

Chapter 10

There was grim work to be done this day, and it fell to Feredac of Peeblesshire to do it. Adopted into the Royal Family for his success in the field in Egypt, he'd travelled with Prince Alexander believing he was going to Crusade against the French. But the Pope had died, the Crusade had been dismissed, and Prince Alexander revealed that he and King Edward had conspired to join the Crusade in order for the former to return to a Scotland under siege without the English being any the wiser. Their triumphant march to Edinburgh had been one of the greatest moments of Feredac's life, as he'd returned to his Home Country for the first time since he was a lad, greeted by cheering Scotsmen, weeping wives and mothers, eager women and adoring children.

But Prince Alexander's good mood had soured almost immediately when he learned his mother, Margaret, had died shortly after the fall of York. He remained in mourning now, but had issued Feredac with a brusque command a week ago. Edinburgh was reinforced far beyond the English's capability to threaten it, but Inverness had been in rebel hands for decades now, and that was unacceptable. Feredac was to prove his worth by retaking the north for Scotland.

The problem was, the English Rebels who had denounced King William the Conqueror decades earlier might have been the ones who controlled and administered Inverness, but the people who defended it and fought for it were Scottish, and many of them kin to Feredac's own men.

Scots would kill Scots today, and as Feredac looked over his Highland men and their unusually grim faces, he knew he would gain no favor from them no matter how clear their victory would be.



Smashing through the gate with their catapults, Feredac ordered his Mailed Knights through first, followed by Highlanders and Highland Nobles who quickly found themselves facing off against their kin. Both sides seemed reluctant to join battle, and the Rebel Captain roared in fury for his men to fight, inadvertently calling attention to himself. The Mailed Knights rode through Rebel Highlanders and cut down Captain Domongart, and suddenly the Rebel Highlanders were roaring their defiance, furious at the death of their leader.

"Kill the bastards!" screamed one Scot, "They killed the Captain!"

"Kill the traitors!" roared a Highland Noble as the Rebels charged in, "They're nae but Englishmen in kilts!"

And Feredac breathed a sigh of relief as finally, battle proper was joined.





The battle lasted for several hours, and Feredac would never list it as a highlight of his life or military career. It was brutal, bloody and furious, with Kin killing Kin as the Scotsmen who had never known anything other than the rule of the English of Inverness fought against true Scotsmen who would never accept the rule of any other than a Scottish King. But whether ruled by English or Scots, one constant remained, a Scotsman would never surrender, and the bulk of Feredac's men died that day in Inverness wiping out the garrison of Scotsmen who refused to give up even after victory had become an impossibility. Come the battle's end, Feredac felt like anything but the victor.





Less than a fortnight later in York, England's King received word that a Scottish Diplomat had arrived at the gates, and gave leave for him to enter. The son of William the Conqueror had come to inspect the town that his father had lost to Rebels and HE had regained from Scotland, a rare accomplishment for Rufus to achieve something his Father had failed to do.

The diplomat was introduced as Gille Calline the Balleol, and one of Rufus' advisors informed him that Gille was a well regarded man, known for his respect and true diplomatic nature. Rufus had no doubt of Scotland's intentions; they were obviously focused on their Desert holdings in and around Egypt, and trailing like puppies behind the Pope to do his bidding. They'd reinforced Edinburgh to dissuade England from taking ancestral land, but there they would be satisfied. Obviously now they hoped to sue for peace from a position of equality with England, if such a thing could be said to exist, and Rufus - who like his Father before him was more interested in France than Scotland - felt generous enough to agree, provided they offered sufficient homage, money and tribute to him first.

"My Lord," said Gille with a perfectly proper bow, his accent flawlessly English, "You are a busy man concerned with affairs of State, as is my Prince in Edinburgh. I will not mince words or in any other way waste either of your valuable time, and will instead cut directly to the heart of the matter."

"He speaks well, considering he is about to drop to his knees and beg for peace," chuckled King Rufus in an aside to his Advisor, then spoke up, "Very well, We shall hear you, Diplomat."

"My Prince, Alexander Canmore of Edinburgh, instructs me to make this command of you," bellowed Gille, standing tall now and slipping into his natural Scottish accent, "Ye'll depart these lands immediately, ye'll surrender all ye lands and cities to the control of the Scottish Empire, ye armies shall disband and ye shall bow before Prince Alexander and beg his forgiveness for ye transgressions against his people. England shall become a vassal of the Scottish Empire, and if ye do not submit to this command from ye better, than Prince Alexander shall cut ye arrogant, pigfaced head from ye shoulders and mount it on a pike over the walls of York."

King Rufus stared in shock, his face growing black with rage and his eyes bugging from their sockets as Gille smirked mockingly and bowed before him, slipping once more into flawless English, "What do you say, my Lord? Shall you submit to Prince Alexander's command?"

"OUT!" screamed Rufus, leaping to his feet from his throne, "HOW DARE YOU ENTER MY CITY AND INSULT NOT JUST ME, BUT ALL OF ENGLAND!?!? I SHOULD CUT YOUR GIZZARD OUT WHERE YOU STAND, CUR! GO BACK TO YOUR PIGSWINE PRINCE AND TELL HIM I WILL CRUSH HIM AND WIPE HE AND HIS DOGSPAWN COUNTRYMEN FROM THE WORLD AND SEND THEM STRAIGHT TO HELL!"

"I take it that is a no, then," grinned Gille, and turned on his heel and walked from the Court with a smile.

Captain Stephen had marched from Nottingham immediately after received the urgent summons. He and 500 men had been recuperating after dealing with a Rebel band North of London when the message arrived. The Scottish Prince had marched from Edinburgh and laid siege to York against all reason, why would Scotland - the bulk of whose forces were on the other edge of the World - invite the wrath of England when they were in such an isolated position.

Still, madness or not, Stephen was looking forward to the chance to kill a Scottish Noble. Like many others he had heard the songs of King Edward and Prince Edmund's adventures in Egypt, and the chance to kill a member of the Canmore Family, to prove himself in battle against them.... well it was more than he could have hoped for in his lifetime. His men were Armored Knights, some of the best fighters in England, and despite the apparent superior numbers of the Scottish, he had no doubt most could not stand against his

men.

The first snows of the Season were lightly coating the hills around York when Captain Stephen crested the hill and saw the Scottish host beneath him. He ordered the positioning of his men, being careful that his catapults were placed behind the hill and out of sight. The Scots would never see the flaming rocks coming for them, and he only hoped that not too many would die or break and flee before he had a chance to kill some himself. The Scots below were aware of his presence by now, and preparing to face the English who stood on the upper ground, while in York itself King Rufus laughed with delight to hear of Captain Stephen's arrival and prepared his own men to ride out and help to mop up the Scots. He could only wonder what the Scottish Prince was saying now to keep his terrified men from fleeing.



"Look lads, the English have brought more men for us to kill!" cried Prince Alexander, and his men roared their approval. Alexander grinned, his grief at his Mother's death had ruined his triumphant homecoming, but since marching out of Edinburgh he'd felt.... at home. When he'd learned of the English movement against Scotland, he'd gone to King Edward prepared to do anything to convince the man to return to Scotland, he'd even considered revealing he and David's plans against Edward and offering his own life if only Edward would defend his home country. But when he'd arrived, Edward had just been informed of the siege and if anything seemed to be even more enraged than Alexander. He'd raged on as he paced his tent before a startled Alexander, threatening to empty the cities and fight their way through Europe to kill the English, those presumptuous bastards!

Finally, after calming down, he had sat Alexander down, stared him in the face and said, "Brother, together we must find a way to protect Scotland from the English."

It was the first time he'd called him Brother.

Now here Alexander was, having lead a Crusading Army to Toulouse only for the Crusade to be called off. Their plans had been to take the City to appease the Pope, then have Gille Calline the Balleol work out a peace deal with France while Alexander travelled by boat up the Welsh Coast and landed at Edinburgh. Instead, providence had seen the Crusade ended and Alexander had been able to move straight back to Scotland, where King Edward had given him his blessing to defend Scotland in whatever way he saw fit.

"If that means killing every English bastard there is, then so be it," King Edward had growled, and Alexander had finally realised that this man WAS his King, and let him carve out an Empire in Egypt if he wished. Alexander was a Canmore, he was back in Scotland, and much like Edward and Edmund before him, he was going to carve out his own Empire and be a King in all but name. One day maybe his sons would rise to the throne, but if not, so be it - they would rule Scotland regardless.

"There are English up there, lads!" cried Alexander, and his men grinned at him. He was personable and friendly with his troops, always had been, and since relieved of the stress of trying to find a way to take the Crown from Edward, he'd returned somewhat to the carefree boy he'd once been, "Kill them!"

"KILL!" roared his Commanders, signalling the charge.

"KILL!" roared the men, gripping their weapons and preparing to move.

"Kill," said Captain Stephen simply, and his Armored Knights charged down the hill.





Captain Stephen frowned as he realized that not only were the Scottish not breaking and fleeing, but they seemed to be holding their own against the Armored Knights. Highland Nobles began to sweep up around the sides of the Knights, surrounding them and preventing them from moving freely.

"Fire the Catapult!" he ordered, "Let's see how brave they are then!"



Scots scattered as a flaming rock smashed into the ground near them, and then whole units began to run, all of them screaming.

The problem for Captain Stephen and his men, is that they were running **towards** them, and they weren't screaming in terror but in fury and defiance.



