"Aren't you the one who always said, and I quote, I refuse to settle down and marry until I find the man who is capable of defeating me in battle? So are you saying you finally met this man? Who is he? Oh, is he perhaps the Ming Prince Zhu Zhi? I hear he is quite the handsome man!"

Itami flushed red with embarrassment as she heard her own words repeated to her. She had quite often said such shameless words in the past to avoid marriage, and it was only now that she was realizing that Berengar had met her qualifications.

Even if it was only a proxy war, Berengar had still defeated her on the battlefield. Hell, the man had quite literally caused her to piss herself in fear. The moment she remembered that, Riyo grew even more embarrassed and covered her face before shouting at her mother and sister.

"Get out of here! I'm taking a bath!"

Mibu Saya immediately misunderstood Itami's words and nodded her head with a smile on her gorgeous face before guiding Momo out of the hot spring.

"I understand. You need some alone time while thinking about your man. We will be downstairs, come find us when you finish!"

Before Itami could even respond to her mother's shameless words, the woman had already absconded with her other daughter in tow. Leaving Itami as an embarrassed wreck as she hugged her knees to her chest and thought deeply about what her mother had said.

### Chapter 833 First Flight

Over the past year since the Victory Day Celebration was held, Berengar was busy enjoying his brief Pax Germania. An era of peace and prosperity for the reich the likes of which it had never seen before.

Immediately upon finishing his newest weapon designs, Berengar got to work on revolutionizing the economy. With advancements in synthetic materials, Berengar could now make a polymer based paper-like currency to replace the use of coins. The advantages of this was that it was almost impossible for criminals to counterfeit.

Since the Thaler was the most common currency used in the Reich, Berengar had decided to print banknotes based on its value. One of the new Gold Marks, which was named as such to represent the gold standard, was worth one hundred pfennigs. It could be printed in values of one, five, ten, twenty, fifty, and one hundred. One hundred marks being the equivalent of the previously issued Gulden coin.

As for the pfennigs, they had long since come in a variety of values such as one, five, ten, twenty-five, and fifty. So there was no need to mint new coins. As for the thaler and gulden coins, they were still a valid form of currency, worth as much as they were before the introduction of paper currency. However, the convenience of having banknotes caused the people to rapidly exchange their coins for bills.

In these nine months, electricity became more common across the reich. With entire cities undergoing modernization. The increase in demand for electricity caused the construction of hydroelectric power plants across the fatherland.

The onset of the electrical era also spurred new inventions by German scientists and engineers, such as the refrigerator, the refrigerated truck, and the refrigerated train car. Allowing for the transfer of meat and produce across the Reich without fear of spoilage.

Radios became more common, as did cameras. With pictures being regularly taken across the reich by enthusiasts, as well as journalists. Not a day went by without a multitude of pictures on the paper.

Because of this, companies had been working on ways to improve cameras, and they had succeeded in their endeavors. No longer were there the old box cameras that were used in the past. In fact, the newest portable camera was similar to the Leica model one from Berengar's previous life.

Linde's agents loved this device, as the rest of the world was entirely unaware of what a camera was, and they could easily snap pictures of their operations. Allowing for a much greater pool of intelligence to be gathered.

These were just some of many of the advancements in German technology, bringing the Reich closer and closer to the interwar period of Berengar's past life. As the reich entered a new era, so too did its military.

The German Army was redesigned from the ground up to support the new mechanized vehicles, which became more common among the ranks with each passing day. Because of this, Brigade Combat Teams had become the primary deployable unit of the German Army.

As for the Border Guard, it was removed from the responsibility of the Department of Defense and transitioned into a law enforcement agency. Those who wished to still serve in the military were transferred to the active duty component of the Army. Whereas the rest were instructed in their responsibilities as peacekeeping officers.

The Coast Guard was also transitioned into a law enforcement agency, where it no longer sailed on powerful armored frigates, but instead made use of fast attack craft modelled after the US Navy's PT boats from the second world war of Berengar's past life.

These ships were designed to survey the coasts and intercept any unlawful activities at the sea. They could also launch torpedos in the event of a hostile naval vessel approaching the German territorial waters. Though such an event was unlikely.

