

## Steel 42

### *Chapter 42: Death of a Marshal*

Lord Friedhelm von Thiersee had served as the Marshal of Kufstein for close to thirty years now. He was a man who was growing older in his years and now had long white hair, a matching beard, and many wrinkles. Despite his old age, the elderly man could still wield a sword in combat and command his liege's armies in battle. That is until a week ago when his health took a sudden turn for the worse. His physicians did not know the cause of his illness and attributed it to the frailty of old age. However, today, the same day that Linde announced she was pregnant, the elderly man was lying on his deathbed in his family's domain in which they had ruled under the fealty of the von Kufsteins for centuries.

His children were surrounding him and awaiting his last gasp. Truthfully the man had lived long enough to know when someone was poisoned, and he already had a suspect in mind. However, by the time he realized this fact, it was too late as he was now too frail to communicate his suspicions Effectively. Currently, His servants attended to his need. However, he was now certain that they were secretly agents of Berengar and had been the ones to administer the poison to him in the first place. At the moment a servant who had been in his service for the past fifteen years approached him and force-fed the old lord a glass of water which was laced with poison. Since the Marshal was no longer able to drink without assistance, he had no choice but to accept the final dose of the lethal poison. It took a while for the dose of poison to take effect as such; the elderly Lord struggled desperately to make his last words an accusation against the eldest son and heir of the Baron.

Ultimately the sounds that came out of the Elderly's lords mouth could not manage to contain a coherent thought. The only understandable word in his deathly babble was the word "Lambert," which immediately caused a hint of concern on his family's faces. Why would the old man's last word be the name of the second son of the Baron. However, before they could ask the old man what he meant by using the name, the marshal drew his last breath and exited this world. Ultimately this left a hint of suspicion on several of the more clever family member's faces. They would even investigate if Lambert had something to do with the old patriarch's sudden illness.

Ironically by trying to get his family to warn Lambert that his brother was the most likely suspect with the Marshal's untimely death, Lord Friedhelm instead thrust the suspicion onto Lambert, which would ultimately result in his family siding with Berengar in the war for the title of Baron. Of course, at the time, Berengar had no way of knowing that his assassination of the Marshal would provide key evidence in his later attempts to eliminate Lambert as a threat. Thus on that night, the Lordship of Thiersee mourned the loss of the mighty and efficient Lord who had presided over them for decades.

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By the time Berengar and his family heard the news of Lord Friedhelm's passing, it was already late into the next day. This was shocking news for Sieghard, who suspected his Marshal to be having a brief bout of illness; he had never expected the elderly Lord to die from what ailed him. As such, Sieghard immediately called for a grand funeral to honor the memory of his loyal Marshal, who had served his family for so many years.

On the other hand, Lambert was horrified by the news; he had only recently become aware of his ally's illness and chalked it up to the troubles of the elderly. However, with his passing and Berengar's smug expression, he knew instantly that his brother had conspired against a key ally in his fight for the inheritance. Without the Marshal on his side, he would have difficulty rallying the town guard against Berengar when his father eventually departed for war. Even if Lambert did not truly understand how efficient Berengar's militia was; if Lambert acted quickly enough upon their father's departure, he could seize power and imprison his brother before Berengar's militia could enter the castle's gates and secure the young lord's regency. Which he had been a critical point in Lambert's plans for the future.

Without the forces already stationed in the Castle backing him, Lambert now had little chance of achieving such aims. Nor could he form his own militia, as Berengar clearly had won the hearts of the common folk, and rumors had spread around of Lambert's character being more wicked than he displayed in public. In fact, despite the period of mourning, Sieghard needed to declare a new Marshal. The only problem was there were not many men as experienced as Friedhelm in the ways of war. The position of Marshal was critical for a Lord as they essentially commanded all forces of the realm in the stead of the feudal lord. However, Sieghard personally enjoyed commanding

his forces; under his reign, the Marshal had always been more of an advisor on strategy and tactics. As well as the chief of his law enforcement. As Sieghard was not expecting to survive the upcoming war, he had to consider someone capable of advising his son and heir on the matters of law enforcement and warfare in the future.

What Sieghard did not know is that Berengar had already found such a capable man to fulfill the role and would eventually replace whoever Sieghard had chosen for the position of Marshal. Currently, Sieghard was in a meeting with Berengar discussing the role of Marshal and who should be appointed. Berengar was surprised that Sieghard was now taking his opinion into account; it could only mean one thing, Sieghard was preparing for his eventual death on the battlefield and his son and heir's transition to power. However, he had to confirm such suspicions and thus asked his father outright.

"Father, I know that there is a storm approaching and that soon this land will be embroiled in civil war. Are you not planning to take your Marshal with you into battle?"

Sieghard gazed solemnly upon his son and heir; he had a suspicion that Berengar's act of forming a militia was to act as a proper defense for the Barony while he was away at war, which was one of the reasons he would always compromise when it came to the expenses of arming the militia.