As Stephen roared for his men to hold their places and stop the advance of the Scots, a trumpet sounded in the distance. Looking down the hill, he laughed with relief as he saw King Rufus leading a charge directly into the rear of the Scottish.



"Charge!" screamed Prince Alexander, and led his Cavalry smashing into the side of Rufus' as higher on the hill, crossbowmen turned their attention from the Armored Knights above them to the Royal Cavalry below them.

"WHERE IS PRINCE ALEXANDER!?" roared King Rufus, "LET ME HEAR HIM COMMAND ME NOW!"

"HERE I AM, YE ENGLISH BASTARD!" roared back Alexander, stabbing his sword into an Englishman's belly and throwing him from his horse, "ARE YE MAN ENOUGH TO FACE ME!"

"TURN ASIDE FOR YOUR KING!" screamed Rufus, insane with rage, "I AM THE SON OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR! YOU ARE THE SON OF A SCOTTISH TURD!"

King Rufus smashed his heels into his horse's sides and charged it forward, pushing it through his own men as he focused on Prince Edward, several hundred yards away cutting and slashing at the English that neared him. He broke free of the greater bulk of his Cavalry, whose job was to protect him from danger, and found himself immediately in it.



"What treachery is this!?" he cried as he saw himself surrounded by Crusader Knights, men who had run down to assist their Prince against the King. Men who the King had not seen from his vantage point as Prince Alexander mocked and goaded him.

Men who were clutching swords and coming straight for him from all sides.



"Thus ends the reign of a fool who thought he could conquer Scotland," grunted Prince Alexander, then looked up the hill at the remaining English forces. A small group of Armored Knights were charging forward, enraged at the death of their King, but behind them the Captain was signalling for retreat, knowing that the day was lost for them.

"Dinnae let them escape, lads!" cried Alexander, "Send a message to these English dogs, Scotland for the Scottish!"

His men charged screaming and laughing, caught up in a battle fervor, and the English ran, throwing aside weapons and armor that weighted them down, running from men possessed, running from the Scottish.





"This," whispered Prince Alexander as he watched the English fleeing before his men, "is only the beginning."

Chapter 11

Prince Edmund reluctantly closed his copy of Liber de Compositione Alchemiae and set it aside, his mind abuzz with the scientific musings contained within. The Affairs of State called, and if his duties sometimes seemed overwhelming, he often reminded himself that things were much worse for Edward, and he couldn't imagine the logistics of dealing with Alexander's war with England.

"My Lord, thank ye for ye time," smiled the first representative from the Explorers Guild, James, "We have always appreciated the patronage of ye and the King."

"Indeed," smiled Edmund, "But my time is limited, so please...."

"Oh indeed," smiled the second Guild member, Sean, "We have come because word has reached us that Prince Alexander has recently retaken York from the English?"

"Aye, it's true," nodded Edmund, "How does this bear on the Explorers Guild?"

"Well it's just that...." started James.

"Dublin is nearby," finished Sean, "Across the ocean in Ireland, Dublin holds an old Guild Hall unused for decades now. If Scotland controlled Dublin, the Guild Hall could be put into use once more."

".....and?" asked Edmund, confused.

"We'd like ye to take Dublin, my Lord," James said nervously.

"Oh, is that all," smiled Edmund, "Shall we take control of Rome on the way? Just for a giggle?"

"But we're Allied with the Holy Roman Empi...." started James, only to be silenced by Sean.

"The movement of the army in England, Wales and Ireland is the affair of Prince Alexander," Edmund continued, his eyes straying back to Liber de Compositione Alchemiae, "If he feels it is in Scotland's best interests to take Dublin, he shall."

"I do not think ye understand, my Lord," said Sean, his voice rising, "The Explorers Guild would be very happy if ye were to take Dublin. If nae, then...."

"Aye?" asked Edmund, raising an eyebrow, "What then?"

"Then," said James, leaning forward with a hard look on his bookish features, "We will be very disappointed in ye."

Edmund stared at them for a moment, surprised, then nodded and promised them he would do what he could. They seemed satisfied, and left him to his studies. Once Edmund was certain they were gone, he burst out laughing, and did not stop for quite some time. He hadn't been so genuinely amused for a very long time.

New Mission



Take Settlement

Time Remaining	10 turns
Source	Explorers' Guild
Description	The Guild's interests would be better looked after if this settlement were to become part of your empire. The Guild requests that you take this settlement.
Target	Dublin
Reward	The Explorers' Guild will be very happy with you. You will receive florins from the Guild.
Penalty	The Explorers' Guild will be very disappointed in you.

Less amused, at this current time, was Crown Prince Finguine, heir to the Empire of Scotland. He'd been left to govern Baghdad in the hope that he would grow used to the administration duties that would be his as King of Scotland, and for the most part he had done well. The City profited from taxes, and what was left over from the money sent to King Edward to help him fuel his campaigns was used to improve the city. Problems in the early months of his Governorship had been dealt with using the ruthless efficiency that had made him such an effective battlefield commander, and the threat of riots on the street was a thing of the past. But now a new concern had risen, and it was one he could not fight or deal with in any conventional sense.

Death Stalks The Land



God bless us! The cursed plague has struck, with good folk perishing within a short while of contracting the vile malaise. If this is divine punishment as some say, then the people must have sinned terribly!

Settlements Affected
Baghdad

Citizens killed: 1079
Soldiers killed: 44

The plague had struck Baghdad, and turned the city into a pariah. No diplomats came, no merchants, no spies (a small mercy) and no foreign armies (a large mercy). But they did not come because people were dying of the deadly disease, and Finguine could do nothing but contain the sick areas of the City and hope that when the disease passed, he and his family still lived.

On the mountain border with the Turks, a Turkish Spy was found inside Adana and escaped when challenged. News was sent immediately to King Edward, who received the report angrily. He'd hoped a trade deal with the Turks would keep them placated and away from his Cities, leaving him free to campaign to the West against the Moors. Now he had to revise his plans, maybe the Turks were only interested in gathering intelligence... but maybe they were preparing an invasion force. He would have to consider this carefully.



But in Scotland itself, for the first time in two decades, the peoples of Scotland had no concerns about their own security. Prince Alexander had returned, he'd brought a massive army with him, he'd killed the King of England in battle and retaken Inverness and York. Truly now was a wonderful time to be Scottish, and Captain Angus Bell was enjoying it. He'd fought in the battle for York and cursed missing the chance to bring down King Rufus, whose head even now adorned a pike on the walls of the City. Now he'd been gifted a chance to act again for Prince Alexander, who had received word that the survivors of the Battle of York were still camped to the South. A Highland Noble, Captain Angus' family had all died at the hands of the English years earlier, and he was the last of his line. He saw in Prince Alexander a chance to bring glory to his family name, and with any luck gain some recognition from the Prince that would give him a chance to buy land, find a wife of either Noble or wealthy birth who would bear him children, and keep the Bell line going.

But England's Captain Stephen stood in his way, a battle-hardened veteran in control of nearly 150 Armored Knights who had survived war against over 1000 Scots.

But this time the English did not hold against the superior numbers of the Scottish, because Angus had reckoned on what held them together - their Captain. He directed his men directly against Captain Stephen, the sheer weight of his men forcing them through and allowing them to strike him down, and with the death of their leader, the surviving English ran, disappearing into the hills and abandoning the Army.





Captain Angus reported back to York, where his victory in what could best be described as a minor skirmish was widely hailed, much to his embarrassment. He wanted recognition, of course, but they'd killed only around sixty men, and they themselves had a hundred times that number in their ranks. But Prince Alexander lauded him as a true Scottish Noble, and taking him aside at a victory feast he told him that he had been watching the young Captain, seeing in him great potential. The attack on the English Knights had been designed to test his worth in commanding on the field, and he was satisfied with what he had seen.

"I shall give ye command of 1300 men, my lad," Prince Alexander told him merrily, holding a cup of ale in his hand as he walked Angus through the Great Hall away from the raucous banquet hall, "And send ye to lay siege to Nottingham. I have plans that require my presence in York, but I do nae wish the English to grow comfortable with my presence. Ye'll lay siege to Nottingham, aye, and ye'll take the blasted City, and we'll teach the English the price of seeking control of Scottish land!"

All of which Angus listened to with a head muffled by ale, and all of which he agreed eagerly to, though even in his drunken state he knew that a siege of Nottingham in the middle of Winter was pure madness suggested only because of the Prince's merry state. Surely Prince Alexander would have changed his mind on the morrow, but would remember Angus' willingness and reward him..

Prince Alexander did not change his mind on the morrow.



Angus sat his horse, a perk of his new position as an adopted member of the Royal Family. He'd been hastily adopted in before leaving York, and was still somewhat breathless from the sudden events of the last few weeks. He'd gone from a landless son of an extinct noble family to a Captain in Prince Alexander's army to a General of his men to a member of the Royal Family. It had been a heady rise, and he kept reminding himself that it was all worth it, even if it meant he and 1300 men were shivering in a snowstorm in the dark outside Nottingham, with an unknown number of English soldiers reported to be somewhere on the road behind them.

"It's bloody cold, even for a Scotsman!" he hissed to himself, then raised his voice, "It's cold men, shall we warm our blood!?"

There were a few scattered cheers from his men, but most were too cold to do anything but watch and wait for the order to attack. Angus realized now wasn't the time for the noble speeches sung of by minstrels, but for action.

