

Steel 44

Chapter 44: Checking in on Things

Berengar was currently in a sparring session with Eckhard with wooden swords. It had been quite some time since Berengar had first picked up the sword and had incorporated its training into his weekly exercise routine. By now, he was starting to become competent in swordsmanship, at least from a fundamental level. Though Berengar still vastly preferred the use of a bayonet, he felt it was still necessary for him to master the fundamentals of swordsmanship. You never know when you might be forced to wield a sword in combat.

Eckhard cut down with a verticle slash towards Berengar; the young lord quickly parried the blow before swiftly counter-attacking. Ultimately, this action was dodged by Eckhard, who unleashed a flurry of blows that Berengar struggled to keep up with. After a few moments of intense sword fighting, Berengar was tripped to the ground, and Eckhard pointed his sword at the young lord's vitals. Berengar was at a loss and yielded to his opponent.

"Damn it... I yield once more."

Eckhard chuckled as he stripped off his training gear and assisted Bernegar up from the ground; after the two stashed away their equipment, they headed to the kitchen, where Berengar procured a liter of beer for each of the men. As a man of refined tastes from his previous life, Berengar was extremely dissatisfied with the quality of alcohol in this world. Aside from distilling alcohol for medical practices, he had recently begun distilling spirits for regular consumption. In fact, he had recently obtained a plot of land from his father to make a large and dedicated brewery with the intent to mass-produce a variety of beers and spirits. The fact that his favorite beers being Doppelbock and Oktoberfest did not exist yet in this world was a damn shame. Unfortunately, it would take him at least a year to brew the first batch of Doppelbock and close to it for Oktoberfest. Thus, for now, he regularly consumed light beer, which was common in this world. It was hard to enjoy his favorite meals to the fullest extent without his most treasured alcoholic beverages and the missing dishes that utilized chocolate or potatoes. Still, it was acceptable for now; he just feared that he would have to wait many years before he could once more taste some of his most favored cuisine that was sadly absent from his meals.

After sharing a drink, the two men walked down to the training field, where they quickly got dressed in their combat attire and began to lead the troops for combat drills personally. Berengar commonly carried a flintlock musket, pistol, and a side sword. If he lost the use of his primary weapon for whatever reason, he wanted a backup in case he was in immediate danger. Berengar's kit was relatively unique; he had a black leather bandolier that held two flintlock pistols and a sword belt that contained a simple side sword. It was not the elegant sword that would later be his wedding gift from Ludwig and his workers. Instead, it was a rudimentary design that worked as an additional sidearm. His belt also contained the cartridge pouch which held his paper cartridges for the musket. When you took into account his extra garish attire, he easily stood out from the other soldiers in his army, which was both good and bad. It made it easier for his troops to understand where their commander was, but it also made him a more noticeable target to his enemies.

Nevertheless, the young Lord stood by his troops and conducted firing practice with them. By now, the earliest troops had graduated basic training and were going through specialized training. The training field was constructed with makeshift buildings and barriers acting as a simulated village for when they were in urban combat. The grenadiers would clear buildings by lobbing their grenades inside and waiting for the blast before storming in with their muskets loaded and ready with bayonets affixed. Berengar did not care about civilian casualties in a warzone; he only cared about how efficiently his army could handle the task with minimal casualties on his own side. As such, the tactics he used would be deemed excessive and possibly even war crimes in his past life. However, there were no such things in this feudal era, and he was free to conduct warfare as he saw fit.

Line tactics, anti-cavalry tactics, urban warfare tactics, siege tactics, these were all things he wanted his men well accustomed to. The peaceful days he had lived in were quickly coming to an end, though Berengar had not received any recent updates on the King's status. It would not be long before the German-speaking regions found themselves embroiled in a bloody conflict for the succession of the title. It was even quite possible that the war could spread to the other regions of the Holy Roman Empire. Nevertheless, to an ambitious young man like Berengar, this war was an opportunity to seize power. When all was said and done and the war was over, the feudal powers of the German regions would be weakened, and he would have the

opportunity to rise like an eagle. As such, the young lord had a cruel smile on his face as he watched his men perform the tasks he required of them with ease. Soon a new era would rise, an era of steel and shot, an era of industry.

