

Steel 57

Chapter 57: You will tell him that, yes?

Berengar sat upon his father's seat of power as he tapped his armies thrice with his left hand and drank from a chalice of wine in his right. Standing before him was a group of priests garbed in scarlet robes with a golden cross hanging around their neck. These were the men of the inquisition, a group of zealous and sadistic priests who rooted out, tortured, and executed heretics. The number of innocent people they had put to death was immeasurable as they truly did not care about whether or not someone was guilty of the so-called crime of heresy, merely the thrill that came with torturing another human being.

The men refused to bow to Berengar was currently acting as the Regent of Kufstein and was essentially Baron in all aspects but name. Instead, they stood before Berengar, who took a sip from his golden chalice as he listened to the inquisition as they introduced themselves. Their leader was a short fat man with an obviously balding set of gray hair and a matching mustache. If the sex crimes of the Catholic Church from Berengar's previous life were to exist in this timeline, then just by first glance, one could assume this man was engaged in such activity. Luckily for Berengar neither Henrietta nor Adela were present, or else he would not be able to contain his wrath at the stubby fat priest's lecherous gaze. Thinking of such a possibility, Berengar instinctively sneered in disgust at the man as he introduced himself to Berengar in a way that lacked the proper respect afforded to a man of his position. The man spoke with a heavy Spanish accent, immediately telling he was not a German speaker by birth.

"I am Father Alphonse, and these two are my associates Fathers Antonio and Gilles. We have come at the behest of the local priest and one Lambert von Kufstein to investigate claims of Heresy. I was told that the Baron of Kufstein was a middle-aged man. Who might you be?"

Berengar could not help but curse to himself inwardly

'Fucking Christ, a Spaniard, a Southern-Italian, and Frenchman, of course, there would not be a German in their little tribunal. It seems I won't be able to play the fellow countryman card.'

After having such thoughts, Berengar took a sip from his glass as he proclaimed his authority in front of the unwanted priests who had barged into his home.

"I am Berengar von Kufstein, son of Sieghard von Kufstein, and acting regent of the Barony of Kufstein while my father has secluded himself in penance. All authority to deal with this matter has been invested in me by my father Baron Sieghard von Kufstein in accordance to the laws of Men."

Berengar made sure to emphasize that last part, as he was making it abundantly clear to the Inquisition that they had no authority here in his domain. Father Alphonse immediately frowned when he heard this news; this was the worst possible outcome. If what Berengar said was true, investigating the claims, and finding the young lord guilty may prove to be difficult. Nevertheless, Father Alphonse proceeded with his task.

"Tell me where is Lambert von Kufstein? I wish to discuss with him the concerns which he brought to our attention."

Berengar glared at the inquisition leader with a smug expression as he boldly declared Lambert's fate.

"Lambert has been convicted of assassination, attempted fratricide, and treason against the Barony of Kufstein. He has been disowned, stripped of his name and titles, and sent to the Teutonic Order where he will spend the rest of his days redeeming himself in the eyes of the Lord."

The fat and balding priest was stunned by this news. It had only been a matter of weeks since they had become aware of the situation, yet the man in which the Bishop of Innsbruck insisted on backing to maintain the Church's power in Kufstein was already removed from the equation? How did this happen?

Father Alphonse now understood why Berengar was calmly sitting on his throne sneering at him with disgust and disdain; with his key witness convicted and disgraced as a traitor and murderer, his chances of ousting this young man from power was slim. Unless he could find something in a legitimate investigation to prove he was a heretic. Now that was the Church's only hope. Either that or they could just frame Berengar for the crimes he was

accused of. As such, the man put on a smile and began to command Berengar as if he were a mere servant.

"Before his departure, Lambert had made several bold accusations of Heresy within the region; as such, I will require your full cooperation in my investigation."

The fat priest began to smile wickedly as he waited for Berengar's answer; all they needed to do was plant some evidence in their investigation and get the local church and its parish to side with them. The inquisition would have enough justification to convict Berengar of Heresy and remove him from power. Whoever took over this minor Barony after his death was not of the Church's concern so long as they abided by the whims of the Vatican. However, the response Berengar gave Father Alphonse was completely out of his expectation. Berengar took a sip from his Chalice and placed it down on his armrest before shifting in his seat of power so that he was peering down at the priests below him with a gaze of intimidation.

"Under whose authority do you dare to investigate such accusations in my realm?"

All three of the priests were shocked as they stared at Berengar with contempt. Father Alphonse could no longer hold back his tongue; he had never witnessed such an impudent young Lord before; as such, he began to flex his backing to Berengar, attempting to intimidate him into allowing his improper investigation.