"Let's at them, then!" he roared, and then because he could not resist, added the call that Prince Alexander had cried after the death of King Rufus, "Scotland for the Scottish!"

"SCOTLAND FOR THE SCOTTISH!" roared his men, surprising Angus, who sat blinking momentarily before giving the order for the ladders to make for the walls, and the ram to make for the Gate.



The Knights holding the walls shivered in their armor, asking themselves not for the last time that night why the hell the Scottish couldn't go to war at a more civilized time of year... and then they were fighting for their lives as Scotsman came up their ladders and over the walls, swinging their claymores and roaring like demons out of the snow



On the ground, the ram had done its work and the Scots poured into the city, met by a Cavalry charge from the English General, Francis, who was cursing Captain Toby for not reaching the city with the reinforcements before the mad Scots broke their way in.



Francis swung about him with his sword, his arm stiff and slow to react in the cold, while the demon Scottish seemed not to feel it.... God's Blood! Many of them were wearing kilts! From his horse he had a good view over the Scots attacking the city, and they seemed without number, a curse upon Nottingham. But then he spied something odd, the Scots that had overrun the walls seemed to be being attacked from behind themselves, and he could see a red banner on the cavalry riding towards the broken gate.... Captain Toby had arrived!

"You're for it now, you Scottish curs!" he roared, slashing clumsily at a Scotsman who deftly stepped aside and grabbed his arm, hauling him from the horse. His mount reacted angrily to the sudden loss of its master, and kicked out roughly, knocking aside the Scotsman who hauled Francis down. The General staggered to his feet and screamed, "TO MY SIDE, TOBY! YOUR GENERAL NEEDS YOU!"

"Will I do!?" laughed a voice, and a member of Angus' Cavalry bodyguard rode into General Francis, riding him down where he stood.





"NO!" screamed Captain Toby, kicking his horse to a faster speed, leaving the rest of his men behind as he charged forward through the gates to avenge his General.... and rode directly into the pikes of a unit of Scottish Pike Militia who had seen him coming.

"I think we got him, lads!" laughed the Pike Commander, and his men cheered in delight.... their blood was up, the cold couldn't touch them in their battle fervor, and best of all the English were dying in droves!





The surviving cavalry of both General Francis and Captain Toby joined up, staring aghast as the surviving English militia was torn to shreds by the Scottish Infantry.

"Ride to the fortress!" snapped one, "If we can get inside we can hold them out till reinforcements can arrive from London!"

"They'll hold Nottingham proper," spat back another, "They'll starve us out and our reinforcements will have to lay siege to them!"

"We'll never retake the city from down in this position, and we'll die out in that storm if we try to ride to London, it's the fortress or death!"

They rode like their lives were on the line... and they were.

They rode like there were demons behind them... and if you'd asked, they would have said there were.

They reached the open portcullis of Nottingham Castle, but the "demons" arrived with them, the English and Scottish Cavalry clashing as Angus led his men against the survivors of Francis and Toby. Fighting for their lives, the English fought with a fury that the Scottish could respect, and as man and horse fell screaming into the bloody snow, Angus suddenly felt the cold once more, the first he'd noticed it since the battle begun and his blood had seemed to boil with battle-lust.

"Why.... why is it so cold....?" he asked, as his face turned pale and his men cried out in dismay around him.

"So.... cold...." he whispered, and fell from his horse, his blood joining that of the other dead, whether English or Scottish.

The Noble Bell Family was no more.



The Scottish roared in fury at the death of their General and pushed in against the hard-pressed English Cavalry, cutting them down, showing no mercy. It was a scene repeated throughout the city, in the streets and on the walls, as the English militia that had come to the aid of Nottingham died there. The Scots gave no quarter, even when the surviving English broke and ran in mindless terror, falling from the walls or under the hooves of the Scottish Cavalry. Some outside the city were in such terror that they actually climbed the walls to escape their Scottish pursuers, only to find more waiting for them atop the walls.

And the Scots killed, and killed, and killed. The cold could not slow their arms, but finally sheer exhaustion did, as every last English soldier was killed, and the city of Nottingham claimed in the name of Scotland!





In York, Prince Alexander smiled as the person he'd summoned to his office entered. Still only a boy, but tall already, and showing such promise... soon he would be a man.

"Adam," smiled Alexander, "Please, take a seat, be comfortable."

"Father," nodded Adam properly, taking a seat and sitting still, waiting for his Father to speak. He had been raised to respect his Father, as Malcolm had raised Alexander. But unlike his own Father, Alexander had been careful to foster a close relationship with his eldest, lest he find history repeating the lessons of Malcolm, Edward and Edmund. He was so proud of the lad, and made sure he knew it. Despite having a healthy interest in women like all men, Alexander's curse was an inability to perform his duties in the bedroom, with few exceptions. One of those exceptions has resulted in Adam, and Alexander considered him a true blessing.

"I have called ye here to conduct a brief lesson in both command, and the duties of a General and a Prince," explained Alexander, "Ye've heard of the victory at Nottingham?"

"Aye Father," nodded Adam, "I was saddened to hear Angus had died."

"Aye," agreed Alexander, "The lad showed promise, and we need able Generals in Scotland. So many of our best Commanders remain in the Desert with King Edward, and I'd hoped to make a new Finguine of him... but enough of tragedy, let us talk of victory."

"Over the English?" asked Adam, and Alexander grinned in spite of himself. Oh the boy was quick, he would make a fine Prince, and maybe one day.....

"Aye, the English," he said, and drew out a large map, standing to spread it on the table, "None but my closest Generals have seen this map and heard what I am about to tell ye, lad, but ye must learn the ways of battle strategy, and ye'll nae get a chance to study firsthand the tactics for such a large contemporary battle again for many years, God willing."

Adam stood and eyed the map critically, and then gasped as he realized what he was seeing.

"Aye, son," laughed Alexander, "It's what ye think it is. Within a month ye'll have reached ye manhood, and I shall leave ye to govern York in my absence, while I bloody the nose of the English more than they've ever felt before."

With a wide grin crossing his face and excitement in his eyes, Adam listened as Alexander explained his plans for the battle, why he would be doing what he did, what he would be hoping to avoid, and how he would deal with it if worst-case scenarios occurred. He took it all in, and despite his best intentions to avoid taking childish delight at a time when he was on the cusp of manhood and his Father was treating him with the respect due a full grown man... he could not help but exult in the scenarios being laid out to him.

His Father was going to take London from the English!

Chapter 12

Edmund of Amersham sat glowering at the Scottish Diplomat before him, who met his gaze with an earnest smile upon his face. The English Noble growled low in his throat, he hated it when people weren't cowed by his sneers.

"I'll hear your words, Scotsman," he grunted, "But be aware, this is not York where my late King held only a small garrison and your coward Prince come with thousands. London is the mightiest City in England, and my forces number amongst 500 of the finest veterans in the world. I'll hear no arrogant talk or insults from you, speak your piece so I can reject it and have you gone from my City, and my servants can wash away the stink of Scottish filth."

Dauid Besat's face remained earnest and open, even as he thought to himself with an inner smirk that English Diplomacy appeared to be somewhat different to what he'd been taught in Scotland.

"Noble Lord," smiled Dauid, "I regret that the words spoken to ye former King were spoken so harshly, and it is my fondest hope that Scotland and England can come together again in a more... familial relationship."

Edmund's upper lip curled in an approximation of a smile, this was more like it. The cur was practically on his belly and begging, just like a Scotsman should before his English betters.

"Demands were made of ye former King, demands he rightly rejected in rage," continued Dauid, "Truly have we in Scotland learned the error of our ways, never would we demand of ye again, as if ye were a recalcitrant child to be disciplined. Rather we have come to realize that England is nae small, angry spoilt child.... and we hardly parents to offer discipline."

Edmund frowned, where was this fool going with this line of diplomacy?

Dauid smiled, "Aye, we know now that England is but a feeble old man, past its use and too addle-minded to realize it has become a subject of pity. So we make no demands of ye, we will not force ye to kneel before us and become vassal to our will. Rather, Scotland comes to ye like a loving brother, and offer ye to submit willingly to our will and become a vassal state, so that we may care for ye, and keep ye from further embarrassing yeself before the world. **That** is Scotland's offer to ye, and we suggest ye take heed that this is ye last chance for peace with us."

Edmund of Amersham, Governor of London and the last member of the English Royal Family actually based in England, gripped the sides of his chair and gritted his teeth, hissing out words as he forced himself from tearing across the table and beating the Diplomat to death, "Get. Out!"

Dauid - face still earnest and open - stood, bowed and left Edmund to sit fuming in fury.

Scotland England

At War for 16 turns

Dauid Besat

Edmund of Amersham

We shall listen to your proposal, but do not expect much.

