

## Steel 46

### *Chapter 46: Lambert's Birthday II*

After finishing the extravagant breakfast, Berengar departed from the family; they had many plans to set into place and a luxurious feast to prepare for the coming night. As such, Berengar used this time to enact his plan with Linde. He had already enjoyed her company in the bath. So he met up with Linde in secret on several occasions that day in various parts of the castle, where the couple released their carnal desires together.

While that was going on, Lambert took out his pent-up fury on a training dummy with his longsword. The 16-year-old boy could not believe that today of all days, he had been humiliated in such a manner by his brother. Though he had wanted to keep a close eye on Linde, the sly girl had absconded the moment breakfast was over, and despite his attempts, Lambert ultimately failed to track her down. The image of her perfect porcelain skin dripping wet with the bathwater as her nightgown clung tightly to her heavenly curves could not escape his mind. Though it would normally be a pleasant memory to have, the scene that transpired afterward where Berengar was equally damp did nothing but create paranoia as he continued to suspect a relationship between the two.

The young lord wanted to get to the bottom of this, though he could not. Accusing Linde without evidence would only create further tension between him and her father. Not to manage the harm it would cause to the fragile relationship he currently had with his fiancée. Truthfully he did not want to know the truth if it was what he suspected. The boy wanted to tear his own heart out as he slashed at the Training dummy's neck, decapitating it with a perfectly placed strike. In his mind, he envisioned the scene of removing Berengar's head from his shoulders, and at that moment, he felt cathartic. He swore to himself that sooner or later, he would have his vengeance on his older brother for the pain and suffering that had been inflicted on him this day. Of course, it did not even enter the boy's mind that he had brought these things upon himself by conspiring against his brother for the inheritance.

After a long training session, Lambert entered the bath, where he cleansed his milky white skin from the sweat and grime accumulated throughout the violent display. As he gazed into his reflection within the pool of water, he could not help but feel inferior in appearance to his older brother; though he had the

charm of youth on his side, he did not have the princely features with which Berengar had been blessed. Instead, despite his youth, his face and body were more robust, as he had the characteristics of a knight. Which was attractive in its own right, and many women would prefer such a look. However, his fiancée obviously preferred the regal features of Berengar, which got under the boy's skin. He dashed the bathwater with his hand causing a ripple to obscure the reflection before getting out of the pool of water and dressing in his attire.

After getting out of the bath, he visited the kitchen where the chefs were busy baking a massive german cheesecake for the celebration that would occur later in the evening. He had no idea that Berengar and Linde were enjoying each other's embrace in his bed at this moment. Thus he continued to walk around the castle. Lately, he had noticed that the guards inside the Castle had shifted from the usual troops adorned with brigandine and halberds to men garbed in the flamboyant attire of Berengar's militia while carrying their hand cannons. He was unaware that his father had selected Eckhard to be his next marshal, as it had not been publicly announced yet. However, unlike before when Lambert laughed at the peasants in their dirty clothes and their laughable hand cannons, their current equipment in which they issued began to intimidate Lambert. The men were clearly garbed in partial plate armor with a breastplate, backplate, gorget, and helmet, which were all made of blackened steel. These guards did not pay the slightest bit of attention to Lambert as he passed by.

Lambert walked out upon the Castle's ramparts and saw more of these men acting as sentries upon the Castle's walls. They were currently in the process of aligning Berengar's cannons onto the ramparts. These cannons were not the 12 lb field guns used by the militia, but 24 lb siege cannons developed by Berengar and recently put into production with the intent of being static defensive guns mounted on the Castle's walls. With Eckhard being made the Marshal, even if it was not common knowledge at the moment, the man had begun to transition the old garrison into Berengar's training and re-outfitting them with the modern equipment. In truth, the men Lambert saw staffing the castle were the same men that always acted as the garrison; they were just equipped with the latest weapons of Berengar's design and were being trained in their use. Of course, some of Berengar's men had replaced those who had been purged from the Castle garrison's ranks for being loyal to Lambert, but

most of the troops stationed at Castle Kufstein were the same men who had always been there.

After traveling across the Castle observing the changes occurring, Lambert could not help but feel that Berengar was winning in the war. They were fighting for the succession of their father's title. Lately, his allies were beginning to back out of his plans after the death of Marshal Friedhelm, and hostile forces now surrounded him within his own home. Things were not going well for the youth, who was now in a difficult position. Count Lothar of Tyrol kept pressuring the boy into another assassination attempt on Berengar's life, but it was becoming increasingly difficult to do so. Berengar had won the favor of the people. Thus he could no longer count on them to poison him, the castle guard who was loyal to himself had now been replaced by forces loyal to Berengar, and the man had quite possibly won over his fiancée and was using her to spy on him. As long as Berengar remained in Kufstein, it would be challenging to claim his life.

