

Steel 151

Chapter 151: Marvels of Industry II

After showing the Byzantine noblemen and merchants the armory, Berengar quickly walked into the next area of the industrial sector which housed the arms factory; there were two of such facilities in Kufstein, much like the armories they had been split into production for local forces, and production of arms for export. The export arms factory was also manned by many workers, who utilized trip hammers and other water-powered machinery to pound the steel ingots into the shapes of swords, spears, war hammers, polearms, arrowheads, etc.

Arethas witnessed the final process of creating a halberd in the hands of one of the workers, it was stacked neatly onto a pallet filled with hundreds of other halberds which would later be inspected for quality control, and only after the shipment was fully inspected, and tested would they be shipped out to their customers. Berengar knew the importance of quality control, and as such, he did his best to maintain the quality of his equipment. Each piece of equipment approved for export was given a proof mark shaped like the letter K, symbolizing that it had been manufactured and received approval for shipment within the factories of Kufstein. This process, of course, was also used on the equipment for his own forces, but that was not important at the moment. Berengar began to introduce the facility to the merchants as if he was a standard tour guide who had repeated this phrase a hundred times before.

"This is the arms factory used to produce weapons from the steel manufactured in the city. Each piece of equipment, much like the armor in our armories, is inspected for quality before it is shipped out to our customers. If it fails to meet our standards, it is recycled into the steel plants and manufactured into something new. I have stringent guidelines about quality control to ensure that each piece of equipment manufactured in our factories is truly fit for the stresses of battle."

The idea of strict quality control was something Bernegar had taken from his previous life and was not generally used in this timeline, at least not to the degree to which he had implemented it. Seeing such a massive stockpile of weapons being loaded onto wooden pallets, the byzantine merchants and noblemen were practically salivating at sight. They all wanted to get their

hands on the arms in front of them, where they could be sold in the Empire for a large profit or used to outfit their own troops.

Berengar had yet to show the actual warehouse which housed his steel surplus, but he had already captured the interests of the men from the East. From the looks in their eyes, he could tell they would spread this news across the Empire, and Berengar would gain various new customers. Arethas, in particular, could not wait to return home and inform the department in charge of procuring equipment for the army about such a massive opportunity. After all, the Byzantine Empire was a highly complex imperial bureaucracy; a general could not just outfit his troops with new equipment out of nowhere; it first had to be approved by the bureaucrats in charge of logistics.

After showing off the armory and arms factory, Berengar finally dragged the men over to the warehouse which housed the steel surplus; after opening it up and displaying the full might of his industrial capacity, the merchants and noblemen were absolutely shocked. The warehouse was roughly 5,000 sq feet and contained piles of steel ingots stacked to the roof. The amount of steel in this facility was in the thousands of tons. This was the surplus that had been gathered after months of production from the Bessemer converters.

Seeing the sight before him, Arethas' eyes nearly fell out of his sockets; his jaw dropped to the point where it nearly unhinged itself. He could not fathom so much steel in one place. Steel was a scarce commodity, and yet Berengar had produced such a vast quantity of it. He could not understand why so much steel was needed. After all, the idea of using steel in structures was not something that had been invented outside of Berengar's domain. The steel ingots themselves were sorted into different areas based upon their composition and purpose. Structural steel, armor steel, weapon steels, tool steels, and galvanized steel ingots were properly organized in their own sections. If one were not familiar with this organization, one would think that all the steel was the same.

After confirming that they were looking at reality, the Byzantine merchants and noblemen recovered their senses and instantly began thinking about taking advantage of this. The merchants, in particular, wanted to resale this steel for an exorbitant price and instantly began making offers to Berengar. One fat and bald man, in particular, approached Berengar with a smile on his face as if the young Count was his benefactor.

"Count Berengar, what would it take for me to acquire a small amount of this steel to bring back with me to the Empire?"

Seeing the way the man was looking at him made Berengar uncomfortable. However, he knew the value of the steel and the man's plans. As such, he made a figure he felt was appropriate.

"I will accept one pound of silver for every ton of steel you wish to buy."

This number was quite high, considering 150 lbs of iron could be sold in England for 4 shillings, each shilling being roughly 1/20 a pound of silver. However, this was not iron but readily manufactured steel, and Berengar held a monopoly on it. There was nowhere else in the world the man would be able to get such a vast quantity of steel. For reference, in the modern world from Berengar's past life, one ton of steel ingots was worth anywhere between 1,000 to 1,500 US Dollars, whereas one Avoirdupois Pound of silver was worth roughly 345 US Dollars. However, silver was much scarcer in this time period, and as such, its inherent worth was much higher than 21st Century America, but then again, so was steel.

The smiling face of the fat merchant quickly receded to a scowl as he heard Berengar's offer. It was quite a large sum of money, but the more he thought about it, the more he realized he could charge an even greater price when he resold it, as for the time being, he would be one of the few men capable of bringing such a vast quantity of steel back to the Empire. However, the man still tried to negotiate the price with Berengar.

"How about 1/2 a pound of silver?"

However, Berengar shook his head in refusal and clarified his position

"One pound of silver for one ton of steel. That is my offer."

Everyone in the room knew that Berengar had a monopoly on such a high quantity of steel, and he could dictate the price as he pleased, even if these merchants were unwilling to pay the price, someone would, and as such, Berengar took full advantage of that to pressure these merchants. Eventually, they gritted their teeth and bought a large steel supply to bring back to the Empire. Of course, they did not have such a vast quantity of silver on them,

and as such, they would have to go back to the Empire, get the silver, and then return to Kufstein to complete the transaction. However, such a trip was worth it when the profit they could make from the steel was massive.

After concluding the initial transaction, Berengar completed the tour of his industrial district and captured the interests of the Byzantine merchants and noblemen; they had no idea how Berengar had managed to accomplish it as he kept them away from the Bessemer converters. Still, he had such a large stockpile of steel. If they were his neighbors, they would be tempted to invade. However, due to the distance between the Empire and Tyrol, it was not something they could easily do. As such, the Byzantines spent some time in Tyrol getting accustomed to Berengar before returning to the Empire, though they would be back shortly with plenty of silver to trade for Berengar's steel.

Berengar, on the other hand, was rather happy about the deals he had made; he had secured a new market, and with it, another fortune. For now, he went back to preparing his armies for the upcoming war with the Teutonic Order, as well as overseeing the construction of his star fortresses and monuments. The work of a Tyrant was never complete.

Chapter 152: Show Him No Mercy!

Nearly two months had passed since Berengar concluded his business with the Byzantines, and since then, another shipment of silk had entered Kufstein as promised. During this time period, the other merchants eager to get their hands on some of Berengar's steel had made their round trip with enough silver to make Berengar an even more wealthy man. However, the most important part of what had happened during this time was the Teutonic Order's progress by crossing through Bavaria. They would soon reach the Bavarian alps, where they would enter into Tyrol, and Berengar intended to lay a trap for them within the narrow passages of the mighty mountain range.

Berengar was once more tasked with the responsibility to go to war; however, this time, it would be a far shorter campaign. At the moment, he was dressed in his exquisite armor, which had once more changed to fit battle conditions. He wore a three quarter's blackened steel plate harness; however, under the armor was a backend steel mail hauberk with brass rings on the bottom layers of the sleeves; over his hands were an exquisite pair of 16th-century style plate gauntlets whose fingers were segmented and were blackened while sharing the elegant gold pattern that was on his armor. Over his cuirass, he

wore a matching gold sash and a black sword belt with gold fittings that contained his majestic heavy cavalry saber.

He no longer wore the signature waffenrock in the past, and his armored codpiece was on full display over his black and gold Landschneckt style trousers. The armored codpiece matched the pattern on the rest of his armor. For footwear, he wore a pair of cavalry boots that folded at his knees; as for his helmet, he had switched from the skullcap and the feathered cap to a more traditional German-style burgonet, which had three rims atop its skull instead of the usual one. Of course, it was embellished with the same intricate gold pattern on the rest of his armor.

Seeing her lover geared up for war again, Linde could not help but frown; her strawberry blonde hair was now much longer and overflowed past her shoulders, her bangs were straight, and a strand of her hair was tied over the back of her long red-gold curtain. If anything, with this new hairstyle, she was even more beautiful than before. She held the baby Hans in her hands as she pouted at Berengar, who was leaving her so quickly after returning from the war in Tyrol.