Details & Behaviour

Relations: Abysmal
Reputation: Despicable
Power: Supreme
Wealth: 716
Religion: Catholic

Private Dealings
Bribe

Make offer
Attack faction
Give region
Make single payment
Regular tribute
Map information

Make demand
Attack faction
Give region
Make single payment
Regular tribute
Map information

Demeanour: Receive Enemy

Your offers
Accept or we will attack

Your demands
Become a vassal

Proposal Balance: Very Demanding

Make offer

Details & Behaviour

Priorities: Unknown
Reputation: Trustworthy
Power: Average
Wealth: Meagre
Religion: Catholic

Allies & Enemies

Allies: Milan
Enemies: France
Scotland
Rebels

Current Treaties:
None

Scotland England

At War for 16 turns

Dauid Besat

Edmund of Amersham

Never! Do you think us foolish and meek? Why do you think we have not surrendered yet? Maintaining our freedom is as important as

Details & Behaviour

Relations: Abysmal
Reputation: Despicable
Power: Supreme
Wealth: 716
Religion: Catholic

Private Dealings
Bribe

Make offer
Ceasefire
Attack faction
Give region
Make single payment
Regular tribute
Map information

Make demand
Attack faction
Give region
Make single payment
Regular tribute
Become a vassal

Demeanour: Firmly Rejected

Make offer

Details & Behaviour

Priorities: Unknown
Reputation: Trustworthy
Power: Average
Wealth: Meagre
Religion: Catholic

Allies & Enemies

Allies: Milan
Enemies: France
Scotland
Rebels

Current Treaties:
None

Later that night, Edmund entered his room still furious. It wasn't just that the mind of the Scottish Prince was still so addled from the Egyptian sun that he thought he could make England a vassal.... but that their diplomat had likened England to a feeble-minded, doddering old man.

"How dare they!" he roared, kicking a chair, "They're **SCOTTISH!**"

"Aye, we are," hissed a voice, and Edmund spun about in shock. From the dark recess of his window appeared a hooded figure, unfolding a long, thin frame like some kind of human spider.

"What treachery is..." started Edmund, and then the figure was closing the distance between them, moving like liquid, a gleam coming from his hand a....."UGH!"

"Ye should have taken Scotland's pity," whispered Fearghus Maknab, sliding his blade expertly into the startled English noble's chest, "Better a dog begging for scraps than a proud corpse."

Edmund started to collapse, Fearghus easily holding the heavy man up despite his thin frame. The Assassin deposited the dead Noble into his chair and slid it against the desk, pinning the body upright. He wrapped Edmund's hand around the hilt of the blade and returned it to the wound, spilling wine all about and carefully placing Edmund's own notes and reports about the Scottish Army's strength about the desk. Let them think their Lord had despaired of facing the Scots and taken his own life like a coward, it would drive fear into the hearts of the English, and turn the Scottish into devils in their mind.

As far as Fearghus Maknab was concerned, that was just fine by him.

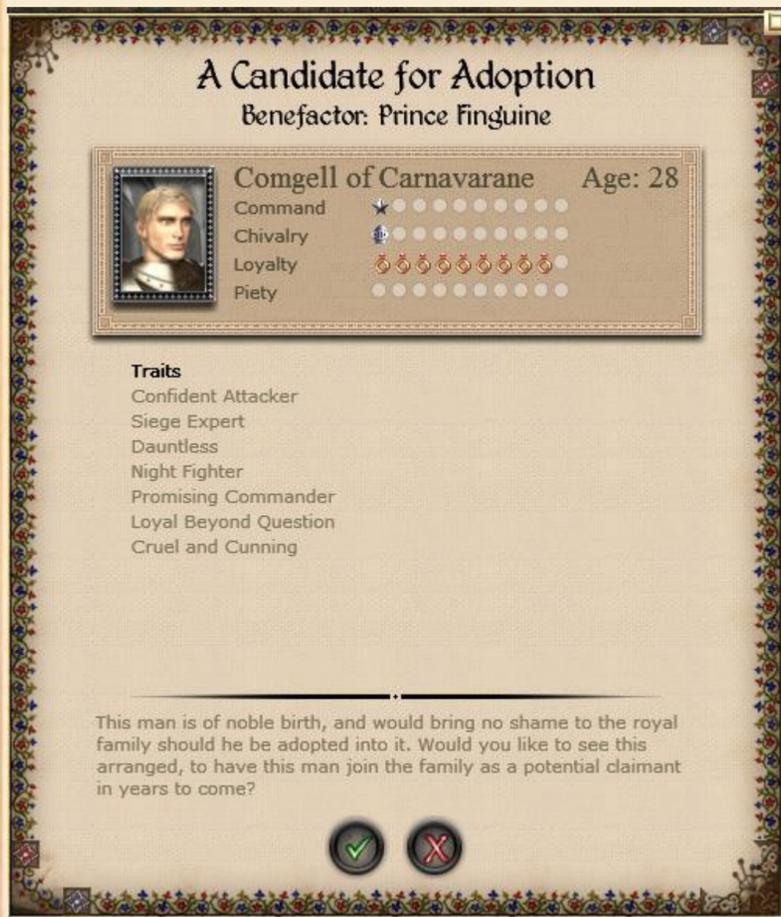


Far away, on the other edge of the world, Crown Prince Finguine stared in disbelief at the small force of men approaching through the desert.

"What madmen would ride in such small numbers to a city cursed by the plague," he growled.

"I know not, my Lord," replied his second-in-command and adopted son, Comgell of Carnavarane, "But they come, madness or not, and we must protect our city, whether the plague kills our people or not."

Finguine nodded, wondering once more why God had seen fit to curse his city with the plague when he had always strived to serve Him well. His was not to reason why though, his was merely to take victory, no matter what the cost, for God and Scotland.





Two of Alexander Canmore's sons were dead.

He wished he could feel sad, he wished he could feel pity or rage or grief.

But he was happy.

He had adopted two sons before leaving Egypt, a matter of expedience only, to create nobles loyal to him that would act on his behalf while dealing with King Edward and Prince Edmund. He had to admit that he had given them little thought once he'd reconciled himself with the concept of Edward as his King, and accepted his own fate as being a King in his own rights in his beloved homeland of Scotland. Raudri Broune and Donald Stewart had died taking the small desert settlement of Jedda for Scotland, casualties of King Edward's campaign against the Rebels.

But Prince Alexander could not bring himself to spare more than a moment's thought for them, because today was his son Adam's 16th Birthday, and today Adam was a man.



Coming Of Age Adam Canmore



After years of the finest tutelage and training, this boy has at last become a man in the eyes of his father, and the rest of the kingdom. Should this prodigal son realise his full potential, perhaps he will one day make a worthy heir apparent.

His son smiled at him as he stood, the gathered Scottish nobles cheering. They stood on the field outside of Edinburgh, Adam dressed in armor, having just been given the rank of Commander by Alexander. The rest of the gathered soldiers cheered too and his son blushed, causing Alexander to bellow with laughter and clap his son on the shoulder in good fortune. The boy had been given the finest tutelage, taught language and art and literature and warfare, strategy and tactical thinking, diplomacy and military discipline. He was as fine a son as Alexander could ever have hoped for, and he meant to enjoy this day, because it could well be the last day he would ever see his son.

Because tomorrow, he marched on London.

Battle Deployment

Your forces attack an army of England

Your Forces

Scotland
★ ★ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Alexander Canmore
818 men

Reinforcements: 0

None

Balance of power

Attempt a night attack

Enemy Forces

England
★ ★ ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Barnaby Lambert
475 men

Reinforcements: 0

None

Army

City

Agents

Family member
Alexander Canmore
55

5721

London had seen great hosts before the city walls before, but they were usually English, and they had never, ever been Scottish. Despite the poor history between the Nations, Scotland had never before threatened the greatest City in England, and only a year earlier no Englishman would ever have thought it would. A year ago, England expected to swallow up the remains of Scotland while their Nobles forged an Empire on the other edge of the world.

A year ago, no one had seen this coming.





"Bring down that gate, men!" roared Prince Alexander, "Then bring down that wall and the cowards hiding on it! I'll nae have anything stop us this day! Today London is ours!"

His men roared in approval and bashed their swords and spears against their shields, taunting the English on their walls as the catapult blasted rocks at high speed against the fortified Gates of the city, bashing and buckling the wood, warping the metal bands and putting enormous stress on the only thing between the English and the Scots.

"Reinforce that gate!" screamed Barnaby Lambert, the General to whom defence of the city had fallen following the cowardly suicide of Edmund of Amersham, "Keep those devils out!"

"Break down that gate!" roared Prince Alexander, his face alight with glee, "We'll show these English a taste of the hell that awaits them!"



"DEFEND THAT GATE! DEFEND THAT GATE!" cried Barnaby, "KEEP THEM OUT!"

"Hold the line," Alexander ordered his commanders, "No one rides till we deal with the English on that wall!"

The men manning the catapult turned the machine and pulled it back to adjust their aim, then fired, smashing massive rocks against the hard stone of the city walls.



The English manning the walls stood their ground.



The English manning the walls were confident that the massive walls would hold as they'd held for so long, that not even the Demon Scots could break through this defence.



The English manning the walls were wrong.



The English were no longer manning the walls.

"FORWARD!" roared Alexander, and then cried out a variation of the cry that had become the motto of Scotland, "ENGLAND FOR THE SCOTTISH!"



The fall of the walls had driven fear deep into the hearts of the English, and seeing the potential for his men to break and rout, Barnaby Lambert did the only thing he could do. He ordered the men deeper into the city, cutting off their own avenue of escape so that when the Scottish entered, they would have no choice but to fight the invaders. But the militia escaping the crumbling walls had barely gotten down to the ground when the Scottish entered, and they had no choice but to turn right at the entrance to the City and fight for their lives against an overwhelming force of baying Scots, demons from hell come to wreak horror and wrath upon them.





