

Steel 68

Chapter 68: Escalation of Force

In the dead of night, under the lack of illumination of the new moon, a group of individuals clad in dark clothing set forth from the town of Kitzbühel and began to engage in a sinister plot to burn the local granaries. With this act of sabotage, the people of Kitzbühel would lack food stored and be forced to purchase food from their neighbors to survive. Not only was this an act of retaliation from Berengar to Baron Guntrum, but it was also a way to force Guntrum to the bargaining table so that his shipment could be returned.

As such, the individuals snuck in the darkness of the night around the granaries, which were guarded by a unit of the town guard. However, the men appeared to be half asleep at the moment and were having difficulties staying awake. This was because they had been to the tavern earlier that evening and drank wine mixed with a sedative, which the local tavern workers had provided to them. The entirety of the tavern staff was either directly or indirectly involved with Berengar's spy network.

The saboteurs waited another fifteen minutes before the men were completely unconscious. Afterward, they lit up a few torches they had brought with them and tossed them inside the granary. Before long, the majority of the town's food stores were lit ablaze, and the perpetrators had absconded into the night, never to be caught.

By morning Baron Guntrum von Kitzbühel was furious; he was not sure how, but this could only be the act of the Regent of the neighboring Barony, who else would have cause and conscious of engaging in such vile behavior. Currently, he sat with his council of advisors, who each had a different view on how to proceed further. His Chancellor was the first to speak his concerns among the group of aging men.

"This is clearly an act to bring us to the negotiating table; I say we comply before things get out of hand. We should return the shipment and allow his traders free passage through our lands under the condition that Kufstein compensates us for the loss of food stores. It is the only reasonable action!"

Guntrum's marshal was of an entirely different opinion; he spat on the ground in disgust of the Chancellor's opinion on the matter.

"What we need to do is return this despicable action in kind. If we can torch their granaries, they will be in just as bad a situation as we are. Then they will think twice before provoking us further."

Quickly the council chamber broke into bickering as none of Baron Guntrum's advisors could agree on a solution. Ultimately the Baron pounded his fist on the table and made his decision known.

"We will return this act of sabotage with one of our own. Not only will we burn down his granaries, but we will sabotage his steel factories in which he is so proud of. That way, we will hurt his trade far worse than simply seizing a shipment of steel and textiles!"

Though many of his advisors recognized that this might lead to an outright declaration of war, they could no longer sway their Baron any further. As such, his decree was made, and his saboteurs were set to task. They would sneak into Kufstein in the night and engage in their criminal acts.

...

It was now the dead of night, and once more, a group of black-clothed and masked individuals was up to no good. However, the shoe was on the other foot this time as these people quickly crossed the Border and rode towards Kufstein under cover of darkness. However, unfortunately for them, Berengar was expecting an act of retaliation and had set his forces in the shadows in at the task to hunt down and eliminate the would-be saboteurs. The moment they step foot into Kufstein, their actions were already being closely monitored by Berengar's assassins.

The Town Guard heavily guarded the Industrial district, and as such, the saboteurs could not find a way to enter it unnoticed. Before long, the leader of the group exclaimed in defeat.

"This is impossible! Why the hell does he have this place locked down like it is some fortress?"

However, an unfamiliar voice came from the shadows, which immediately put him and his team on high alert. However, the origin of the voice was completely shrouded in the darkness.

"Because his Majesty Berengar has many secrets to hide, kind of like these"

The last thing the would-be saboteurs saw was a flash of blinding light as they heard the thunder of the guns echo in the night; before they could even react, their bodies were torn to shreds by the revolving flintlock pistols of the assassins who had surrounded the saboteurs without their knowledge. These prototype weapons were issued to Berengar's spies and assassins and were based on the Collier revolving flintlock pistol from his previous life.

Immediately the Town guards were alerted and rushed to the sounds of the gunshots with their Muskets loaded and ready for combat. However, when they arrived, they saw the corpses of the saboteurs riddled with musket balls, with no sign of the perpetrators.

Half an hour later, Berengar was enjoying schnitzel and spaetzle with a nice cold lager at the dinner table in which he ate by his lonesome despite it being well past midnight. His family was all asleep, though even if they were awake, it would not matter. Berengar had become accustomed to eating his meals with only Linde to accompany him. However, she currently was not present. Unfortunately, Lambert's actions had devastated his family, and he had not seen Henrietta in weeks. However, according to her servants, she was still alive and eating the food brought to her. As for his mother, Gisela, she had secluded herself alongside Sieghard where they continued to read the bible Berengar had given her to find some answer to the Lord's plan, and by extension, Lambert's sinful actions.

At this moment, Linde approached with an excited expression, though the moment she saw Berengar was eating a midnight snack, which just so happened to be her favorite meal, she pouted like a child.

"You could have told me you were eating; I would have surely joined you!"

Berengar chuckled as he finished his meal and wiped his mouth with his napkin before draining the remainder of his beer down his gullet. Afterward, he teased Linde with his response.

"Too late now."

This caused her to pout further, though eventually, she remember her reason for seeking him out and gave him the good news.

"Just as you had expected, Guntrum sent men to sabotage the granary and the factories; your hands assassinated them before they could cause any trouble."

Berengar smiled wickedly as he grabbed Linde and pressed her into his embrace before kissing her passionately.

"Excellent, everything is going as plan; as long as the violence keeps escalating, sooner or later, he will give me a valid *Cassus Belli* for me to declare war on him. Hopefully, I don't have to wait long..."

With that said, he dragged his sly lover back to his room and enjoyed the rest of his waking hours training her.