After a long day of arduous training, Berengar returned to the village where he visited Gunther, who was overseeing his agricultural implementations. When he visited the man's farm, he saw that all of his advancements had been implemented and that Gunther's farm, in particular, was extraordinarily prosperous. With the introduction of animal-powered mechanization, the nearby farmlands were incorporated under his supervision as their previous workers began to shift to the industrial workforce. So many families working one plot of land was no longer necessary. Though these tools had not yet been mass-produced nor had they been outfitted to all of the farms across the village of Kufstein, the fact that Gunther and his large family alone were able to take care of such a large farm was a good sign of the future.

When Gunther noticed Berengar's approach, he immediately stood at attention and smiled as he addressed the young lord.

"Milord, the harvest this year is sure to be bountiful! The livestock is also growing in numbers now that they can be bred year-round!"

Berengar clasped the man on the shoulder as he greeted him. It had been some time since he checked up on his progress in person.

"It is good to see you, old friend! That is excellent news."

Gunther smiled and accepted Berengar's greeting

"So what can I help you with, milord?"

Berengar smiled and began to walk around the farm, inspecting its progress in person while Gunther followed behind him.

"Tell me, how is the implementation of the four-field system, phosphate fertilizer, and irrigation going across the Barony's many farmlands?"

Gunther kept track of the progress throughout the town, and word eventually spread from contact with the other townships and villages within the Barony to Gunther.

"As far as I know, your innovations are fully implemented here in the town of Kufstein. In the other regions, we have seen the four-field system and fertilizer being used. Though irrigation is on the rise, it will still be a few months before it is used across the board. Many of the unemployed farmers of the other regions are flocking to the town of Kufstein looking for work; as far as I'm aware, they fit in well with locals. Soon enough, this town may become a real city!"

Berengar smiled upon hearing such news. Clearly, construction was undergoing, and the city development plan he had petitioned his father to use was currently going underway. Before long, A new city would appear here in the heart of Kufstein. Berengar had many plans underway to reduce squalor and homelessness. Keeping the city organized was a top priority.

"That is exactly what I wanted to hear! Now tell me, Gunther, when will we see the new machines implemented into agriculture across the town?"

Gunther smiled and shared the good news with Berengar

"Roughly three months milord, and the town's agriculture will be mechanized as you put it. Maybe a year later, the rest of the Barony will follow suit."

Berengar was pleased with this news; hopefully, his Barony would have mechanized agriculture powered by animals by the time the war broke out. If not, at least it would be close to it. He could not be happier with the way things were headed. After speaking with Gunther for a bit about what he had been up to since Berengar's last visit, the two parted ways for the day. Berengar still had to check up on Ludwig and the industrial sector.

After returning to the industrial sector, it was a completely different sight from when he was last there. He now had two steel production lines, an arms factory, an armory, an agricultural equipment factory, and a textile factory. The industrial sector was bustling with hundreds if not thousands of workers who were hard at work producing the products needed to usher in the new age. The machinery used to produce equipment was all water-powered. Wherever

necessary assembly lines were in place to make the creation process smoother. As such, it was quite the operation; Berengar figured there was no city on the planet with such an advanced industrial sector. The best part is that it was growing by the day.

When Berengar approached Ludwig's old shop, which was now his office, he saw the older man was hard at work looking at a set of blueprints Berengar had given him. The office was completely cluttered with designs, and paperwork was strewn about. Berengar knew the pains of paperwork all too well; after all, he had his nights filled with it. As such, he could empathize with the old man who was so hard at work that he did not notice Berengar's entry. It was not until Berengar cleared his throat that the man noticed the young lord standing in front of him.

"Milord!?! I am sorry I did not see you there."