Seeing his chance, Barnaby Lambert rode his Knights around the side-streets of London, keeping the buildings between him and the Scottish army as they wiped out the English troops. Coming up on the inside of the Eastern Wall, he charged his men into the side of the Scottish, hoping to cut them off from the broken down gates and shattered wall, isolate the Scottish trapped inside and wipe them out. But the Scottish were without end, or so it seemed to him, as he charged in and found himself instantly surrounded, and the Scottish kept coming and coming, and he cast about with his sword but for every Scotsman that fell, five more took their place, and they were screaming and laughing and they kept coming and coming and....





Prince Alexander rode over the dead, staring around at the massive City, thinking to himself that in his youth he'd never been able to imagine a greater city than London. But he'd seen Cairo, travelled to Jerusalem, seen sights that so many had never seen nor would ever see, and all he could think as he rode down the street towards the remains of the English army was that in the end, London was just another City.

The only difference being, this was ENGLAND'S city, and that fact made this all the sweeter.

In the massive square that separated London-town from London Castle, the English waited to make their final stand. Prince Alexander rode in, ordering his men forward to deal to the last of the English, and that is when they finally surprised him.

A massive bolt of flaming death tore through the air and exploded amongst his Bodyguard, sending men scattering and horses screaming. Instantly men were riding in front of him to protect him, while he himself took a moment to gape at the dead and dying men lying in flames only yards from him.



He shook his head clear, he couldn't ever let himself forget he was a Prince and General, the men relied on him to command them.

"Charge that ballista!" he ordered his men, "Don't let them fire it again, our infantry can handle the rest!"



They rode forward, seeing the English hastily reloading the ballista, lighting fire to the massive barbed bolt and winching back to fire it.... and then the Scots were amongst the English manning it, swinging swords and hacking into them, cutting them down where they stood.

When the last Englishman lay dead by the ballista, which by now had caught alight from its own flaming bolt, Prince Alexander turned and looked with pride upon his men as they washed over the remaining English Knights, who had formed a knot of survivors desperately trying to eke out a few moments more of life.

"It's over," he hissed with a grin, and threw back his head and laughed, "LONDON IS OURS! LONDON IS SCOTLAND'S! NOW LADS, KILL THE LAST OF THESE ENGLISH BASTARDS!"

2:36



0:47



King Edward sat in his Chambers at his desk, frowning as he stared at the latest correspondence from the Pope. The former Pope, Gregory, had been a good friend of Scotland's and wrote often to the King about his religious musings, most of which Edward only paid momentary attention to before passing them on to Edmund, who said he found them a fascinating insight. The current Pope, Stephanus, wrote just as often, but usually to complain or chastise some action Scotland had taken. Recent events in England seemed to have driven the Pope to distraction, and now the letters were becoming harsher in tone and more threatening.

The word ex-communication had been touched on in the latest letter, and that wasn't something Edward was very pleased with.

"My King," whispered a messenger, entering his Chambers with a bow, "I come bearing a message from Prince Edmund the Honorable."

"The Hono.....? Haha, is that what they're calling the bastard nowadays?" laughed Edward, glad for the distraction. It had been too long since he'd seen his Brother, why his nephews must be almost men by now! He took the letter from the messenger and dismissed him, opening the letter and raising an eyebrow at the abrupt nature of the message.

Dearest Brother, I believe I have found a solution to our problems with both Pope Stephanus and the Turks to the North.... join me in Cairo as soon as humanly possible.

Edmund.

Chapter 13

"Cairo, she's a damn finer sight than Edinburgh in Winter, is she nae?" asked King Edward, weaving slightly on his feet and loosely clutching a mug of ale. It wasn't the alcohol that had him unsteady, he was well known for being able to hold his drink, but a mixture of sleeplessness, the relentless heat, physical exhaustion and, he had to admit, copious amounts of ale.

"Cities are cities, and no matter how fine they all have slums," chuckled Edmund, who always drank less than his brother, having learned long past that he could not match him, "But Cairo has its charms, its true, and I would nae return to a Scottish Winter if the Pope himself called me to it."

"The Pope's the one I came to talk about," growled Edward, who had travelled to Cairo at his Brother's request, Edmund telling him he had a solution to problems with both The Pope and concerns about the Turks to the North. Being a King meant you could never do anything as simple as visit your Brother though, he'd had to march with an Army, and be welcomed with great ceremony, and treated to a feast, and inspected the City and the barracks and a thousand other things beside, "Stephanus does nae take kindly to Catholics killing Catholics, and Alexander is killing a lot of English Catholics."

"In a moment Brother, first I thought ye could use some relief from the pressure of the affairs of State.... ENTER!"

Edward raised an eyebrow as two bookish looking men entered Edmund's chambers, shuffling forward with beaming faces.

"My Lord, My King," smiled the Explorers Guildmember, greeting Edmund and Edward, "The Explorer's Guild thanks ye once more for ye fine service in the pursuit of knowledge!"

"Wha....?" started Edward, but Edmund elbowed his side and dropped a sly wink.

"Of course," said Edmund with a slight incline of his head, we were pleased to capture Dublin, and hope that the Explorers' Guild will continue to enjoy our patronage."

"Thank ye again, kind Lords," smiled the Guildmember, then dropped his voice and took on a conspiratorial tone, "A token of our appreciation."

He and his companion left, and Edmund turned with a massive grin to his perplexed Brother, holding a small pouch in his hand.

"What the hell was that?" demanded Edward.

"Feredac of Peeblesshire took Dublin for Alexander, as ye know," grinned Edmund, "What ye dinnae know is that the Explorers Guild came to me insisting we take Dublin, assuring me if we dinnae do it, they would be "very disappointed" in us. To be honest I forgot all about it after having a good laugh, but once Feredac took Dublin, the Explorers' Guild was singing our praises.... and look, a "token!"

He handed Edward the small pouch with a wink, and Edward opened it and spilled out the contents onto Edmund's desk, a small collection of florins.

"There cannae be more than 300 florins here," gasped Edward, "I let my daughter carry more when she was but a wee bairn!"

"Aye Edward, but it's a "token" of their appreciation," laughed Edmund heartily, "Dinnae spend it all at once!"



Alexander, Pope Stephanus has begun to speak publicly of the "darkness in the hearts of the Scottish Royal Family", and written communication with the Papacy warns of ex-communication if Scotland continues to kill English Catholics.

Edmund has plans to improve our relations, but in the meantime you must stay your hand against the English.... for now at least.

Your Brother, Edward Canmore.

Alexander read the note again, frowning angrily. All of Scotland, England and Ireland were in his control now, and Feredac had handpicked a Noble to lead the siege on Caernarvon in Wales where the English still held control. Once that was taken, the English would be reduced to their holdings on the French Coast, and out of "England" forever.... and now he was being instructed to leave the English in peace? After they'd dared to take York and lay siege to Edinburgh? After they'd dared to refuse his offer to make them his vassals? When at least two English armies still marched through Scottish land? Simply on a threat from the Pope?

New Mission



Cease Hostilities

Time Remaining	7 turns
Source	The Pope
Description	His Holiness demands that you stop shedding the blood of your fellow Christians. Cease hostilities against this faction immediately and do not carry out hostile acts for the duration of this mission.
Target	England
Penalty	You may be excommunicated.

"Father?" asked Adam, popping his head into the room, "Is something the matter?"

"Nae, son," grinned Alexander, looking up at his handsome son, "I should be asking ye that question, are ye nervous?"

"Aye," laughed Adam, "But I doubt any man has ever been anything but on such a day."

"Then come, son, and let's have ye married to that beautiful women. There is nae that could ruin my good mood this day, and nae that I will allow to do so."

He stood, crumpling the letter up roughly in his hand as he did, and as he left the room tossed it into the roaring fire, where it quickly blackened and turned to ash.

Marriage Celebrations

Adam Canmore
Mor Canmore



Celebrations erupt throughout the kingdom as news of the royal wedding makes its way to the far corners of the realm, and beyond. The people are already excitedly speculating whether or not their first-born will be a boy or a girl.

In Florence, Gille Calline the Balleol sat at a table loaded with the finest foods and wine, which was only fitting considering who the real guest of the evening was. The meal was supposed to be a diplomatic formality, the kind offered to all who visited the Papacy, but the presence of another in Florence meant that there was more to this dinner than usual.

For The Pope was in Florence.

Which Gille had known, of course, it was the reason he'd been sent here. His orders had come from Prince Edmund himself, a man whom Gille truly respected. He was dedicated to Scotland, and adored King Edward for the glory he had brought to the Nation. He was loyal to Prince Alexander, who had not only rescued Scotland from the English but then conquered their greatest cities. But he respected Prince Edmund, because the man could speak like a Diplomat, think like a spy, govern like a born administrator and lead men on the field.

"So tell me of Scotland's exploits, then," the Pope instructed, eating heartily, "Not of the defilement of fellow Catholics in England, but the capture of Holy Lands and conversion of heathens, the good work that King Edward **once** did for Christ."

"Your Holiness," smiled Gille, speaking - of course - Latin, "I could brag to you of the capture of Jerusalem in the Crusade, or offer protestations at the suggestion that we defile our faith by protecting ourselves from England, whose own King you yourself have publicly chastised for a lack of faith. Surely you have heard such and more from many diplomats in the past, from one nation or another, all spoken to suit their purpose. But I feel that such would be wasted, and so instead I will tell a more intimate tale, of the salvation of a small settlement, a tiny outpost of heathen soldiers who whored and killed and lived only for the sake of living. I will tell you of Adana, your Holiness, and how Scotland brought the light."