Berengar closed the distance between her and himself and brought her into his metallic embrace before kissing her passionately; after releasing his grasp, Linde spoke the words in her heart.

"Show him no mercy!"

Berengar nodded with a serious expression on his face; he had already made the mistake of allowing Lambert to live, which had brought serious consequences. An army of over 30,000 men was at his doorstep, with his scoundrel of a little brother at its head. Though he had roughly half the amount of men, he would be riding into battle to meet Lambert and end this sibling rivalry once and for all.

After bidding farewell to his lover and child, Berengar walked out into his Castle's courtyard, where he mounted his mighty steed Erwin and prepared to meet up with his army, which was already assembled within the city gates of Kufstein. After meeting up with his army at the rallying point, Berengar noticed the magnificence of his army. Many of the veterans had been recalled from their positions as garrisons and replaced with the recruits. After all, having

veterans in his army to maintain order and discipline was crucial to victory, especially against an army as large as Lambert's.

Standing before Berengar were roughly 15,000 men, 10,000 of which were infantry, all clad in the brilliant display of black, gold, and white attire, with blackened steel half-plate armor and burgonets. As for the NCOs, their armor was lined with a simple brass trimming, and the Officers had a more embellished brass trimming on their armor which allowed his ranks to identify the men in charge and follow their orders quickly. Roughly half of the infantry were equipped with the 1417/18 Rifled Musket; the others still used the standard 1417 Land Pattern Musket, smoothbore. As for the remaining 5,000 men, it was a mix of Cuirassiers and Artillery.

When compared to the army of Lambert's, which, aside from 10,000 men, was filled with mere peasant levies, Berengar's forces were far more impressive. With this sight, Berengar began to get the feeling that his vision for a grand army that would put Napoleon's elite forces to shame was beginning to take shape.

After arriving at the head of the formation, Berengar gave the order to his men, who were waiting patiently.

"Forward March!"

with that declared, Berengar's army was once more on the march to war. The citizens of Kufstein gathered on both sides of the marching army to show their support, fully realizing that many of these young men would not be returning. As such, flowers were laid at the army's feet that began to march towards the Bavarian Alps.

Riding alongside Berengar was his Field Marshal Eckhard von Hallstatt; he was the one who devised the plan to meet the Teutonic Army in the mountains and ambush them. With the superior range and the treacherous terrain, Berengar and his forces would be able to take full advantage of the situation and inflict mass casualties on the enemy before they were able to clash with his forces in melee combat. The more enemies that could be killed at the range, the better. Berengar, of course, was still apprehensive about the plan considering how vastly outnumbered they were; as such, he voiced his concerns to Eckhard.

"Are you sure about this? If they enter through a different region, we will be leaving our flanks open."

Eckhard put on a solemn expression as he assured Berengar of his plan's success.

"Munich has fallen into the hands of Duke Otto; unless he wants to clash with the Austrian armies, Lambert will have to circumvent them; they will go through Swabia, specifically through Oberstdorf, to reach Tyrol. Rest assured, our scouts have already reported seeing them in the area. When they enter the mountains, we will be lying in wait for them; there will be no escape."

Hearing how confident Eckhard was, Berengar let out a sigh of relief. Despite being a decent strategist and tactician himself, Eckhard was the true prodigy in the art of war, and if the Field Marshal was so certain of this battle's outcome, then Berengar had nothing to fear. As such, the young Count continued on his journey. With this, Berengar and his army would soon meet the Teutonic Army in brutal conflict; ever since Berengar opted to spare Lambert's life, he knew the decision would come back to bite him in the rear, and the chickens have finally come home to roost. Only blood could resolve this sibling conflict that had been brewing for so long.

Chapter 153: Ambushing the Teutonic Order

After marching for a few days, Berengar and his Army arrived at the passage in Oberstdorf that led into Tyrol. Due to the ongoing war in Germany, specifically with the Austrian conquest of Bavaria, the Teutonic Knights were forced to take a narrow and more treacherous path on the western region of Bavaria, which was part of the proud Duchy of Swabia. As Berengar entered the mountainous path with a relatively narrow ravine, he ordered his troops to set up their artillery higher than the pass below.

Hiding among the treeline of the mountains side Berengar's troops lay in wait, ready to ambush Lambert's forces. They had received information from their scouts that Lambert and his forces would be walking into the trap they had set within a matter of hours. As such, Berengar kept careful watch over the mountain pass where his troops had set themselves up in a position to trap Lambert and his armies.

There would be no escape from the encirclement they had set up, and Berengar could not forgive Lambert for the transgressions he had made against him. Berengar had spared Lambert's life at the behest of his mother and given him a chance to redeem himself. However, Lambert did not appreciate his mercy and decided to spit in his face by marching an army into Berengar's lands. This could not be tolerated. There would be no mercy shown to the enemy today.

Before long, Berengar could hear the march of an army of Teutonic soldiers singing their Catholic Hymns. The white banners with the infamous black cross of the Teutonic Order were waving in the background as they marched through the narrow pass. Seeing the enemy before them, Berengar's troops prepared their rifles as they hid behind the tall trees, using them as cover. Only when the enemy was fully trapped in the encirclement did Berengar's troops begin to fire. The distance between Berengar's armies and Lambert's were a few hundred meters, easy enough for the thousands of rifled musketeers to rain fire down on the unsuspecting Teutonic Order. The critical targets were the knights and men at arms under Lambert's command, so the initial volley was centered on the well-armored forces who would prove more difficult to kill in melee combat.

Lambert, who was riding at the head of the army, was shocked when he heard the explosive gunfire echo into the air; instantly, thousands of musket shots were fired, causing chaos, death, and destruction upon his ranks. Lambert was completely caught in a crossfire by both sides of the mountains; the effect of the musket balls tearing through his knights and men at arms was devastating. Though Lambert was unharmed, his horse was hit by one of the minie balls and tumbled to the ground.

By the time Lambert had recovered from his position on the ground, the second wave of musket shots had fired off, shredding his armies once more. Realizing that these were the weapons of Berengar and that he had walked right into his brother's trap, Lambert boldly declared his armies to charge to the treeline where the enemy was hiding. As soon as the Teutonic Order made their way to the tree line, they began to be battered by the dozens of cannons placed in the mountains above, firing on the foothills below with their explosive shells. Yet Lambert paid no heed to them and instead rallied his forces.

"Into the forest! They would never fire upon their own lines!"

As such, the tens of thousands of levies were pushed forward by the remaining members of the Teutonic Order, who were not slaughtered in the initial volley. Despite being well equipped with rifled muskets, 300+ meter targets were still a difficulty for many of the soldiers equipped with such technology, and many of the projectiles missed their mark. As such, there were still thousands of heavily armed Teutonic soldiers marching into the forest to engage Berengar's forces in melee combat. Berengar had yet to deploy the Cavalry. Instead, they would act as the units that would encircle Lambert's forces if they attempted to flee the ravine; as such, he calmly sat atop Erwin's saddle and waited for the battle to turn interesting.

After suffering thousands of casualties in the initial fighting, Lambert remained undeterred, he had over 30,000 men at his back, and it became quickly apparent that Berengar had at most 10,000 men under his command, if he could close the distance, he would win by the sheer volume of numbers, or so he hoped. As such, Lambert quickly advanced towards the enemy, unafraid of the oncoming projectiles as he led his troops into battle. Whether he was simply lucky or blessed by God, Lambert arrived at the enemy lines in the forests screaming at the top of his lungs the battle cry of so many crusaders.

"God wills it!"

However, what he was met with was the battle cry of Berengar's soldiers as they rushed towards him and his armies with bayonets affixed.

"God with us!"

The two chants of the armies perfectly contrasted their worldview as a grand melee began to unfold. Despite Lambert's overwhelming numbers, Berengar's forces had completely encircled them and began to push them back into the ravine. After all, many of Lambert's army were forcefully conscripted levies, and hundreds if not thousands of them had already broken ranks the moment they came under fire. They were simple peasants, and seeing such death and destruction, which resulted from thunderous echoes, they could not help but fear they were being punished by God's wrath and thus fled for their lives.