"Under the authority of the Holy Father himself!"

As such, the Priest pulled out a large scroll signed by the Pope; in it were the orders to investigate and purge Kufstein of any heretical thoughts and their believers. However, Berengar was unphased by these remarks and merely continued to gaze down upon the men with domineering and overbearing pressure.

"The last time I checked, these lands were ruled over with absolute authority by the Baron of Kufstein, my father who in his absence has appointed me Regent in his stead, to act with all the Authority of the Baron himself. As far as I'm concerned, neither the Pope nor the Vatican has any judicial authority in

my family's lands, and you would best return from whence you came before I deem your stay no longer welcome."

The words he spoke were chilling to the bone, and the other two members of the inquisition began to tremble in Berengar's presence. Only now the priests of the inquisition noticed the ranks of men equipped in half-plate armor and armed with what appeared to be a weird mixture of a hand cannon and spear staring at them with indifferent gazes. Berengar had called the most loyal and elite of his men here, the grenadiers, especially for this meeting. Men who had already fought and killed for Berengar at the Battle of Mining Town. Men who would willingly lay down their lives for their Lord and Commander who had brought them and their families up from servitude and into the well-paying jobs of industry.

Outraged by the outright blasphemy in which Berengar spoke, or at least as far as he was concerned, Father Alphonso no longer acted politely to Berengar and blatantly threatened him.

"Blasphemy! I am warning you, if you do not submit to our Investigation, then we will deem you guilty by default, and we will return with a holy order to raise this land of heathens to the ground!"

This threat against not only Berengar but the land and people under his dominion was the last straw. He was no longer willing to politely negotiate instead he stood up from his chair and stared down at the priests below as he gave his command to Eckhard, who was currently leading the unit of grenadiers which acted as Berengar's personal guard at this moment.

"Vice Commander Eckhard, arrest these men for conspiracy to usurp the Barony of Kufstein."

There was no hesitation in Eckhard's voice as he motioned for his men to follow the Regent's orders.

"Yes, My Lord, I will do as you command."

Quickly, the grenadiers surrounded the Priests and lowered their Bayonets to aim at the Inquisitors' chests.

Father Gilles began to protest immediately as the bayonets were mere inches away from piercing his heart.

"I am an emissary of the Holy Father; you cannot do this!"

Berengar began to step down the stone steps in front of his throne and approach the three men in front of him.

"Father Alphonse, Father Gilles, by the power invested in me as Regent of Kufstein, afforded to me by my father, Baron Sieghard von Kufstein. I hereby convict you of espionage, sabotage, and usurpation. Henceforth you shall be sentenced to death by firing squad. Men! Take these would-be usurpers out into the courtyard, line them against a wall and shoot them!

Immediately his troops responded in unison without a hint of disobedience in their collective voices

"Yes, My Lord!"

Afterward, the priests of the inquisition were dragged out of the great hall and brought into the courtyard, where the men lined up into a proper firing squad. Berengar dragged Father Antonio over to the window to watch from above as his comrades were executed. The terrified priest begged Berengar to rethink his actions and spare the Inquisitors' lives.

"Lord Berengar, if you do this, you will be excommunicated and branded a Heretic. The church will consider you an enemy for eternity!"

Berengar merely looked over at Father Antonio with a look of indifference and raised his hand, signaling the troops to fire their shots. The thunder of gunfire and the smell of smoke filled the air as the priests' bodies were shredded apart by a dozen musket balls, their blood splattering the stone walls of the Castle Courtyard like a painting of death.

Antonio looked in horror as his brothers were gunned down by the mighty hand cannons; he was only awoken from his shock when the Iron grip of Berengar grabbed ahold of his shoulder, the young and princely man stared into the eyes of the priest with the ice-cold gaze of a born-killer and responded to his earlier words.

"When you return to the Vatican inform the Holy Father, that he may have the power to Excommunicate me and to brand me a Heretic, but ultimately when I finally perish from this world it is under the Judgement of God, not the Pope that will determine whether or not I enter the Kingdom of Heaven... You will tell him that, yes?"

Antonio began to tremble in fear as if he had been touched by the cold hands of death and stared into the eyes of the grim reaper himself. After struggling to find his voice, he eventually said nothing and merely nodded at Berengar's "request."

From this day forth, Berengar had made a powerful enemy, one who would never forgive him for his actions here on this day. The divide would only grow further as Berengar refused to bend the knee to a corrupt, and bloated church, and the Supreme Pontiff who presided over it.