Elsewhere in Florence, an Englishman quivered with excitement as he read the message again.... it was more than could be hoped for, the arrogance of the demon Scottish Prince would finally be his downfall! A small force of English had been trapped outside of York and massacred by an overwhelming force of the Scottish.... in direct defiance of the word of the Pope!

"We shall bring the wrath of God-on-Earth upon the devils!" he gasped, and screamed for the innkeeper to ready his horse, he must ride for the Palace immediately!

Battle Deployment

Your forces attack an army of England



Your Forces

Scotland

Captain Matad
591 men

Reinforcements: 440

Scotland

Captain Morgunn
440 men

Enemy Forces

England

Captain Toby
391 men

Reinforcements: 0

None



Attempt a night attack



Clear Victory

Battle Results

	Men Deployed	Men Lost	Men Remaining	Enemies Killed
Captain Matad	591	196	395	167 (7)
Captain Morgunn	440	10	430	24 (0)
Captain Toby	391	203	188	244 (0)



In the Palace itself, the Pope sat spellbound as Gille continued his tale, telling of the battle of Adana, and how the people who had built up a small town around what had started as a defensive outpost had appeared in the streets as the battle raged and cried for an end to the fighting. Of how the Rebel Leader refused to surrender, and ordered his men to take the people as shields against the Scottish. He spoke eloquently of King Edward calling a halt to the fighting, and riding between the two forces to cry out to the soldiers to show sense and not betray the people who had flocked to them initially for protection. Of the Road To Damascus conversion that had occurred rather aptly on the edge of a road to led to Damascus, as Rebel Soldiers had seen the horror of their chosen life of survival at all costs, and given themselves to the mercy of Edward, who had sworn them to loyalty to God and Scotland and taken them into his own army.

All of which was a slight exaggeration of the actual battle, in which King Edward mercilessly wiped out every Rebel Soldier and forced the people of the tiny outpost to convert to Catholicism for their own good.

But Pope Stephanus was touched, as Gille knew he would be. The man had been a missionary in his youth, a travelling Priest bringing the Word and salvation of God to the heathens, and he appreciated this intimate story of a small, personal conversion over the braggart tales of Diplomats talking of the thousands that were converted by their Lords merely by being near their presence.

"The People of Adana have now embraced a life of sacrifice," Gille explained, "Working for the betterment of humanity, knowing that their reward will await them come Judgement Day if they can only outweigh the sins of their former lives. Your Holiness, I came to Florence not to argue Scotland's cause or impress you with tales of mass piety. When I was stationed in the desert and travelled amongst the Moors, I saw so many outposts, towns and cities full of people like those of Adana, and it is for the people of Adana that I come to you. I spoke of it with my Prince, and received a note of blessing from my King to undertake this course of action, because I think the people of Adana deserve credit for turning their backs on their heathen ways, and the Moors, the Turks, and more besides could learn a lesson from their conversion. So it is with a hopeful heart, your Holiness, that I come here today to offer the Papacy control over the people, homes and lands of Adana, so that they may see even clearer the blessings of Christ."

Pope Stephanus stared at Gille Calline for long moments, the Diplomat properly lowering his eyes but not turning his face away or falling prey to the desire to say more to press his case.

"I..." whispered Stephanus, a tear rolling from his eye, "Would be honored to accept this gift."

Scotland

Gille Calline the Balleol

Relations: Perfect
Reputation: Despicable
Power: Supreme
Wealth: 5441
Religion: Catholic

Make offer

- Alliance
- Trade rights
- Attack faction
- Give region
- Make single payment
- Regular tribute
- Map information

Make demand

- Attack faction
- Give region
- Make single payment
- Regular tribute
- Map information

Neutral for 57 turns

Of course! We accept this deal with open arms.
Your gift is welcome, and you have our gratitude.

Demeanour: **Happily Accepted**

Make offer

The Papal States

Florence

Large city

Priorities: Unknown
Reputation: Mixed
Power: Respectable
Wealth: Meagre
Religion: Catholic

Allies & Enemies

Allies: None
Enemies: Moors, Rebels

Current Treaties:

None



Raised voices suddenly took their attention away, and the doors to the dining hall opened to allow in a guard, who bowed deeply.

"With the greatest respect, your Holiness, a Diplomat from England has arrived in the Palace and is insisting that he must see you."

"Let him in," muttered the Pope, clearly agitated, "I shall see what is so important as to interrupt this fine moment."

The English Diplomat entered almost immediately, clutching papers to his chest and sweating profusely, his hair carefully messed to appear unkempt, to create the impression of great haste.

"Your Holiness," he gasped, then spotted Gille and actually growled, impressing the Scottish Diplomat with the depth of this theatre, "I am not surprised to see THIS devil here.... I come bearing news of a grave injustice and an unpardonable insult to the Church. The Scottish have attacked and killed an army of English attempting only to travel to Bruges on the French Coast, where our aggrieved people have been forced to flee."

He practically thrust the message into Pope Stephanus' hands, and the Christ-On-Earth read the contents with a steadily growing frown, matched by a steadily growing smile on the English Diplomat's face directed at Gille.

"I cannot believe this treachery," hissed the Pope.

"Yes, your Holiness," gasped the English Diplomat, "Truly the Scots have go...."

"The English ride an army past York in a clear attempt to draw out the Scots and take advantage of the protection I offered them!?!?" roared the Pope, shooting to his feet, "The English think that they can use the office of Pope as a military tactic! THE ENGLISH THINK THEY CAN FOOL GOD!?!?"

"You.... your Holiness," gasped the Diplomat, "No! No! I...."

"I REMOVE THE PROTECTION OF THE CHURCH FROM ENGLAND!" roared Pope Stephanus, his face red with fury, "**YOUR KING IS EXCOMMUNICATED! LET THE SCOTTISH TAKE YOUR LANDS, AT LEAST THEN THE ENGLISH WILL BE RULED BY GOOD, CATHOLIC MEN! TAKE THIS CUR AWAY!**"

The Diplomat was dragged screaming away by the guards, while Gille was careful to maintain only a regretful expression on his face.

"The.... rigors of this office..." panted the Pope, hands clutching to the table for support, "So many seek to.... use the Church for their own ends.... I thought tonight I could enjoy at least one dinner with a true member of the Faith, but even that was ruined.... I must retire for the night, forgive me, Gille Calline, may God Bless you and your King, God spoke well to my predecessor and speaks now to me, truly Scotland is the only real supporter of the Church."

Several days later, Prince Adam lay in bed with his Mistress, the opened message bearing the seal of the Pope lying on his desk, forgotten. His Father had roared with laughter when he read it, and Adam himself had been so delighted he'd immediately come to see her, she always made good things better.



In Baghdad, the plague was over, no new cases had been announced in weeks, and the people of the City were giving thanks to God for living through the horrors. None considered it a coincidence that the Pope's recent proclamation of Scotland's great piety had coincided with the end of the plague, and the wiser of the city also noted that now the Turks to the North would have to come through Adana should they ever recklessly consider an invasion of Scottish territory. Coming through Adana would raise the wrath of the Pope, and risk a Crusade, and not even the Turks were **that** mad.

Unfortunately it had come too late for Crown Prince Finguine.

He'd died the previous day, one of the last victims of the plague, and he had survived longer than most other patients. For a day the Doctors had even thought he might do the unthinkable and recover, but it was not to be. His adopted son, Comgell, now ruled Baghdad in his stead, and to his great surprise had been named the new Heir to the throne. He could not understand why, and short

of the proclamation declaring it, King Edward had given him absolutely no indication as to why Comgell was better suited as the future King of Scotland than Alexander's son, Adam.

But Prince Comgell did not question such things, and never had. Finguine had adopted him because of the man's fanatical loyalty to him on the field, and because he had shown promise not just as a commander of men, but someone who understood that sometimes harsh choices needed to be made on the field to gain victory. For the coming campaign against the Moors, both King Edward and Prince Edmund felt that these qualities - which had been Prince Finguine's as well - would make Comgell a good choice for King if Edward died and it would not be, at that point, in the best interests of the Empire for their sons to take the throne.

Faction Announcements

The following events have taken place within your royal family:

- A Noble Life Ends** **A victim of the plague**
  Prince Finguine - Family member Baghdad
- New Faction Heir**
  Prince Comgell
- Retinue Expands**
  Adam Canmore
 Adultress: +1 Dread, -1 Piety, -1 Morale for all troops on the battlefield, Decreases the chance of having children

Baghdad - Minor city

 **Prince Comgell** Age: 30
 Governor
 Command: ★★☆☆☆☆
 Chivalry: ☆☆☆☆☆
 Loyalty: ☆☆☆☆☆
 Piety: ☆☆☆☆☆

Retinue: None

Traits: Confident Attacker, Siege Expert, Dauntless, Night Fighter, Demining Commander

Construction	Recruitment	Repair	Retrain
7	8	3	1
4		1	

Units available for hire: 128, 423, 118 Recruitment Slots Remaining: 0

But King Edward and Prince Edmund meant to see to it that an eligible Canmore WOULD be fit to sit the throne soon, and both agreed that Edmund's sons were their best chance to accomplish this. Scotland's nobles were already desperately trying to gain the favor of Edward's daughter, Afraig, in the hopes of marrying their sons into the Canmore Clan, but Edmund's two oldest sons had finally come into their manhood, and now the two men who had once gotten drunk and sailed on a dare to the other edge of the world were preparing to take their own sons to War with them.