Despite the fleeing levies, many of them remained, and as such, Berengar's forces were still greatly outnumbered. Thus the two armies clashed against one another in a valley between the Bavarian Alps on the border of Austria. The blood and chaos that followed would prove to be an inspiration for the future artists of this world. The only men who remained calm during this sea of bloodshed were Berengar and Eckhard, who gazed upon the battle from afar, watching the Teutonic Order play right into their hands.

Chapter 154: My Dear Brother

As the Teutonic Order and Berengar's Army clashed in the field below, Berengar gazed upon the bloody scene with a smirk. Everything was going according to plan. Berengar investigated the melee below through a spyglass, desperately searching for Lambert's location, unfortunately for him, Lambert was clad in a full set of plate armor, and his great bascinet's visor was down; as such, it was not easy to spot him in the chaotic scene.

Lambert, on the other hand, was currently engaging in combat against one of Berengar's infantrymen; as the soldier thrust his bayonet at Lambert's direct, the boy swiftly dodged the strike and lunged with his longsword piercing through the gap in the man's helmet and into his eyes, killing him on the spot. Lambert had trained his whole life in the art of combat, and though bayonet training was much simpler than the sword against a true master, it was too easy to cut down Berengar's professional army.

The surviving knights of the order's army surrounded Lambert, and they engaged in brutal combat with Berengar's soldiers. When grouped together, they made an easy target for the grenadiers, one of which lobbed a grenade into the mix that detonated shortly after. Shredding the nearby knights and forcing the others to redirect their efforts into protecting their flanks. Lambert was too busy in combat to realize that the explosive blast had torn the visor of his helmet, revealing his face, which was spotted from afar by Berengar and his spyglass. A wicked grin appeared on Berengar's face as he spotted Lambert from a great distance.

"There you are, little brother! It is time to pay for your sins!"

After putting away his spyglass, Berengar unsheathed his heavy cavalry sword and pulled out one of the pistols from his saddle. Before declaring to his cavalry forces in a loud shout.

"God with us!"

The infamous battle cry was the signal for the charge, as such thousands of cuirassiers began to descend on the encircled Teutonic order from both sides of the ravine. Before long, a new wave of gunfire was unleashed by the pistols in their hands as they charged into the fray. The stray bullets went in many directions; due to the chaotic situation, it was unknown whether or not any of Berengar's forces were injured or killed by friendly fire. However, the attack was effective in breaking open a path into the melee.

After crashing into the wall of steel, which was the Teutonic Order's forces, the cavalry began to cut their way through the massive horde of enemies. Berengar was leading his forces straight to Lambert, who was busy fighting off the ranks of Berengar's grenadiers, who were a far more elite group of soldiers than the standard line infantry, and as such, presented a greater challenge for him and his knights.

However, Before Berengar could reach Lambert, the chaos of battle affected his trajectory. While he was rushing towards his brother on horseback, a lucky spear thrust through the gaps in Erwin's armor and pierced itself into the horse's hide, gravely injuring the mighty beast. Berengar fell to the ground amidst the chaos and found himself surrounded by the spearman, where he quickly deflected the oncoming blow into his breastplate, which he knew would prevent its advance, and used this time to stab the 38-inch blade of his Damascus steel sword into the crusader's eye socket.

Berengar certainly had a reach advantage as his single-handed sword was greater in blade length than most longswords; as such, he adeptly moved from his position after killing the man and slashed into the poorly guarded torso of a levy who got in his path. Seeing the target of his ire was only a few yards in front of him, Berengar shouted out above the chaotic sounds of battle in a voice so loud it would even garner Lambert's attention whose longsword was currently bound with the bayonet of a grenadier.

"Lambert! I've come for your head!"

Noticing the voice of his brother taunting him in the distance, Lambert quickly unbound from the Grenadier's bayonet and stuck his blade through the man's

face before gazing over at Berengar, who stood a few yards away next to his dead horse.

Lambert instantly charged at his older brother while calling out to him

"Today, you will die by my blade Berengar! Why could you not just die peacefully in your sleep from the poison? Instead, you have taken everything from me!"

Berengar grinned wickedly as he clashed with Lambert's longsword; what the boy said was true, Berengar had taken everything from him, but in his eyes, it was the price to pay for plotting against him so many times. As such, he felt no guilt for his actions. Lambert quickly slashed at Berengar, which the garishly outfitted Count parried; Berengar counter-attacked with a lunge which Lambert swiftly dodged. Finally, the lessons of swordsmanship in which Berengar had so painstakingly engaged in every day for the last year were beginning to show their effects.

As the battle waged around these two commanders, Lambert and Berengar danced with their swords. However, after a while, it soon became apparent that despite the advantages Berengar's sword had over a traditional longsword, he was not nearly skilled enough to keep up with Lambert. Eventually, a vertical slash passed through Berengar's defense, and right under the protection of his Burgonet grazing past his right eye, cutting through the soft tissue and spilling his blood on the ground. Berengar reeled in pain as the sting of the cut electrified his brain.

Despite losing his vision in his dominant eye, Berengar desperately tried to raise his sword in defense. Instead, the sword was quickly disarmed from his hand, and he was kicked by Lambert's steel-clad foot onto the ground, lying against the corpse of his once-proud destrier.

"Sixteen years! Sixteen years I have had to watch you make a fool of yourself and our family. The sheer damage you did to the von Kufstein name throughout your life through your childish fits of anger and indolent behavior was enough to set back our family's prestige by generations! Can you honestly blame me for wanting to kill you and take your position! I would never have imagined that I would have actually succeeded on my first attempt and invite a demon into our midst."

Hearing the last few words of Lambert's monologue made Berengar break out in uncontrolled laughter; despite losing sight in his right eye and bleeding profusely from the wound, Berengar could not contain himself. Seeing his older brother seemingly lose his sanity in the moment before his death, Lambert instinctively lowered his defenses and questioned Berengar for his odd behavior.

"What is so funny?"

Berengar stopped laughing and glared at Lambert like a demon mocking a mortal for being foolish enough to believe that they had cornered him. As his lips curled up into a sinister sneer, Berengar spoke in a chilling tone to Lambert.

"Oh, my dear brother... You have no idea how right you are!"

With that, Berengar quickly grabbed the remaining pistol from Erwin's saddle and cocked the hammer while pointing it at Lambert's chest, which was not three feet away. Berengar was only a second faster than Lambert as the boy reacted to Berengar's actions by lifting his sword into the air with a killing blow. The thunder of the flintlock pistol exploded into the air as the musket ball within left the barrel's chamber and flew point-blank into Lambert's breastplate before passing through it and into the youth's heart. Lambert's slash came down upon Berengar, but due to the damage dealt by the musket ball to the young Teutonic Knight, the trajectory of the sword was altered and slashed into the steel armor that was atop Erwin's corpse before Lambert himself fell to the ground bleeding out from his wounded heart.

Berengar used this opportunity to clamber to his feet before grabbing ahold of his sword; due to the damage inflicted upon his right eye and the difference in depth perception, it took him a few attempts to get ahold of it. Afterward, Berengar walked over to his brother and gazed upon him as he slowly bled to death. In the process he removed the boy's helmet before saying something Lambert would never expect.

"I really have to thank you, Lambert; if you had not poisoned this body to the brink of death, I might not have been able to enter this world. For that, you have my sincerest gratitude. However, the moment I came into this world, there was only one of two ways this would end. With my death or yours, and

unfortunately for you, the entity you brought into this Earth is beyond your comprehension. A bit of advice from one who has already pierced the veil. Try to do better in your next life!"

After hearing these words, life finally faded from Lambert's eyes as he entered the void. Whether or not he would be reincarnated, Berengar did not know; after all, even after experiencing death, Berengar saw neither heaven nor hell; he simply awoke in another body. It was completely unknown to him if that was everyone's fate or a one-time thing. Lambert had passed from this world in a state of total fear and confusion. He genuinely died believing that Berengar was possessed by a demon, one in which he had personally brought into the world. Berengar on the other hand had merely spoken the truth, albeit in a deliberately vague way to mess with Lambert's mind one last time.

Chapter 155: Cut Off His Head!