"I won't lie to you, son, what you say is true; shortly, I will be called to war by the Count of Tyrol. I do not anticipate coming back from this conflict alive. It may take years, but sooner or later, I will perish on the battlefield fulfilling my duties to our liege. What I want is to put someone capable in charge of Barony's defenses and law enforcement. Someone who can guide you best on how to defend our land in my stead."

Berengar tried not to smile as his suspicions were confirmed; his father knew he was no longer fit to be Baron with how efficient Berengar had proven himself as a ruler. Now that his children were old enough to survive without him, he was looking for a way out. This meant that in a handful of years, Berengar would be Baron and could fully enact his plans to conquer the German-speaking regions. Rather than waiting for his father to die peacefully in his sleep in a few decades. Berengar was ruthless to his enemies, perhaps

even cruel, but he was not a psychopath. His father had shown him nothing but benevolence and patience as he grew up, and Berengar had no desire to harm his father to accomplish his goals. At most, he would have mustered his forces and force his father to abdicate if his reign went on for too long. With his father's goal to assign a martial who can aid Berengar, he had no choice to voice the candidate he already had in mind.

"Father, I know of a man who is perhaps greater material for a Marshal than the late Friedhelm."

Sieghard looked up from his list of candidates and stared into Berengar's eyes. He was personally not aware of such a man in his realm.

"You do?"

Berengar nodded as he proceeded to make his suggestion.

"Eckhard, he is an anointed knight and a veteran of many battles. He has quite the mind for strategy and tactics, and I'm certain he can quickly adapt to the role of Law Enforcement. He's the second command of my militia and was instrumental in the defeat of Ulrich's forces at Mining Town."

A wide smile spread across Sieghard's face; it turned out his son had already found a capable Marshal who was loyal to him; this was good news for the realm's future. As he thought about it, he began to smile more; this essentially meant that Berengar's militia could be incorporated into the Town Guard and act as a military force, with police duties among the civilians. In Berengar's previous world, such a force would be referred to as Gendarmerie. It would be quite the efficient force in defending his family's territory when he was off at war. As such, he immediately accepted Berengar's suggestion.

"Very well, I will name Eckhard Marshal of the Realm after Friedhelm's funeral. We will incorporate your militia into the town guard, and it will act as the defensive force of the Barony and as its law enforcement."

Berengar was extremely delighted by this news; by eliminating Friedhelm, he had guaranteed that a unit of his forces would be stationed in the Castle and loyal to him. If Lambert attempted to cause trouble upon the start of his Regency it would not end well for his little brother. With a single assassination,

Berengar had greatly weakened Lambert and his allies' ability to harm him. Slowly but surely, the tides were turning in his favor. Soon he would be able to finish this war of intrigue and secure his reign. With Eckhard's appointment as Marshal, he could root out any supporters of Lambert within the ranks of the town guard and have them expelled from its forces under false charges. Thus ensuring the only armed force within the Barony of Kufstein after Sieghard's departure was loyal only to Berengar.

This also would mean that Berengar would now have the authority to raise cavalry forces and add them to his ranks, albeit in small numbers. He believed he would start with a unit of demi-lancers—a type of cavalry that would one day replace the heavily armored knights of this era. The establishment of such a force would have to wait until after Eckhard's appointment to Marshal, which would take at most a month and a minimum of a fortnight. Nevertheless, things were looking bright for Berengar's future as his path to power was slowly beginning to come together.

After conversing with his father about the details of the appointment for some time, Berengar returned to his room, where he began drafting the plans for the establishment of a Demi-Lancer company, which would be outfitted with Three-Quarter's munitions grade plate armor and lances. After a while, he heard a knock on his door, and when he opened it, he saw Adela standing before him in a beautiful dress in the colors of black, white, and gold, which were the colors of his house. She looked ravishing in such attire; in her hands was a tray full of cookies and milk. The young girl had quite the sweet tooth.

"May I enter?"

Berengar would not deny his future wife entry into his room; as such, he made way for her approach, and the two sat down next to each other while snacking on the treats. Though Berengar enjoyed them, he did not enjoy the sweet deserts quite as much as Adela did. Still, he could not prevent his mind from thinking about chocolate. Unfortunately, it would be a long time before he could send an expeditionary force to the Americas to claim potatoes and cocoa. Nevertheless, it was one of his greatest goals in this life. The establishment of a colonial Empire in his mind was a necessity. However, the reasoning was more for the wide variety of crops and spices it could bring back and less for the territorial expansion. Nevertheless, when he was able to do so, he fully intended to take advantage of the European powers' lack of

knowledge of the rest of the world and lay claim to territories in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. With the power his armies would wield by then, nobody could stop him.

To achieve this, he would first need to unite Germany and gain some coastal territories; he wanted major Naval bases in the Baltic, North, and Adriatic Seas. Then he would need to build a mighty Navy to maintain colonial power. Either way, it was many years, if not decades, away from where he currently stood. Nevertheless, he would do everything he could to establish his Empire as the world's preeminent power. Needless to say, there was a lot of work ahead of the ambitious young lord. For now, he relaxed by his young fiancée and dined on cookies while dreaming of conquering the world.