Faction Announcements

The following events have taken place within your royal family:

- Coming Of Age**
  Nectan Canmore
- Coming Of Age**
  Domnall Canmore
- Retinue Expands**
  Mac Bethad of Aberdeen
 Dancer: +2 to agent's skill
- Retinue Expands**
  Matad Macconel
 Biographer: +1 Authority
- Retinue Expands**
  Gille Coimded the Unorthodox
 Witch Hunter: +1 Piety, -1 Unorthodoxy
- Retinue Expands**
  Fearghus Campbell
 Dancer: +2 to agent's skill

For their parts, Nectan and Domnall couldn't wait.

Chapter 14

"Boy, come here!" snapped Edward the Malevolent, King of Scotland, Ruler of the Scottish Empire, Pharaoh of Egypt, Master of Jerusalem, Vanquisher of armies, ravisher of women and killer of men.

And much loved Uncle.

"Aye, Uncle Edward," smiled Nectan Canmore, "You have duties for me?"

"Aye lad," growled Edward, his face harsh as he took Nectan's arm and lead him down the hall past the merrymakers and celebrants, two guards unlocking a solid looking door and letting them through. Stepping aside, Nectan was surprised not just his twin, Domnall, but his father, Prince Edmund the Honourable. King Edward closed the door behind him and his stern face broke into a beaming smile.

"We're going to get pissed!"



King Edward's daughter Afraig had married, and every Scottish person who mattered on this edge of the world had come to Cairo to celebrate. King Edward had spared no expense, and Alan of Midlothian was a fine man in his mind. Good at everything he put his mind to, a fair fighter and a proven commander from a good family, and most importantly, someone his daughter professed to love. So on the eve of Edward's planned Moorish campaign, the wedding had been held, and now with his daughter and new son retired for the night to do things Edward preferred not to think about; Edward meant to get good and drunk with his beloved Brother and his two fine nephews.

Nectan was loyal and bright, as a child he'd constantly questioned his tutors and mentors, forming his own opinions on subjects based on what information he could gather. He was also notoriously spartan in his lifestyle, he ate what he needed and drank hardly at all, was not interested in fine art, furnishings or lavish surroundings, and trained methodically in his military duties.

Domnall, on the other hand, was a distant introvert given to outbursts of sudden great cheer and comradeship, in which he would drink heavily, tell vulgar jokes that shocked even the ribald Edward, and merrily throw himself into brawls.



Character Details



Nectan Canmore Age: 17

Governor
 Command ★★★★★
 Chivalry ★★★★★
 Loyalty ★★★★★
 Piety ★★★★★

Retinue: None Traits: Mostly Rational, Legacy of Chivalry

More of this man's beliefs are based on his own common sense than what others would preach to him.
 +1 Authority *Domnina's Chastity*

What both twins shared was a high intellect and a talent for command, and they were as close as Edward and Edmund had been after Edmund had grown old enough to become interesting. Both seemed to let their guards down around their Uncle though, who they had always enjoyed the company of, which had been less and less as the logistics of running the Scottish Empire had grown.

So tonight, with four Canmore's together in the same city, it was time to get drunk!

The next day, Edmund woke with a groan, clutching at his sore head. He shunted his chair away from the table and staggered to his feet with a belch. He swayed and cursed whatever ale they'd drunk last night, so potent that even now it seemed that the floor was rocking and rolling like a... like a... like a boat!

"Oh God Edward, ye've nae put me on another boat, have ye?" he groaned, "Where are we going this time? Spain?"

"What are ye talking about," snapped Edward, rolling his head to the side and grunting, "We're nae on a boat."

"Aye, I'm just old," muttered Edmund, supporting himself on the wall and sniffing uncomfortably at his clothes, "As are ye, the drink never used to effect ye so much."

"I'm nae ready for the grave yet," chuckled Edward as he leaned back in his chair, "Look at ye wee bairns, there."

Edmund looked at the corner of the room, where both Nectan and Domnall were draped over tables dead to the world. He chuckled affectionately, his sons were grown men now, but it would be some time till they could match their Uncle's capacity for drink. His head thumped with a regular, booming rhythm and he grunted angrily, it seemed to be getting louder and louder, would it not stop... and then he noticed that Edward was frowning and looking towards one of the thin windows, and he realized that the booming noise was coming from outside the city.

"To arms! To arms!" came a distant cry, "The city is under siege!"

At Caernarvon in Wales, Captain Aston of the English army stared from his walls at a similar predicament, but the sieging army in this case was Scottish. It was led by the cursed Arcill of Caithness, the adopted son of Feradac of Peeblesshire, the twice cursed Scottish bastard who'd taken Dublin while the thrice cursed Alexander Canmore sat in control of LONDON!

"I hate the Scottish," he growled, "The bastards won't be satisfied until England is but a memory."

"Arcill of Caithness, you say," whispered a quiet voice, and Captain Aston felt a chill run down his spine. With the death of King Rufus, Symund had been named King of England, and his dealings with the Scottish had been so disastrously handled that the Pope had excommunicated him, removing the Church's protection from the people of England... but not the Church's reach. Captain Aston turned and looked at the red robed figure.

"Arcill of Caithness," repeated Albizus de Alario, Inquisitor for the Catholic Church, "Tell me of him."

Neutral Character Details



Albizus de Alario Age: 51

Inquisitor
 Piety ★★★★★

Piety: Widely considered a living saint, even by his enemies

Retinue: Unknown Traits: Unknown

Spotted By: Captain Roy
 Subterfuge: ●●●●●●●●



Against all reason, Sicily had declared war on Scotland.

It was unfathomable, the act of madmen, but those who had known Sicilians knew that was a fair description. They were tough and they were fighters, much like the Scottish, but unlike the Scots when they were angry their blood ran cold instead of hot, and some said that made them more dangerous.

They had marched to Cairo from a city far along the Western Coastline and laid siege, and they had come in large numbers, easily the match of the numbers inside the city itself, of which a full third were simple militia trained to keep the peace on the streets.

Cairo was a large city, well fortified and easily defended, but the Sicilians had marched prepared for war, and even now they sat outside the city making preparations to attack. Highlanders, militia and Sudanese mercenaries held the walls, staring uneasily down at the milling Sicilians as they prepared massive siege ladders, battering rams and what looked to be a giant siege tower. None of them was scared to go to battle with the Sicilians, but was it a battle they could win? No Scotsman feared death, but none of them embraced it either, and the army milling about below them was death.

And then Death walked out onto the walls.

King Edward the Malevolent, 52 years old and looking more powerful than he'd looked in his life, known for his tyranny on the field and his pure, relentless drive to conquer in the name of God and Scotland. He walked amongst his men without a word, face set like stone and eyes unreadable. Oddly for the King, he wore a kilt today, but the reason for this soon became clear.

"I see children running about beneath me, lads!" he cried suddenly, his voice booming and carrying to the Sicilians below, who stopped and looked up in surprise at the figure far above them, "Boys who think they can be men!"

King Edward stared at the Sicilians, satisfied that he had their attention.

"So ye've come to fight Scottish men, have ye?" he roared, "Come mewling and crawling from between ye whore mothers' legs in hopes of proving ye manhood and then crawling back home to get between ye whore mothers' legs again!?!?"

Edward's men roared with laughter, and the Sicilian Captain, Gano, narrowed his eyes furiously.

"All maybe I have ye all wrong?" laughed Edward, "Maybe ye've nae come hoping for a whiff of the treat between a Scottish woman's legs, but to satisfy ye filthy lust for arse? Have ye come hoping for some of this?"

He turned and bent, flipping up his kilt and revealing a bared ass beneath, causing his men to let loose a massive cheer as they roared with laughter. Captain Gano was infuriated, and turning to a Bowman he hissed at the man to fire at Edward. The Sicilian nodded, as mad as every other Sicilian to hear their mother's called whores, regardless of anything else said. He nocked an arrow, aimed high and fired, and the arrow sailed through the air, arced and fell down, hitting the stone wall of Cairo 20 yards below where Edward stood. The King twisted and stood, a massive grin on his face as he shouted, "Ye see lads! We've all heard tell that Sicilian shafts falter before they can make their target, now we know!"

His men roared with laughter, and Edward walked away from the walls with a grin.



The next day, the men stood at the walls watching the Sicilians working on their siege equipment once more, when once more a Scottish Royal walked the wall. Prince Edmund walked to the edge of the wall and stared down at the Sicilians with a critical eye, and then with a voice that surprisingly carried as well as his Brother's, he spoke, "When my Brother and I left Scotland, our Father held Edinburgh and York and that wall. Together we took Alexandria, then we took Jerusalem, then we took this magnificent city,

Cairo. He conquered Baghdad, Damascus, Antioch and Adana, Jedda and Gaza. We put an end to an Egyptian Empire that has lasted since time immemorial, none could stand before us and those that tried died. We made Scotland the mightiest Empire in the world, and then our brother Alexander returned to Scotland where the English threatened to conquer our Father's old home, and he threw back the English Empire, recaptured Inverness, captured Nottingham and Dublin and took England's beloved London from them, because we wanted it."