Despite Lambert's death, the battle continued to wage on. Of course, in the middle of the chaos and bloodshed, nobody noticed that the commander of the Teutonic Order lay dead on the ground, not at first at least. However, the surrounding Teutonic knights and grenadiers quickly realized that their commanders were missing and gazed over to see Berengar wounded in one eye, staring down at his brother's corpse. You would think that the sight of their commander dying would weaken the crusader's resolve. However, it only enhanced it. The Heretic had killed his own brother; that was a grave sin, and as such, their zealotry took hold of them as they began to make their way to Berengar to avenge the loss of their commander.

However, the Grenadiers quickly halted the knight's advance to put their bayonets in their path and formed a wall between the enemy and their commander. A fierce clash broke out between Berengar's grenadiers and the Knights of the Teutonic Order; despite the Knight's being clad head to toe in plate armor, they soon found themselves being gunned down by a few of the rifled musketeers who stayed in the treeline and sniped the enemy targets from afar. These men were Berengar's marksman and would one day become his Jaeger Corps. For now, they pelted the heavily armored knights with lead projectiles while they clashed with the Grenadiers.

Eventually, the melee seemed to turn in favor of Berengar's army; after all, their commander was dead, and at this point, Berengar and his army had

slaughtered the majority of the Knights and Men at Arms. As for the levies, they no longer had the resolve to fight. As such entire ranks of levies dropped their weapons as they realized they were greatly outmatched by the skill of Berengar's line infantry and their bayonets. Noticing the decrease in Knights and Men at Arms, Berengar shouted to the chaotic battlefield as loud as possible.

"Any levy who turns on the Teutonic Order will be spared the death in which I have reserved for them!"

Berengar's officers and NCOs quickly relaid this news across the melee to the point where most of the Levies had taken up arms against the men who forced them into this deadly conflict. There was no love lost between the levies and the Teutonic Order, and given the option, they would gladly backstab the Knights and Men at arms who forced them out of their homes and away from their families into this slaughter.

Despite being surrounded by Berengar's forces and subjected to the treason of their levies, the Teutonic Order's zealotry was to be commended as they fought to the last man, taking as many enemies as they could with them. For a crusader surrendering to a heretic was worse than death, and these men exemplified that ideal. Before long, the Teutonic Order's army was completely wiped out down to the last man, yet the damage done to Berengar's forces was immense. He had lost well over 2000 men in the conflict; after all, the heavily armored knights had an enormous advantage in melee combat.

After the battle was over, Eckhard approached Berengar, whose wounds were being treated by a field medic. It stung like hell, but the distilled alcohol disinfected the wound to his right eye, and series of linen bandages were wrapped around it. For now, that was the best treatment he could receive. Seeing Berengar was rather calm about the whole situation, Eckhard asked him an important question on his mind.

"What should we do with the remains of your brother?"

Berengar thought about it for a few moments before a wicked idea formed in his head. Berengar's own arrogance had gotten the better of him in this conflict; he had charged towards his brother's position expecting to kill him easily; in the end, the price of his victory was that of his dominant eye and the

life of his trusted steed. He needed a memento mori, a symbol to remind him that no matter what he accomplishes in life, he is only human and that death is inevitable. As such, he gave Eckhard a barbaric decree, one which made the man question the sanity of his Lord and Commander.

"Cut off his head and bring it to me; I will have his skull turned into a golden chalice! As for the rest of his body? Bury it in the mass grave with the rest of these foolish crusaders!"

Eckhard was immediately taken back by the notion; such a thing was not uncommon during the Dark Ages; However, the idea of decapitating someone and turning their skull into a drinking cup was a savage and barbaric notion during this time period. Still, the veteran Knight knew better than to disobey one of Berengar's commands. As such, he ordered some of the more unstable men in the army to perform the evil deed.

As for the levies they gathered before Berengar, after all, they were captured by Berengar's troops after the conflict was over and awaited his orders. Though he promised to spare them if they fought for him, one could never know if the young Count would keep his word. Seeing the destitute peasants forced into the armies of the Teutonic Order and compelled to fight against him, Berengar felt a great deal of pity for them, and as such, he rose from his seat. The bloody bandage over his right eye marred his otherwise charismatic appearance. Berengar gave a command for all of the levies to hear.

"I hold no ill will towards any of you; you all were forced against your will to fight against me and were dragged away from your families without your consent. Yet despite this, you have given me aid in this conflict, and as such I will reward you. Go home, and spread the word of my merciful and righteous actions."

With that said, the surviving levies of the Teutonic Order's army were freed and allowed to return to their homes, though some of them were not as lucky as the others. Many of them were wounded and would die of infection on their path back to their homes. However, Berengar had limited medical supplies, and he was far from a saint. The fact that he had spared their lives despite taking up arms against him was in itself mercy. After all, these men were not his enemies; if they were, he would never allow them to see the light of another day. For Berengar had learned a valuable lesson about showing

mercy to one's enemies, a mistake he would never repeat so long as he drew breath in this world.

Chapter 156: Recovery

At the moment, Berengar was sitting in his castle, having his eye looked over by his court physician Ewald. It had been a few days since his return from the battlefield, and his injury was well maintained due to the disinfectants used on it. Despite the horrendous nature of medieval medicine, the man seemed to be somewhat competent, having trained in his earlier years in the Byzantine Empire; he had access to many of the more enlightened views of medicine from the classical era and the golden age of Islam. As such, he carefully observed Berengar's right eye, which had a vertical slash through it. Though the cut was not deep enough to kill, it had severed his retina and potentially the optical nerve. Of course, Ewald did not know such advanced information; after observing it, he made his diagnosis.

"The eye itself will heal, albeit heavily scarred but you will never be able to see from it again. I suggest you get yourself accustomed to life with only half of your vision before you go on any further campaigns."

Receiving this news made Berengar frown with discontent; as for Linde, she was nearby holding her lover's hand throughout the process. She was more anxious about the results than Berengar himself was. Ultimately Berengar sighed heavily before expressing his views on the matter.

"Such is the price of my arrogance..."

Ever since he had become wounded, Berengar greatly reflected on his prior actions. Despite knowing the danger, and the ability of his brother's swordsmanship, Berengar rushed into the fray, truly believing he could contend with Lambert after only a year's worth of training. After all, he had been overwhelmingly victorious in all his previous conflicts; how could this one possibly be any different? Such hubris had cost him dearly. The price of Berengar's victory over the Teutonic Order was steep; he lost roughly 3,000 men in the battle, his faithful steed Erwin, as well as the function of his dominant eye. After hearing what Ewald had to say, Berengar dismissed him where he was left alone with Linde, who placed a fresh bandage covered in a basic antibiotic ointment.

Since the day that the Alchemists arrived in Kufstein and began learning Chemistry, Berengar had placed them in charge of more than just creating TNT; in fact, a large amount of the chemicals they produced thanks to Berengar's future knowledge was for medical purposes. Such as neomycin, bacitracin, and polymyxin, which were antibiotics used in over-the-counter antibiotic ointment in Berengar's previous life. The worst part of an injury like this was its potential to become infected; as such, Berengar had taken great preventative measures with repeated disinfectants and antibiotic ointment. If his wound were to become infected, the possibility of death was high, and as such, he wished to avoid such an outcome so early in life.

After placing the ointment-covered bandage over Berengar's wounded eye, Berengar began to laugh bitterly as he decided to use his self-deprecating sense of humor to overcome the awkward silence.

"I always thought I would look good with an eyepatch..."

This caused Linde to chuckle as she hugged Berengar tightly and nodded while trying to comfort him.

"If anything, it will add to your regal appearance!"

After saying those two remarks, the couple returned to awkward silence, where they sat still in the bedroom for a while. While Linde was greatly concerned about Berengar's injury, she was just grateful that he was still alive; after all, if the blade penetrated a little deeper into his eye, it could have killed him. Though she knew injury and death were possible on the battlefield, Berengar had always returned home in one piece in his previous campaigns. Because of this, there was a natural inclination to disregard the possibility. Yet here he was permanently injured from the battlefield; it caused her to be thankful that her man had survived, and as such, she desired to comfort him in his time of need. Berengar, however, saw this as a humbling experience, something from which he could learn a valuable lesson. After all, he still had one eye; thus, he could still function normally once he recovered.

For the time being, Berengar would go through a phase of recovery; he would leave the realm's governance up to his Chancellor Liutbert and the rudimentary parliamentary system he had in place. At the moment, Berengar had two concerns, one of which regarded the construction of his new chalice.