Ludwig said as he rapidly rose to his feet. However, Berengar quickly signaled that he could sit down, and as such, Ludwig was only halfway out of his seat before he sat back down in his old leather chair.

"What brings you here, milord?"

Berengar chuckled and looked over the paperwork Ludwig was currently going over before speaking his thoughts.

"I am just checking in on things. How are you holding up?"

Ludwig let out a deep sigh and vented his frustrations to the young lord who he knew would take it in stride.

"I am fine, just a little overworked is all, though I am sure you are the same way. Of course, I do not have a beautiful young lover to vent all my frustrations on at the end of every night..."

Berengar could not help but laugh at the old man's comments. It was true he released any pent-up emotions through his nightly escapades with Linde, and as such, always woke up refreshed. The same could not be said for everyone else.

"So, how is it going with my factories?"

Ludwig quickly smiled with a hint of pride on his face; his hard work was paying off.

"What was the saying you used before? Everything is running like a well-oiled machine?"

Berengar chuckled when he heard that phrase, it was definitely out of place in this medieval world. Still, he had been known to use idioms from his past life, which had caused confusion on several occasions.

"That is good to hear; I see a lot of men working here. Are they properly paid and given the necessary rest breaks?"

Ludwig nodded with a big grin on his face as he answered Berengar's question.

"Of course, and they're quite thankful for it. Many of the new arrivals are men from the other regions of the Barony, and they had expected to have been slaved to death here in the factories, like many of the miners used to be before you began to impose your reforms on the realm. Despite the hard work, they are quite happy about their pay and hours, for the most part. Unfortunately, there will always be a few bastards complaining about their life no matter how good they have it."

Berengar nodded at Ludwig's words; he spoke the truth, you could not please everyone in this world, but at least they were afforded a proper wage, working hours, and safety standards, which is more than could be said about the rest of the world at the moment. The exponential growth of his family's wealth from all of the business he had made over the past few months has allowed him to increase the workers' wages and set up performance bonuses. As such, a new middle class was finally forming in the region of Kufstein. Though it was still in its early stages, the Barony of Kufstein was beginning to shift from the feudal era of nobles and peasants to an industrialized world with a multi-class structure.

After having a few drinks like old times with Ludwig and talking about the past, present, and future, Berengar parted ways with his friend and returned to the

Castle. Everything was progressing smoothly; now, all he needed was Linde's report from the spy network she was managing, and he could finally call it a night. The life of an ambitious man was never idle. Berengar bathed before returning to his room; before long, Linde approached as per usual, but before she could pounce into Berengar's embrace, he stopped her and asked her the question on his mind.

"So, how are things on your end?"

She instantly knew what Berengar was referring to and pouted before she sat down next to him. she exhaled deeply and gave him the latest report.

"Your network has penetrated the entirety of the Barony and the vassals beneath your father. If anything even remotely similar to a plot against you appears, I will know about it. I've contacted my half-sister in Innsbruck and instructed her to set up a cell in her area. Before long, we will know everything that transpires in the seat of power of Tyrol. As for Ludolf, he is close to becoming a priest, and when he does so, he has orders to do as you have asked. Aside from that, your mouths are currently producing propaganda throughout the region about your exploits and inventions. They've come up with some interesting stories about how you are blessed by the divinity of Christ with knowledge of the future and will usher in a new era of peace and stability for the German people. I don't know who came up with that bullshit, but people are eating it up."

After reporting to Berengar about her activities, she leaned into his chest and whispered in his ear.

"Have I been a good girl?"

Berengar smiled and stroked her glossy strawberry-blonde hair before pushing her down upon the bed and whispered back to her.

"You have been a very good girl, and I think you deserve a reward."

After which, he spent the remainder of his waking hours with his lover's warm embrace. He wondered how long this peaceful and plentiful life could go on before the storm arrived. However, as of right now, that was not his concern. He needed to enjoy this time while it lasted, one thing was certain his future

would be filled with bloodshed, and that was not something he could escape now that he had embarked on the path to power.