

## Steel 74

### *Chapter 74: Throw them to the Wolves!*

The dawn had risen, and Baron Guntrum and his family had not been able to get a wink of sleep. Instead, they were huddled in the great hall listening to the near-constant thunder of guns while shivering in fear. Baron Guntrum's 2-year-old daughter was particularly frightened by the thunder that echoed throughout the night and held onto her father's hand firmly.

"Daddy, I'm scared..."

The look on Baron Guntrum's face was not reassuring; after all, in his declaration of war, Berengar had promised to show no mercy to Guntrum or his family. If the walls crumbled and the enemy forces rushed into his keep, there was no chance of survival. As such, he had begun to regret his decision to provoke Berengar in the name of the Church. Why was God testing him in such a manner? What had he done to deserve this fate? Those were the questions the pious noblemen asked himself as the echoes of the cannons continued to bombard his castle.

However, shortly after praying to the Lord, the thunder of the guns had ceased; after waiting nearly half an hour for the bombardment to resume, there was still only silence from his enemies. As if his prayers had been Answered, Guntrum rushed outside to see for himself what was transpiring. After standing atop the walls, which had been greatly diminished by the night of bombardment, he could see the Besieging forces standing idly by in their siege camp below. He could not help but wonder if they had run out of munitions.

At the next moment, a small lead projectile whizzed past his face, and the thunder of the rifle which had fired it echoed in the distance. He quickly ducked below the ramparts and hid from the enemy fire. Just what kind of weapon was that? Seeing that his men were cowering in fear beneath the protection of the walls, he could not help but empathize with their pain. As such, he quickly returned to the keep, where he hid with his family once more, though the cannons may have stopped the hand cannons in which the enemies used posed a significant threat to anyone stupid enough to expose themselves.

...

Berengar was currently standing in the middle of his siege camp in front of three men who were stripped of their arms and armor and currently wearing nothing more than the gambeson they wore beneath it. These three men were of his father's forces, and they were currently bound and kneeling in front of him. During the night, these men had abandoned their posts and raided the local town; they had even raped a local teenage girl who was ever so slightly older than Adela, which Berengar found disgusting and unforgivable. However, they did not pull this off on their lonesome. Clearly, there were other people involved. However, only these three men were caught, and they were not willing to rat out their brothers in arms.

Berengar strode back and forth in front of the men and glared menacingly at them. His fury exuded from the very depths of his soul as he lectured the surrounding army, which was forced to bear witness to this scene.

"I have made my orders very clear, the local population are not to be harmed, and yet the three of you have disobeyed my orders. You abandoned your posts in the night to engage in raiding, raping, pillaging, and burning while flying the colors of my family! Do you have any idea how this makes me look, as the Lord and Commander of this army?!"

Standing next to Berengar was the little girl on which the three men had preyed upon; her family had remained in the region, along with a few of the more stubborn families who did not wish to leave their homes behind. After Berengar had heard about their crimes, he instantly had the men arrested and interrogated. Unfortunately, they were quite resilient and did not rat out any other members of his father's forces who had acted in a similar manner.

As such, Berengar was left with no further options and had gathered his army and the villagers alike to witness the upcoming scene. Berengar spat in disgust on the men bound before him and boldly declared for all to hear.

"As Regent of the Barony of Kufstein, and Commander of this army, I hereby find you three men guilty of War Crimes and sentence you to death by firing squad. May God have mercy on your souls..."

As such, Berengar motioned for his militia to drag the three men away to a safe area where they would publically execute the soldiers. While the men were tied up to posts and prepared for their execution, Berengar addressed his armies with a vicious gaze.

"Any one of you who is guilty of engaging in this activity in the future will be afforded the same punishment! I come to these lands as a conqueror, but that does not mean my army will act like a bunch of brigands! You will obey my orders, or you will face the consequences!"

The members of his militia were fully disciplined in the manner in which Berengar desired to conduct war. Against enemy forces, Berengar would allow virtually any use of force. He was also not afraid of civilian casualties if they were caught in a bombardment or assault of an enemy's position. His ruthlessness in his pursuit of victory could be considered War Crimes by the standards of the 21st Century in which he resided during his past life.

However, as far as Berengar was concerned, raiding, raping, murdering, and other crimes of the like which deliberately targetted unarmed civilian populations were absolutely unforgivable, especially when enacted against those he deemed to be children. Unfortunately for him, these things were common in this feudal era, especially during sieges, and his father's professional forces did not take his warnings seriously.

Berengar comforted the girl who had been violated by the men in his father's army as he crouched down and got into her line of sight.

"I know that no apology I could give you can make up for the crimes that you have endured under my watch. However, I hope you can find solace in the fact that justice has been dealt to the perpetrators..."

With this said, Berengar returned his attention to the public execution and motioned for it to proceed. The criminals were tied to posts, and a proper firing squad of a dozen men was formed as they raised their muskets. Eckhard personally gave the commands that led to the deaths of these men who were guilty of doing nothing more than what was a common occurrence in this primitive era.

"Ready! Aim! Fire!"

With the last command given, the thunder of the muskets echoed as their projectiles shredded the bodies of the men who were tied against posts and ended their miserable existence. Many of the soldiers from his father's army were shocked and outraged at Berengar's action. Until the moment it transpired they truly believed Berengar was just bluffing in an attempt to scare them into following his ludicrous ideas of civility in warfare.

The last orders Berengar gave before the gathered crowd would act as a permanent reminder to the men under his command as to the ruthlessness Berengar would enact upon those who failed to follow his orders.

"Throw them to the wolves!"

With that said, the criminals' corpses were cut down from the posts and left to rot in the wilderness; under Berengar's orders, they were not even afforded a proper burial...