For the time being, he had no plans to inform Henrietta that Lambert had come to Tyrol to cause him harm. Instead, he would fabricate a letter from the Teutonic Order "informing" the von Kufstein family of Lambert's death in a righteous crusade. His retired parents and little sister did not need to know of Lambert's actions or the fact that his skull had become Berengar's favorite drinking cup.

The other concern was the construction of an exquisite eyepatch; as such, he began to design a black velvet eyepatch with golden embroidery that was sure to match his regal appearance perfectly. After it was complete, he sent the design to his tailors, who handcrafted the piece for him. The construction of his chalice and eyepatch took a few days, and by the time Berengar received them, he was quite happy with the results.

The skull chalice was hollowed out and dipped in gold, black garnet gemstones were encrusted below the lip of the cup, and at the bottom of the stand which protruded from the stem of the skull seamlessly, as if the entire piece was not actually made from a human skull, but carved out of a block of gold itself. The craftsmanship was of the highest quality, and Berengar was pleased with the result.

As for the eyepatch, it was exactly how he had envisioned and was also a work of art. The eyepatch was an accessory that covered his hideously wounded eye, which had already begun to mend itself; within a few weeks, the gash in the eye itself would be restored, but there would definitely be a scarred pupil and iris. As for the rest of the scar, parts of it were still visible above and below the eyepatch, which Berengar felt gave him a dignified appearance. Overall the wound did not take away from his appearance; if anything, it made him more striking and authoritative; Berengar was quite pleased with how it turned out. If he were wounded anywhere else on the face, his devilishly good looks would be affected.

Linde, who was nearby, witnessed Berengar inspecting himself in the mirror and giggled as she watched the man she loved trying on his eyepatch as if he was a teenage girl getting ready for a date. Noticing that his actions had been observed without his notice, Berengar decided to joke about the whole situation.

"You are going to have to give me some notice in the future when you sneak up on me like that; my peripheral vision is not as great as it used to be..."

Hearing Berengar joke about his condition so casually made Linde feel less melancholy about his injury; Berengar had quickly accepted his fate and vowed to learn from the experience. Yet, Linde had spent the last few days sulking, as if she were the one wounded. After all, she felt as if what happened to Berengar also happened to her; as such, Berengar had spent most of his recovery comforting Linde, despite being the one injured himself. The hearts of women were a complex entity, and Berengar did his best to navigate its stormy seas. Yet, now that Berengar was displaying a smile on his face for the first time since his injury, Linde began to feel her spirit being lifted as well; as such, she began to smile warmly as she responded to Berengar's remarks.

"I will consider that. How is your eye doing?"

Berengar smiled as he looked at himself in the mirror

"It will be fine; it just needs a few more weeks of healing."

as such, Berengar removed his eyepatch and replaced it with a clean bandage. For now, the eyepatch would have to wait; despite how great it looked, healing was a greater priority than aesthetics.

Ultimately weeks went by, and Berengar had not informed Adela of his injury. Until he was fully healed, he would not worry the girl; after all, she might do something foolish like abscond from the safety of her family's castle and travel the roads by her lonesome to Kufstein during this dangerous era of civil strife. As such, he spent a great deal of time with Linde and their child Hans. Berengar was greatly pleased by the time he spent during the weeks of his recovery, as he was usually so dreadfully busy that he could not spend as much time with his family as he desired.

The time he spent with his family was filled with bliss, and quite honestly, he was thankful for the reprieve from the hustle and bustle of the life of a Tyrant. Things progressed smoothly in the realm, but ultimately he would have to cut his vacation short as the after-effects of the battle with the Teutonic Order were far greater than he had initially estimated.

Chapter 157: Storm in the East

Weeks had gone by, and Berengar had fully recovered, however at the other end of Europe in the east, the Teutonic Order was still attempting to accumulate its gains in the war with the Grand Duchy of Moscow, and yet, the Grand Master was currently reading a report in regards to the Battle of Oberstdorf in which Lambert fought with Berengar. The man was greatly frowning as he read the contents. One of his most promising talents, being Lambert was dead, and 10,000 men with him. The results were disastrous; he was not expecting Berengar to field such a large and powerful army in such a short time. Then again, he was also not expecting Berengar to be the Count of Tyrol by the time Lambert's armies arrived. Too many things had happened between the time Lambert marched to war and the event of the battle itself.

The result of the battle was a significant loss to the Teutonic Order, 10,000 men were no small number, and he was counting on many of those men to return and bolster their ranks to defend their territory. Now that the news of their defeat had spread, the Golden Horde, the sovereigns over the Grand Duchy of Moscow, had begun to move their armies to liberate the territory in which the Teutonic Order had annexed their conquest. There was no mistake; at any moment they could be facing the might of the great Khanate, a war they could have been better off dealing with if they still had the 10,000 Crusaders who embarked with Lambert.

Not only was the East unstable, but the Grand-Master was now facing pressure by the Papacy to raise another army and invade Germany once more; the Crusade to end Berengar's Heresy had just begun in the eyes of Pope Simeon II. Yet the Grand-Master had no intention of doing such things. If they could not defend their recently conquered regions, then what was the point of marching into the warzone known as Germany. In fact, Lambert was lucky not to get into conflict with the German armies currently fighting for the vacant throne.

The messenger in which the Pope had sent to deliver his demands to the Grand Master was standing before him impatiently as he watched the Teutonic Leader read through the reports of what had transpired, as well as the Vatican's demands. Eventually, the messenger could contain his eagerness no longer and asked what the Grand Master intended to do about the situation.

"The Pope demands a response to your Order's loss in Oberstdorf. Berengar's victory will only further embolden the heretics who flock to his cause. If he can defy the might of the Papacy without punishment, then why can't they? So what do you intend to do about this?"

The Grand Master glared at the Messenger viciously before responding.

"I have already done enough. If Berengar could defeat an army of thirty thousand men with half that amount, then it means he is not an opponent I can underestimate!"

The messenger was shocked that the Grand Master would praise Berengar's ability despite suffering massive losses against him. So much so that he foolishly condemned the Grand Master for his views.

"You compliment a condemned Heretic? I am beginning to question your faith and that of your Order!"

Hearing these words, the Grand Master turned around and grabbed the messenger of the Vatican by the throat with his hand and slammed him into the stone wall before chastising him.

"Listen here, you pompous twit, Tyrol is a mountainous region in which Berengar holds all of the advantages as the defender! The man has acquired a vast fortune, has he not? Who is to say that he is not using that fortune to construct defenses across its entirety, making it even more difficult to conquer? Do you fools in the Vatican have any idea what is going on in the Count's territory? I sent 10,000 battle-hardened veterans into Tyrol because you fools told me he was not a threat to worry about, and they are all dead now!"

The priest who acted as the messenger of the Vatican was so frightened by the fury of the Grand Master that he began to soil his tunic, which caused the Grand Master to release him in disgust. Afterward, he turned away, no longer facing the messenger before giving his decree.

"Return to the Vatican and ask his Holiness what he desires most of the Teutonic Order, to convert the Orthodox regions of the east to his domain, or

to crush the Heresy that has spread throughout the German-speaking regions? Because I can not fulfill both of his requests at the same time!"

With this said, the Priest from the Vatican fled the Grand Master's chambers and quickly left the Castle of Malbork, where he intended to report back to Pope Simeon II as quickly as possible. After the messenger departed, the Grandmaster sighed as he gazed into his fireplace and let out his thoughts.

"A Storm is brewing in the East, and I do not have the time or resources to wage war against the various German powers. If the Pope is foolish enough to send me to Tyrol, then the East will be lost forever."

Shortly after saying that, an Order commander walked into his chambers with a report in his hands and announced his presence.

"Grand Master, may I have a moment of your time?"

The elderly leader of the Teutonic Order sighed before nodding his head, signaling for the commander to continue.

"The Golden Horde is on the move; they are laying siege to Moscow as we speak."

With this news his worst fears had been realized, the Grand Master responded to this information by sighing heavily before pulling out a flagon of wine and filling it into two chalices, one for himself and the other for the Commander. After handing off one of the cups to the other man, he took a sip from his glass before expressing his thoughts.

"So it begins..."