Worse yet, Lambert was now aware that rumors were spreading of Berengar's divine powers to see the future and that the inventions he had implemented were gifts from God to the people of Germany that would lead them into a new era. Many of the common folk were beginning to treat him like he was some saint. Suddenly Lambert had an epiphany if he could not get the people to turn on Berengar, and the feudal powers were no longer supporting Lambert. There was only one potential ally he could call upon, which had enough power and authority to end Berengar's life. A devilish smile appeared across Lambert's face as he realized that this war was far from over. If he could gain the church's support and accuse Berengar of heresy, then it did not matter if he was a Baron's son and heir; the inquisition had the power and authority to deal with any potential heretics, no matter their social status! As such, he quickly rushed to his room to draft a letter to the Bishop of Innsbruck to make accusations of Heresy against his elder brother.

By the time Lambert reached his room, Berengar and Linde had already moved onto another part of the castle to continue their day of debauchery. As such, Lambert was entirely unaware of what had recently transpired in his own bed. He quickly got to his desk and pulled out parchment, a quill, and some ink where he began to draft a letter for a plea of assistance from the Bishop. In this letter, Lambert brought up concerns about Berengar being the embodiment of the seven deadly sins and consorting with witches and

demons to gain forbidden knowledge that had allowed him to "invent" these new devices that were being implemented in Kufstein; and how Berengar was spreading blasphemy about his divinity. The list of concerns in which Lambert brought up was both extensive and almost entirely fictitious.

After drafting the letter, he brought it to the local priest of the church within Kufstein. Currently, Deacon Ludolf was working alongside the priest on matters of the ecclesiarchy. Thus Ludolf, a high-ranking member of Berengar's spy network and trusted ally, was present. When Lambert rushed in to gain the signature of the local priest for his approval of these concerns.

"Father, I have some concerns about my brother's erratic behavior lately and have decided to draft a formal inquiry to the Bishop so that we may discover the truth about these matters. I would like you to read about my concerns and give your support."

The priest smiled when he saw Lambert; the boy was considered a pious and graceful youth worthy of the title of Baron. Unfortunately, he was born the second son and thus would not inherit the lands. The priest's opinion of Berengar was not as high as Lambert's; after all, Berengar had only shown his face in the church once in the past few months. He was beginning to believe that the young man had become an apostate. When the priest read the letter Lambert had drafted, it was as if his suspicions were confirmed. Without any evidence for the claims in which Lambert had presented, the priest signed away his endorsement on the spot. It would be good for an unfaithful wretch like Berengar to be removed from his position, especially if these concerns turned out to be legitimate. The old priest smiled at Lambert and patted the boy on the shoulder.

"Lambert, my child, you have always been a faithful servant to the Lord, and I will gladly endorse your letter to the Bishop. If what you say is true, there is a dire need for the inquisition to get involved. We can only pray that the devil and his worshippers are routed out from the halls of your ancestors and that the glory of God can be returned to these lands."

Lambert smiled gracefully and bowed to the Priest

"Thank you, Father; I knew I could count on your support in these troubling times!"

Afterward, The priest saw Lambert off as he raced back to the castle to send the letter to the Bishop of Innsbruck. When he returned, he was given an odd stare by Ludolf, who could not help but voice his concerns.

"Father, you can not possibly believe that a single thing written in that letter was the truth. It is obvious the boy is scheming to take over his brother's position as heir to the Barony!"

The priest frowned at Ludolf as he chastised him greatly for his words.

"Whether it is true or not is of no concern of the Church. If Berengar were to inherit his father's position, he would use the power in his hands to be rid of the Church's influence. We cannot allow such ideas to take hold over the people's minds, especially the nobility who stand to benefit from them. It is better to have a God-fearing Baron like Lambert in charge who will obey the will of the Papacy than a Godless heathen like Berengar who would challenge the authority of the Holy See."

At that moment, Ludolf knew everything Berengar had said about the Church was true; they were corrupt beyond measure. They were willing to torture a seemingly righteous man to death over nonsensical claims simply because he posed a minor threat to their power. These words by the priest of Kufstein ultimately convinced Ludolf that the Church needed to be reformed. However, he stood there in silence, simply nodding his head at the priest's words. For now, he would have to warn Berengar of the danger that lies ahead. Ludolf would one day come to realize that this one decision by the authorities of the Church would cause Berengar to view the Papacy as the greatest obstacle in his rise to power and would cause endless bloodshed in the struggle for secular authority.

After Lambert returned to the Castle, he quickly sent the letter to the Bishop of Innsbruck, though it would take time to approve the inquisition's interference in Kufstein. Lambert was certain that this action would lead his Brother to his demise. For in his mind, how could a lowly Baron's heir defy the might of the inquisition? If Lambert knew what his brother would have in store for the church's forces upon their arrival, he would have soiled himself in fear of the mad lengths to which Berengar was willing to enact to ensure his dominance.