As for the Navy, it was undergoing rapid modernization. The old armored frigates were being retrofitted and sold off to the Ming Dynasty, all while being replaced with battleships, battlecruisers, and destroyers.

By now the number of Destroyers, and U-boats the German Navy had were in the dozens. It took roughly six months for these vessels to be completed, and Germany had many shipyards. Speaking of which, the number of shipyards had nearly doubled in recent days, as more and more of them finished construction around the reich.

Berengar's plan was to focus on the construction of carriers, to be supported by carrier strike groups. Each carrier strike group would consist of one carrier, one battleship, two battlecruisers, ten destroyers, and two u-boats.

Thus, out of his currently active thirty active shipyards, four were constructing carriers, four were constructing battleships, eight were constructing battlecruisers, five were constructing destroyers, eight were constructing u-boats, and one was constructing fast attack craft. Half of these shipyards had already been in the production of the larger vessels for nearly a year, and the other half were just starting.

The reason so many shipyards were dedicated to the larger vessels was because they took between two to three years to build. With five dedicated shipyards to destroyers and subs, Germany could construct between 10-15 destroyers and an equal amount of subs in the time it took to build one carrier, battleship, or battlecruiser.



Finally, there was the Luftwaffe, which was not yet officially established. However, at the moment, Berengar was sitting on an airfield in the middle of Austria. This base had been constructed to test the prototypes of the numerous aircraft Berengar had designed. Through a year's worth of collaboration with his engineers, they had finally developed the first functional prototype.

Naturally, as the man who never stopped chasing glory, Berengar had to be remembered as the first man to fly in this world. Because of this, he was dressed in a flight suit modelled after those issued to Luftwaffe Pilots in the second world war of his past life. Over this flight suit was a black leather jacket. He wore a black leather skullcap which integrated his communications, as well as an oxygen mask which was connected to the vehicle.

Berengar had never flown a plane before, even in his past life, and had gone through minimal training for this endeavor. I mean, what training could you really do without functional aircraft and advanced simulations? Because of this, he wore the ring of sol, in case he crash landed, which was a likely possibility. He could hear the voice that belonged to one of his generals over the comms as the man expressed deep worry over the Kaiser's safety.

"My Kaiser, I think this is a really bad idea. We have no idea if this thing will even work. You could fall straight out of the sky for all we know! You should really delegate this responsibility to someone else!"

Berengar merely chuckled and turned off his comms as he waved to the people in the crowd who had gathered to witness this monumental occasion. After doing so, he started the engine of his prototype trainer aircraft modelled after the Arado Ar 96 and steered it onto the runway. Among the many people in the crowd, Hans and Linde were standing there, waiting anxiously as they watched the head of their household, the Emperor of Germany, do something incredibly dangerous and stupid.

Before long, the trainer plane picked up speed, and with a little help from Berengar, it lifted into the air. The moment it did so, the people gathered below stopped breathing for a second, in fear that the plane might fall out of the sky. Yet it did not. It continued to soar high above, as Berengar steered the plane to make a lap around the airfield.

Adrenaline and endorphins flowed through his veins in a way that mimicked that which he felt on the front lines of war. No, perhaps it was an even greater high. Berengar did not know the answer to that, but what he did know was that he could no longer contain his excitement. He switched the comms back on and hollered to the ground control in a recording that would go down in history.

"God in heaven, I am so hard right now!"

Berengar was not thinking about his choice of words, and just shouted the first thing that came to mind. However, his words caused the comm operators on the ground to break out into laughter. As for the sight of the plane flying high in the sky, a journalist who was invited to the event to take pictures captured it into the archives of history.

Berengar flew a victory lap around the airfield before touching down. After shutting down the engine, he crawled out of the cockpit to monumental applause. Linde, who was in the crowd with her son, immediately rushed over to Berengar and jumped into his embrace, while passionately kissing him in front of the entire audience.

The redheaded beauty had nearly died of fright, watching her idiot of a husband take off into the air in such a death trap. Thus, the moment after she kissed her man, she scolded him severely for his actions.