If what the Teutonic Commander had reported was true, the Order would have a difficult road ahead as they tried to defend the East from the Golden Horde's invasion. Now that they were down 10,000 men, it would not be an easy feat. On top of this new invasion from the East, they were currently fighting a war with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; their troops were stretched thin enough as it was. Yet Simeon still wanted him to waste time and effort on Tyrol.

Judging from the expansion rate of Berengar's forces, it would not be long before such a war would be unwinnable for the Catholics; the Berengar Heresy was likely to flourish in Germany as its tenants were appealing to the nobility and common folk alike. Now that the Golden Horde had invaded, it was no longer his concern; the Papacy would have to find some other fool to wage that war. If only those French bastards had not dismantled the Templar Order, maybe they could have been the ones to bring the Church's justice to Berengar.

All of these thoughts swirled in the mind of the Grand Master as he silently drank from his cup; when he was finished with the wine within, he tossed the chalice aside and instructed the Commander of his orders.

"Alert the men; we ride for the East. Hopefully, the armies we have stationed there can hold off the enemy long enough for our reinforcements?"

After hearing this order, the Commander was confused and, as such, attempted to clarify the issue at hand.

"And the Berengar Heresy?"

The Grand Master grabbed ahold of his sword belt and tied it around his waist as he casually dismissed the issue.

"Let someone else deal with it; we have bled enough."

With that said, the Teutonic Order completely disregarded the events in Oberstdorf and the defeat of Lambert and his army; after all, they had far more pressing concerns to attend to. As such, The Grand Master had begun to muster the forces in the Westernmost region of the Teutonic State, the war in the East had begun, and they had limited time to make it before they were overwhelmed. It did not take long before The forces at Malbork had gathered and began to ride off into the East; the other armies of the Teutonic State would be mustered along the way. The Teutonic War against the Golden Horde had just begun, buying Berengar some much-needed time to build up his defenses.

When Pope Simeon II heard that the Teutonic Order had snubbed him and marched to the East, he would be greatly infuriated; to enact his vengeance

upon Berengar, he would need a new army to fight against him. Unfortunately for him, all of the Catholic Military Orders were currently undergoing some form of warfare, and the Byzantines to the East had already begun to form friendly ties with Berengar. As such safety, and security for the people of Tyrol had been secured for the time being. Something in which Berengar would take full advantage of to bring his vision of a fortified Tyrol into reality. When the Catholic Church could muster an army large enough to invade Tyrol, the region would be one giant self-sustaining fortress.

Chapter 158: If You Want Peace, Prepare For War

A month had passed since the battle with the Teutonic Order in Oberstdorf, and Berengar had spent much of this time as a much-needed vacation. His eye was fully healed aside from the fact that he was blind within it, and no longer presented a danger to his life; as such, he wore the luxurious eyepatch he had created over the heavily scarred tissue. Overcoming the loss of an eye was not an easy task, and he needed to teach himself how to shoot and fight effectively with what used to be considered his off-hand. As such, when he was not hard at work managing the realm's affairs, he was adapting to his circumstances.

After being healed, he wrote a letter to Adela informing her of what had transpired and the injury in which he had suffered, though he assured her he was fully healed, and despite losing sight in his dominant eye, he was doing quite well for himself. He made sure to emphasize the need for her to stay safe in these troubled times, and as such, he implied to her not to do anything rash due to his injury. Before long Berengar found himself looking at construction blueprints.

After the battle with Lambert, several men had suffered grievous injuries so much so that their bodies could not be identified, which reminded Berengar of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in his previous life, Berengar decided to have a monument similar to that constructed within Kufstein to represent all of the unidentifiable soldiers who had perished in his wars, as well as those who might one day go missing in action.

This was yet another of his many monuments that were undergoing construction. He had the wealth to splurge, so he felt it necessary to create a culture that honored their soldiers as early as possible. One day Germany

would be united under a sense of militarism much like Prussia had done to the German Empire in his previous life's timeline.

When Berengar met with the House of Lords to discuss his new monuments, they were happy to see him. Since his injury, he had seldom left his Castle, and many of them were worried about his condition. After all, he had only left a bastard son behind, who was not legitimized... yet. When they saw the eyepatch on his face, they knew that he had suffered a permanent injury, and as such, took a moment of silence to commemorate his loss.

Nevertheless, Berengar quickly managed to convince the noblemen to take action, and as such, he displayed his plans for a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier for all to see; the design was essentially a rip off of the American one, with the same words carved upon it, albeit slightly altered to fit his needs.

"Here lies in honored glory a German Soldier, known but to God."

One of the bodies of a soldier killed in the Battle of Oberstdorf who was unrecognizable would be interred within, and it would be a Grand Ceremony for all of Kufstein to be invited to attend. The cost of this monument would be significantly lower than the large bronze statues dedicated to different aspects of society that were currently undergoing production, such as the military, the labor force, and the agricultural force. It was a much more simplistic design, but it was because of this simplistic design that it was a beautiful monument in its own right.

Seeing the depiction of the monument and its cost-effectiveness, the House of Lords held a vote for approval, which was merely a formality's sake at this point since Berengar's word was still the law in Tyrol, despite the drafting of a Constitution. At the end of the day, a Constitution was a piece of paper whose principles were only enforced through military might.

Considering the Military was a branch indoctrinated with loyalty towards Berengar and the von Kufstein Dynasty, more so than the State itself, Berengar, in practice, wielded near-absolute authority. Especially when the House of Commons and House of Lords were stacked with members, Berengar approved of. After all, as the Head of State, he reserved the right to dismiss anyone in parliament and replace them with someone he saw fit.

On paper, Tyrol was a Semi-Constitutional Elective County, and as far as the people believed, this was true. In reality, it currently acted more like a dictatorship, albeit with an intricate and meritocratic bureaucracy. Berengar did not just appoint yesmen to their positions; they had to have been capable in their own right so that he may delegate responsibilities; he simply appointed capable men who were loyal to him, and at the moment, they were few and far between, as such both the House of Commons and House of Lords were a fraction of the size they were intended to be.

However, there were no complaints about the establishment of this monument, and it was met with a unanimous vote by both chambers of parliament. After the vote was over, Arnulf, who was currently a member of the House of Lords, approached Berengar to check on his physical and mental health.

"Your Excellency, I was wondering how are you holding up?"

Berengar smiled and clasped Arnulf on the shoulder in a friendly gesture.

"I am doing well, despite losing the sight in my right eye. You could say I am quickly adapting to my circumstances, even if it is a bit tedious using my off hand for everything."

Arnulf smiled when he heard the good news and began to make small talk with Berengar about current events.

"Your Excellency, have you heard about the recent events in the East?"

Berengar had been on vacation until recently and had not yet heard about what had happened. As such, he gazed at Arnulf with an inquisitive gaze and asked about what he was referring to.

"I'm afraid I am unaware; why did something important happen?"

Arnulf was sure that Berengar had spent the last month spending quality time with his family, and in his opinion, the young Count deserved a break for once; the man was practically working himself to death every day. As such, he was not shocked to know that Berengar was not informed of the current happenings in Eastern Europe. Thus he elected to inform him.

"The Golden Horde has attacked the Teutonic State, and in response, the Order has marched their armies to the East in an attempt to hold onto the territory they have gained against the Muscovites. It appears the loss of Lambert and his men has greatly affected their fighting capability."

Berengar chuckled lightly when he heard this before expressing his views.

"Good, that ought to keep them busy for some time. It gives us a much-needed reprieve so that we can focus on constructing our defenses and implementing our industrial and agricultural reforms."

Arnulf agreed wholeheartedly with this statement, and as such, he began to question Berengar's plans for the future; after all, Berengar had not shared with many people his vision for a unified German Empire, and he could not help but notice the monument said, "German Soldier" instead of "Tyrolean Soldier."

"So tell me, what do you think Duke Wilmar's chances of winning this war is?"

Berengar scoffed at the idea before saying the objective truth or what he thought it to be.

"I do not bother speculating about the future, Lord Arnulf, for the future is malleable from what we do here and now. However, I have a suspicion that the ultimate winner of this chaotic era will be a man that the higher nobility least expects. Someone who will take advantage of the weakened factions towards the end of the war to become the victor."

Hearing Berengar's thoughts on the matter left Arnulf with a lot of speculation. However, Berengar had not outright admitted it. It sounded to Arnulf like the young Count had lofty ambitions, and something deep inside his mind told him it was entirely plausible for Berengar to achieve these things. After all, the young man went from being Baron's son and heir to a Count in roughly a year.

He had stood beside Berengar as he went through this monumental transition and knew now that Tyrol's security was ensured, Berengar would undoubtedly focus on rebuilding the army and constructing defenses across the region. If the peace in Tyrol could last, Berengar would ultimately be in such a position towards the end of the war, one in which he could reap the spoils.

Of course, as Berengar had stated earlier, time was malleable, and the future was uncertain, it might be possible for an event to occur in the near future which could drag Berengar into this massive conflict far earlier than he expected. Or things could go exactly how Berengar planned. The only entity who could know the future was God, assuming he really existed.

As such, Berengar stayed with the house of Lords for the rest of his day's work, overseeing his plans for military expansion and defensive spending. The budget he had outlined perfectly took into account all of their current assets and the potential for future growth with the trade to the Byzantine Empire. Peace is always temporary, and Berengar planned to take full advantage of the time he had. As the old Roman adage stated, *Si vis Pacem, Para Bellum*, in translation If you want peace, prepare for war.

Chapter 159: Council of Kufstein

With the Teutonic Order's defeat in Oberstdorf, Berengar's fame had increased exponentially. The fact that he resisted such a massive army and dealt a devastating blow to the Crusaders who invaded Germany at the behest of the Pope to put down the so-called Berengar Heresy had emboldened Berengar's followers.

The town of Suhl and the destruction wrought upon it by the Papacy's forces became a symbol of resistance against Papal Authority. As a result, noblemen and clergy alike flocked to Kufstein to discuss the details of the German Reformation and how to proceed. While Berengar entertained these delegates inside his Great Hall, he merely sat upon his seat of power with his skull chalice in his hands, drinking from wine as he listened to the Noblemen and Clergy squabble over the direction in which this Reformist movement should take.

At the moment, there was a significant figure of the Catholic Church present, and that was the old and wise Cardinal who had tried to mend the divide in the Catholic Church at the meeting of the Council of Constance the year before. After seeing what Simeon and his French counterpart had done to the Catholic Church, the old Cardinal decided to throw his lot in with Berengar. At the moment, he was closely observing Berengar's actions. He was quite shocked to see that Berengar was allowing the discussion to take its course naturally, rather than enforcing his views onto everyone else.

While the Prince-Bishop of Chur and the Count of Vorarlberg were debating over the degree to which the Church should Separate themselves, Berengar watched calmly as if all his plans were going smoothly. Eventually, the Prince-Bishop of Chur made a bold declaration for the entire Council to hear.

"I will gladly give up my authority over Chur in favor of a like-minded nobleman! The Church should focus on the spiritual affairs of God, and not the mortal affairs of men!"

With this said, a smirk spread across Berengar's lips as he witnessed the scene coming to fruition. A powerful Prince-Bishop would take the lead and dissolve the Church's authority over the Region of Chur, one of his neighbors, in favor of a German-speaking reformist nobleman. It was certainly a bold declaration. Nevertheless, this would be the key to conquering the Swiss Confederacy and incorporating it into his Empire in the future, and as such, Berengar was very pleased.

However, that was a plot for another time; now, he needed to solidify the foundation for his reformation. Ultimately the topic of the separation of Church and State was practically universally agreed upon by the people in the room, and the reason for the debate was more of a border squabble between Chur and Vorarlberg than it was religious. Thus when the men continued to argue over such irrelevant things Berengar grunted in displeasure which instantly silenced the two parties. After which the subject of the Council moved onto the next point of contention.

The next item on the menu was the question of Clerical celibacy which sparked an enormous debate. After all, there were plenty of sex scandals in the Church, even during the medieval period. However, Berengar knew exactly what maintaining celibacy could lead to and was against such a point. While the people were arguing over which option their reformist movement should take, Berengar spoke up for the first time during the meeting. The moment he did so, everyone stood in silence, listening to his words, which were not his own, but those from the gospel.

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath

created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. 1 Timothy 4:1-5."

When the room heard these words, they knew exactly what Berengar meant; the gospel states that actions such as celibacy and refusing to eat meat as well as some of the other Catholic practices were against the teachings of the Apostles and Christ Himself. In particular, the old cardinal, who had been waiting for Berengar's input, was shocked when he heard Berengar quote the Bible so perfectly, even memorizing the exact verse. Finally, the old man spoke up as well.

"I agree with Berengar, if we are to take the words of Christ and the Apostles as the basis for the reformation, then prohibiting the marriage of the clergy, and forcing them to take vows of celibacy is against the teachings of Christ and should not be enforced."

Hearing both Berengar, who was at the head of the Reformation, and a high-ranking member of the current Church both agree on the matter, those who doubted the validity of such as concept before now found themselves nodding their heads in approval. For on the topic of spirituality, who could argue with the words of the Gospel?

Berengar nodded at the Cardinal, whom he had been aware was watching him closely this entire time. Truthfully Berengar did not know if the man was an infiltrator of the Papacy or if he was as irritated with the Church's behavior as Berengar was. However, with his endorsement on this matter, he began to suspect the man was genuinely pious and cared more for the teachings of Christ than the power of the Papacy. A trait that was exceptionally rare in a man of his position during this era.

After concluding that topic, it came down to another important aspect of Christian reformation, which was salvation and how it was achieved. One of the priests present, an elderly man with a lengthy white beard, made his opinion on the matter known.

"Through a life of good works and faith in God is the path in which one enters the gates of heaven!"

However, another priest was in firm disagreement over this regard and voiced his concern.

"The bible teaches us that it is through faith in Christ alone that one achieves eternal life!"

The two priests began to butt heads, which was a common occurrence in any religious discussion, and as such, Berengar voiced his opinion on the matter

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. - Ephesians 2:8-9"

after saying this, Berengar once more was able to garner the attention of everyone present. As such, he quickly followed his thought.

"It is through the bible, not the traditions of the Catholic church which our reformation should be based upon, and because the bible teaches us that only through faith in Christ shall we enter through the Gates of Heaven, then it must be so!"

Through Berengar's interruption, these two issues were eventually settled into an agreement; through faith, one gains salvation, not action, and the fact that religious truth stems from the bible, not the teachings of the Catholic Church. After giving such information, the final argument for the basis of their reformation came down to the Eucharist, and Berengar personally did not care in the slightest for this issue. As a closet Athiest, how the Reformists viewed the Eucharist or communion as some branches of Christianity referred to it in his previous life had absolutely no bearing on his political authority.

As such, the men present argued among themselves until finally it was agreed upon that the Eucharist represented both the body and blood of Christ, but also the bread and wine. With all of these major points of contention ironed out, the First Council of the German Reformist Church was concluded and though there would be more later in life. The split in the Catholic Church, which had been prevented for so long in this timeline, finally occurred; with the endorsement of the wise Cardinal who formerly sat upon the Council of Constance, German Reformism had come into existence, bringing a further degree of civil strife to Germany as Reformists and Catholics would soon begin to split the already fragile duchies apart.

The wise Cardinal was aware the entire time of what Berengar's plans were. After the meeting was over and the Reformation had been decided, he approached Berengar to talk with him about his plans for the future personally. Seeing the wise old man come to him directly, Berengar felt cautious at first and raised his hand, signaling the old man to maintain his distance.

"Cardinal, is there something I can help you with?"

The Cardinal smiled amicably at Berengar, though behind his kind smile was a face filled with a degree of wariness similar in level to Berengar; as such, he began to speak to the man who he knew was bound to change the world.

"I must say I am impressed..."

Finding the cryptic message, amusing Berengar decided to take the bait.

"With?"

The man stood several feet away from Berengar, who was currently seated in his position of power. As such, there was ample space to prevent any threat; of course, Berengar's guards were on watch and would have no problem slaying the Cardinal if he made a move on Berengar's life. Luckily for everyone in the room, he had no such intentions.

"In my many years, I have met Kings, and Emperors, and plenty of them. Yet none of them have had the ability to influence the Church as you have. Within a single year, you have climbed from the position of a Lowly Baron's son to that of an influential Count whose arms and armor are sold to every corner of Germany, supplying the factions who vie for the Vacant throne. Yet during this time, you also manage to inspire a schism in the Church, the likes which I fear we have never seen before. Tell me truthfully, Berengar, are you an Angel sent here by God to liberate us from the shackles of the Church's corruption, or are you a Demon whose sole purpose is to benefit from the chaos and destruction that you leave in your wake?"