"You dummy! Do you have any idea how worried I was? Promise me you will never do anything so foolish ever again!"

Berengar only chuckled and petted the woman's silky strawberry blonde hair with a confident grin on his face. The sight of Linde glomping him after he emerged from the cockpit was forever recorded in history thanks to the quick hands of the journalist, who took a shot of the heartwarming scene.

Berengar had made the first successful flight in human history, an achievement that was just one of many in his long life of accomplishment. With the proof that these planes could fly, as well as a working prototype, the first generation of pilots could now be instructed and trained for the upcoming war with Japan. Berengar had planned to greatly expand the line of aircraft in the upcoming years to cover all aspects of aerial warfare. For now, he would return home and celebrate with his family.

#### Chapter 834 Aerial-Warfare Academy

Roughly a year and five months had passed since the first Victory Day Celebration had taken place. At the young age of ten, Prince Hans von Kufstein had graduated from High School and despite his mother's many concerns he immediately enrolled in the Military Academy. However, this was not the War Academy in Vienna, which housed the many potential officers of the Army.

Instead, this was the newly established Aerial-Warfare Academy in Kufstein. Five months ago, Hans' father, Kaiser Berengar von Kufstein, had taken part in the first manned flight of a heavier-than-air object. It was a monumental achievement for the Reich, and what followed afterward was the establishment of the Luftwaffe.

Naturally, with a new branch of service dedicated to aerial-warfare, there needed to be a specialty university for cadets to learn the necessary skills at. Thus, it was established in Kufstein, where the first major Air Base of the Reich was located. Young men from around the country who had just finished high school, and were intending on a military career, all gathered at this university to learn the new style of warfare.

After Berengar had introduced the rigid airship during the first victory day celebration, the people of Germany became obsessed with flight. Even more so after the Kaiser flew with the first prototype plane. However, the aerial-warfare academy was not just going to take in every kid who wanted to learn how to fly. Nor was everyone who entered going to be a pilot. As a military branch, there were plenty of positions to be had, and most of these cadets would never earn their wings.

Hans currently sat in his seat, in a specialty tailored cadet uniform. It was loosely modelled after those that would be worn by the Luftwaffe in the coming years. Most of the members of his class were between the ages of seventeen and nineteen, and naturally, as a military academy, it was filled with young men.

However, as a departure from standard protocol, the German military had, for the first time, opened its ranks to women. In a bid to get more men into combat positions, Berengar had allowed women entry into the three military academies so that they could fulfill roles in administration and medicine.

One of these girls was in his class, and she immediately caught Hans's interest. The young woman had long blonde hair which flowed from her hair like a river of gold. In many ways, this girl was remarkably similar to the boy's aunt in terms of appearance. In fact, at first glance, Hans thought this woman was indeed Henrietta.

Upon further inspection, the woman had deep sapphire eyes, like Berengar and Adela. In fact, the more Hans looked at her, the more he thought she resembled his father, as if she were a gender bent version of the man. The notable exception being that she lacked an eyepatch.

Despite this uncanny resemblance to both Berengar and Henrietta, or perhaps because of it, she was a beauty among beauties, and because of this, the men of the class had gathered around her, attempting to woo the young woman over with their charm. Despite acting friendly, it was clear from the girl's eyes that she had no interest in any of the guys who approached her.

It was only after the instructor came to the head of the class did the men disperse and jump to attention. Causing the beautiful blonde girl to sigh in relief. Hans was likewise at attention, where the instructor quickly followed up with the words "At ease" after staring at the young boy in the cadet uniform for several seconds. Obviously, he was curious why such a young child was among the ranks of his cadets and quickly asked Hans to introduce himself.

"You there, boy, introduce yourself, and explain the reason why a child such as yourself is in my class!"

The instructor had not been informed that Hans was in his class, nor that a boy as young as him would be. He did not immediately recognize the Prince, which was not at all unusual as outside of the Cadet Corps, Hans mostly spent time in the palace with his family and fiancées. This did not surprise Hans, and he quickly announced his identity.

"Hans von Kufstein, I have already graduated from High School and have elected to spend my years of higher learning here at the aerial-warfare academy. Is that a problem, sir?"