Berengar studied the man's words carefully; he knew very well that the old Cardinal was not literally asking if he was an Angel or a Demon, but which side his character reflected. Berengar played with Lambert's skull for a few moments with his fingers before taking a sip out of its contents. Afterward, he

exhaled deeply. After careful consideration, Berengar had decided to tell the old man the truth; after all, he could tell by the way in which he had voiced the question that he had already seen through Berengar's plans.

"Can't I be both?"

The Old cardinal's smile never disappeared, and instead, he turned around and walked away, saying his thoughts on the matter before walking out the door. After all, he had received a satisfying answer to his question.

"Well-played..."

Chapter 160: Proclamation of the Reformation

In the corner of the great hall of Berengar's castle, Ludolf stayed standing; he had sat through and watched the entirety of the Council of Kufstein take place. As an important figurehead of the reformation, he had been privy to the meeting between the various noblemen and clergy members who supported his and Berengar's endeavors. Though he seldom spoke, his words had carried great weight.

Having witnessed the conversation between the Cardinal and Berengar, Ludolf took the opportunity to approach his old friend, who had helped him on his path to enlightenment. When Berengar was sitting alone on his seat of power, Ludolf approached and began to express his thoughts on the principles of what would soon become known as the German Reformation.

"Your excellency, you should know that the Church's response will be one of sheer brutality, with the Cardinal turning his back on the Catholic Church and endorsing our ideas, there will be no shortage of chaos that follows..."

Berengar gazed at the priest who had been instrumental in spreading the message of the reformation with a solemn expression on his face.

"Great change in society will always lead to conflict between those who are too stubborn to advance with the new age. From the moment we began to challenge papal authority, it was inevitable that blood would be spilled. However, this brings opportunity; the more the Catholics seek to oppress us, the easier it will be to drive them from the German lands!"

Ludolf sighed heavily at the thought; he knew at the moment Catholics and Reformists could not peacefully coexist; he also knew that Berengar planned to take advantage of the ensuing violence to establish himself as a major power within the European realms. However, Ludolf was a pious man and did not care which secular leader sat upon the Throne of Germany so long as the ruler was friendly towards the reformation.

The young priest admitted he was quite lucky; Berengar and his armies afforded him protection, and as such, the Church had no real ability to punish him for his alleged heretical beliefs without a full-scale invasion of Tyrol, which at the moment would prove difficult for them, due to the numerous conflicts the existing Holy Orders continued to wage.

Ultimately Ludolf found himself in agreement with Berengar's words. However, he still expressed his concern.

"Germany is already in a state of turmoil; this schism in the Church will undoubtedly cause more conflict. The Duchies will fracture as Lords turn on one another over accusations of heresy and corruption. Do you not lament the loss of life that will occur?"

Berengar nodded his head at Ludolf's words and offered his own views on the matter.

"Did you forget what happened to Suhl? If we do not gain significant support for our cause, countless people will be murdered by the Church in an attempt to suppress our views. Only by uniting together and forming a block of like-minded Noblemen and Clergy can we withstand the might of the Catholic Church and spread our views! Yes, lives will be lost in this conflict, but think about how many voices will be snuffed out if we sit back and do nothing!"

After hearing these words, and being reminded of what the Teutonic Order had done to the Town of Suhl, even a pious man like Ludolf struggled to contain his rage. Such an outrageous action was all too common for Crusaders, especially in the middle east. Yet to do it to your fellow Christians over a simple difference of opinion, Ludolf found that unforgivable. As such, he clenched his fists and found his resolve to weather the tide that would soon be arriving. After several moments of contemplation, he responded to Berengar's words.

"I understand... I will do what I must to spread the word of our reformation!"

Seeing Ludolf had agreed, Berengar smiled and rose from his seat before walking over to Ludolf and clasped him on the shoulders in a friendly gesture.

"It is up to us to liberate the German people from the shackles of the Church!"

Ludolf nodded at Berengar's words and smiled before responding.

"Indeed!"

With that, the two men had begun the Protestant Reformation a hundred years in advance of which would naturally occur within this timeline without Berengar's intervention. The next day the public announcement of the German Reformist Church was declared, with Tyrol being its seat of influence. However, the regions occupied by Reformist Lords and clergy did not stop there; it spread into portions of Chur, Vorarlberg, Salzburg, K?rnten, Upper Bavaria, and Swabia well. Southern Germany and Eastern Switzerland had become a hot zone of Reformist thought and teachings. Many of the local Lords and middle nobility shared their interests and protected their people from the wrath of the Catholic Church and their followers.

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Of course, when news of this Schism spread to the Vatican, Pope Simeon II nearly had an aneurysm from the sheer degree of rage he felt. He instantly began to curse at his Cardinals upon hearing that a large swath of Southern Germany and Eastern Switzerland had basically declared open rebellion against his authority. He could no longer deny that the influence of Berengar and Ludolf had spread beyond his imagination. It was time to settle the dispute with the so-called Papacy of Avignon, for if the Catholic Church were not united, they would not be able to quash this Heresy, and the Church would be permanently in a state of schism.

As such, Pope Simeon got down from his throne and approached one of his subordinates. The expression on his face was one of utter fury as he bellowed his orders at the man.

"Contact that French Bastard, and let him know that I'm calling for the Council of Constance to meet earlier than anticipated. This Heresy is too important to wait any longer!"

However, the meeting spot of the Council of Constance would have to change from the Bisophric of Constance to a new venue; after all, Germany was now a hotbed of religious and civil conflict. They would not be safe within its borders; as such, the final Council of Constance would be moved to neutral ground in Cordoba, Spain, in this timeline.

The subordinate quickly bowed his head to the Pope and agreed immediately to his demands.

"Of course, your holiness!"

With that, subordinate had rushed to fulfill his task leaving Pope Simeon II fuming in anger at the thought of Berengar's influence over Southern Germany, which had spread like wildfire since the Pope had first heard of the young man less than a year ago. He did not know how Berengar had managed to achieve such things, yet it was becoming clear that if Simeon was the representative of God on Earth, Berengar was Satan's representative. Or at least in the eyes of the Catholic Church. Berengar the Accursed had caused too much damage to Catholic Influence over Southern Germany, and his views would only spread further now that they had received legitimacy in the eyes of high-ranking Clergymen and Nobility.

Simeon Scoffed at the idea and voiced his inner thoughts aloud for all nearby to hear.

"Church of the German Reformation?! What nonsense is this? These heretics will pay for their sins one way or another; I swear by the Heavenly Father that I will personally see and end to this farce!"

Despite this solemn vow, Simeon would have a difficult time doing so, as the reconciliation between the Papacy of the Vatican and the Papacy of Avignon at the upcoming Council of Constance, or as it would be known in the future as the Council of Cordoba, would prove to be a challenge to his authority as Pope. After all, he intended to mend the schism between Avignon and the

Vatican, and this would require some form of agreement to come into place about who was the one true Pope.

The Council of Kufstein and the following Proclamation of the German Reformation would forever alter the history in this timeline. Years of bloodshed and destruction would follow this development. However, in the end, these events would lead to further schisms in the Church. The Protestant Reformation had begun, and Pandora's box had been opened. Despite the Catholic Church's best efforts, they would never be able to hold onto the absurd amount of Power they had sustained throughout these past centuries; Berengar had made sure of that.

Ironically the Papacy had brought this upon themselves. If the Church had left Berengar alone, he never would have started this conflict so early in his lifetime. Initially, he had planned to live out a life of peace as a lowly Baron and bring wealth and prosperity to his people. However, Lambert's actions and those of his allies in the Church had forced his hand, as Berengar accumulated more power, so too did his ambitions and enemies grow, and when the Church reached out its hand to swat him away like a mosquito, he bit down into it and inflicted a dangerous disease upon it.

Thus, they had created a powerful enemy by trying to get rid of a seemingly insignificant Baron's son in an isolated region within Tyrol. One who would forever liberate the German people from the Shackles of the Catholic Church and the immense corruption that sustained it.