The moment the words "von Kufstein" escaped the boy's lips, the entire class stared at him in awe. None of them expected to be in the same class as a member of the imperial family. Primarily because Berengar's kids were all so young, but the boy had clearly stated he had already graduated from high school, and he had obviously been admitted into the aerial-warfare academy.

The instructor immediately began sweating bullets upon realizing that an Imperial Prince was a member of his class. Having one of the young Princesses of Bavaria present in his class was shocking enough, but to have the Imperial Prince, the boy who most people suspected would one day succeed his father, in his class, the honor was simply too much. He immediately broke his strict facade as he spoke to Hans as if he was his superior.

"My apologies your highness, I was not alerted that you would be in my class."F

Hans cocked a brow when he heard this response before politely reminding the instructor of his duties.

"Sir, might I remind you that in section two, paragraph four of the student handbook, it clearly states: All cadets are to be treated as equals, regardless of noble heritage. Therefore it is of my opinion that it is simply unacceptable for you to refer to me by my royal title. Please refer to me by my cadet rank!"

Anne von Wittelsbach immediately gazed over at Hans with curiosity in her sapphire eyes as she heard him reject the preferred treatment. She had never thought the Kaiser's son of all people would consider himself just another cadet.

This unusual behavior caught the girl's interest. As she was certain that any other man in this room would need no excuse to flaunt their privilege, as many of them had done when they introduced themselves to her.

Anne was sixteen years of age this year, and had graduated early from high school just like Hans had. Despite her father's resistance, Anne had enrolled in the aerial-warfare academy. What were her reasons for doing so? To put it simply, her reason for joining the military was so that she could avoid an unfavorable marriage.

Not long after the victory day celebration, where she rejected the Scottish Prince's advances, Anne found herself engaged to the third Prince of Saxony. There was just one major problem with that: the man was a morbidly obese glutton, and a sadistic asshole. If rumors were to be believed, the third Prince of Saxony treated his wives rather cruelly, and from her few encounters with him, Anne was convinced they were true.

So long as she was in a military academy and saw active service in the armed forces, she had the right to refuse any potential marriage candidates that her family might set her up with. This was a stipulation acted into law for a single purpose, to install an additional sense of loyalty into Berengar's officers.

In other words, "So long as you are part of my armed forces, you are not beholden to the whims and wishes of your family, no matter how powerful they might be." Thus, there were many young men who sought to enter a military academy in the hopes of avoiding an unfavorable betrothal. Anne just so happened to be a woman with the same goal.

However, after witnessing Hans and his respectable behavior, Anne immediately reconsidered her previous plans. Though she knew that the boy had four fiancées, Hans was allowed up to five wives, and despite his young age, he was certainly a better choice than that fat bastard.

She would rather buy herself a permanent escape from her father's wishes, then temporary freedom. After all, the moment she concluded her mandatory military service after graduation, her father could easily pull the strings to have her discharged.

Thus, after some careful thought, the girl shot Hans a smile and a wink, an action which immediately drew the ire of the rest of the men in the class. Hans had a stoic facade as he saw the beautiful Bavarian princess show her interest. However, internally, his heart was racing. It was only now that he realized the same rules that applied to Anne applied to him as well.

Ingrid had been a massive pain in the ass to the boy ever since she first arrived in Kufstein. Though she was beautiful and had an ideal body. The woman was constantly feuding with his other fiancées. Causing Hans nothing but headaches over the past year and a half.

If he really desired, Hans could use his military service as a means to marry his other three girls when he came of age, but refuse the engagement to Ingrid. All while marrying another two women of his choice.

Of course, he could simply tell either his father or his mother that he was unhappy with Ingrid, and they would easily void the betrothal. However, Hans did not know this, and was deeply afraid of disappointing his father. Because of that, he had soldiered through the last year and a half to the best of his ability.

It was with this in mind that Hans eventually smiled back at Anne and waved. Thinking that perhaps he should get to know such a beautiful young woman, in case he could not get rid of Ingrid's strict monogamous notions that fueled her incessant bitching. Thus, Hans's first day at the aerial warfare academy had gone quite well.