Edward paused, letting this all sink in, "When Scotland wants something, we take it. When people oppose us, they die. When nations defy us, we wipe them out. Scotland's armies have always been led by our Royals, Clan Canmore fights at the head of any force we care to muster. Think of that, Sicilians, while your Nobles sit at home and leave you to die at the hands of the Scottish."

His men cheering, he turned and walked away from the walls.



The next day, Prince Nectan Canmore walked onto the walls, watched with great surprise by the Scots manning them. The Sicilians seemed ready this time, a number of them had been taken off working on siege equipment to jeer and taunt any Scottish Noble who came to mock them. If Nectan seemed at all taken aback by the jeers, he gave no sign, merely casting a critical eye over the assembled force before giving voice to his thoughts.

"It strikes me that I am a disappointment!" he cried, his young voice carrying well but bearing none of the authority or dominance of Edward or Edmund, "I am but a lad, 17 and untested in battle, a mere bairn! Ye could count on one hand the number of women I've bedded, and on no hands the number of men I've killed! Were I to go to battle, I would be the rawest of recruits, the poorest Pikeman, the mildest of militia...."

The Sicilians taunting had stopped, because there was nothing they could say that Nectan wasn't all ready saying to them. They all stood and listened as Nectan ran himself down, talking of his inexperience and lack of ability as opposed to other men.... and then it happened.

"So I look around at the men who stand these walls with me!" cried Nectan, doing just that, seeing men staring at him with wide eyes and concerned faces, "And I realize..... it dinnae matter! BECAUSE EVEN AN INEXPERIENCED SCOTTISH BAIRN IS TWICE THE MAN ANY SICILIAN EVER WILL BE!"

His men blinked in surprise, then roared their approval as, with a grin, Prince Nectan walked away from the walls.

The next day, King Edward returned to the walls, and his men - waiting eagerly by this point - roared and cheered, giving cue to the Sicilians that he was there. He stepped up to the edge of the wall and stared down at the gathered Sicilians, and then let loose with a blood-chilling roar that shocked even his own men.

"ENOUGH!" he roared, "YE ARE STILL HERE? THEN ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! TOMORROW I LED MY MEN OUT OF THE WALLS INTO YE MIDST! I WILL RIDE THROUGH YE AS IF YE WERE WATER! I WILL CUT YE DOWN AS IF YE WERE WHEAT AND I A SCYTHE! I WILL BRING DEATH AND HELL WITH ME, MY BROTHER AND NEPHEW AT MY SIDE, MY MEN BEHIND ME, SCOTLAND WILL RIDE OVER YE AND YE'LL DIE! AYE, AND THEN YE'LL RUN, AND I WILL CHASE YE, AND EVEN IF YE FLED OVER THE OCEANS I WOULD COME FOR YE, AND YE'D HIDE BEHIND YE WALLS AND I WILL STILL COME, AND KILL YE, YE WIVES, YE CHILDREN, YE ANIMALS, AND I'D TEAR DOWN YE HOMES, AND BURN THE TREES AND GRASS AND SALT THE EARTH, AND STILL MY FURY WILL NAE BE QUENCHED! YE WILL HAVE UNLEASHED DEATH ON YE AND EVERYTHING YE LOVE, AND THE FAULT WILL BE ALL YE OWN!"

"NOW. GET. OUT. OF. MY. EMPIRE!"

And as his men stared in shock at their King, he turned and walked away from the walls.

The next day.... the Sicilians had broken their siege and disappeared into the desert.



Arcill of Caithness screamed as he was dragged through the crowd, the stake waiting for him, the red robed figure he'd come to hate standing waiting. Albizus de Alario had walked through the gates of Caernarvon despite the city being under siege, walked into Arcill's camp despite them being prepared to attack the City, and promptly ordered a trial for heresy. Arcill had been shocked, he'd always attended Church.... well, religiously.... but never given much thought to spirituality. It had been merely another one of the many duties he felt compelled to undertake due to his position as a Nobleman, but surely he'd always done that duty well, how could anyone suspect him of heresy. But Albizus was a fiend, a terrible mind-reader who merely looked at him and [b]knew[b] all of his secrets. This was not like the Priests of Arcill's youth who were happy if you could recite passages from the Bible, sing hymns, and answer prayers in all the right places. He questioned and probed and trapped Arcill in unintentional contradiction, and worst of all was that all of Arcill's men, including long standing friends and loyal Commanders, stood back and allowed it to happen.

And he'd been found guilty.

"Arcill of Caithness, son of Feradac of Peeblesshire," bellowed Albizus, his voice projected for the crowd and nothing like the usual harsh whisper he used in regular conversation, "You have been found guilty of heresy against the Church, the Pope and God! You mistook your nobility as an acceptable substitute for piety, but God was not fooled and neither was I! The punishment for this heresy is death, may God have mercy on your wretched, heretic soul!"

"WAIT! WAIT! NO!" screamed Arcill as Albizus grasped a flaming torch and approached him where he was tied to the stake, "I DID NAE MEAN TO SIN! PLEASE I BEG FORGIVENESS!"

"Forgiveness is not for me to give," Albizus replied in his usual whisper, and touched the torch to the gathered wood.

Executed for Heresy!

Arcill of Caithness



Perhaps this person was simply not pious enough... After proving to be guilty of heresy, they have been burned at the stake for crimes against God by an Inquisitor.

Crusade Called

Toulouse



The Holy Bible may preach peace, but when it is Christendom itself that is threatened, then it is every Christian's duty to defend all that is holy! His Holiness, the Pope, has called a Crusade to reclaim the Holy lands from the infidel, who would deny Christian pilgrims their right to visit the Holy places. It is time for the armies of Christendom to put aside their differences and unite under one banner - the sign of the Cross, and give back God's children what is rightfully theirs... or die trying. You must create a Crusade army within ten turns to join the Crusade.

Feradac of Peeblesshire was marching at the head of his men down the road when the call came back from the scouts that someone was waiting for him ahead. He continued on and came to a crossroads, and was not surprised when he saw the red robed figure who had killed his adopted son was the one waiting for him.

"Feradac of Peeblesshire, on God's business," grinned Albizus, staring at the cross on the Scottish banner carried by the army, "Called to the Crusade in Toulouse."

"Volunteered for the Crusade in Toulouse," corrected Feradac, "We are both on the Pope's business, Inquisitor."

"I suspect your business will be delayed slightly at Caernarvon?" smirked Albizus, and Feradac swallowed his anger and urge to make a biting retort. He knew Albizus' reputation, in fact he knew more about Albizus than the Inquisitor might suspect. He knew that Albizus put on a mocking, sarcastic act to goad men into making foolish comments, but that it was only a facade. The man was fanatically devoted to the Church, and was above and beyond reproach in all respects. He did not gamble, drink, indulge in food, women, men, girls, boys or animals. He had burned both friend and foe for heresy, his only thought was working for the betterment of the Church, by destroying heresy wherever he found it. He'd killed Arcill, yes, but there had been nothing personal in it, just Arcill being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Somehow, that made it worse.

"England remains excommunicated, and Scotland has proved itself time and again to be an agent of the Church," Feradac said at last, "We will take Caernarvon from the English and bring Wales into the Catholic fold before we go to face the Milanese at Toulouse."

"Go about God's work, Scotsman," smiled Albizus, "I stopped you only because I wanted to be sure you were not like some foolish people I have known, who have blamed an Inquisitor for protecting God and the Church from heretics."

"God bless ye, Inquisitor," replied Feradac stiffly, and ordered his army to continue forward again, the Inquisitor standing and watching the army pass, nodding a greeting to the Pilgrims and Religious Fanatics who made up a large portion of the force. Finally they were all past, and Albizus continued on down the road on foot, content and secure in the knowledge that he would be given welcome at whatever home, inn, castle or city he came to before nightfall.

Albizus woke groggily, trying to remember, something had happened, something.... something was.... his hands weren't working properly, he.... what?

"Awake are we? Good," whispered a voice, and Albizus felt a chill run down his spine, that voice... it was the voice of the Devil!

He struggled to open his eyes, his vision focusing on the small campfire that provided the only light. It was night, clouds obscuring the stars, and they were in a clearing, one he dimly remembered entering as the afternoon had been darkening into dusk.... and then everything had gone black. Kneeling near the fire, back turned to Albizus, was a tall, thin hooded figure dressed darkly, a long, curved dagger on his side. He stood up, seeming to unfold more than stand, and turned to saunter up to Albizus, who by now had realized that he was tied to something, his arms and legs bound.

"Are you mad," growled Albizus, "Do you know who I...."

He was cut off as the man backhanded him, hand moving like lightning, shocking the Inquisitor who hadn't been physically beaten since he was a boy.

"I know who ye are," growled the shadowy figure, "That's why ye are to die, ye fool. Burning a Scotsman leading a siege on the English... and ye thought ye could get away with it?"

"I act on God's behalf!" roared Albizus, horrified, "I don't favor any one nation or..."

"Oh shut up," grunted the figure, sounding bored, "Nobleman, King, Merchant, Diplomat, Farmer, Inquisitor, it all comes to the same thing at the end, they all try to convince me they dinnae deserve to die. Well sometimes they do and sometimes they dinnae.... ye definitely do."

He sauntered back to the campfire and lifted a flaming torch from the fire, turning back and walking towards Albizus, who by now had realized what he'd been tied to.

"You can't!" he cried, "I'm an Inquisitor for the Catholic Church..... you'll.... you'll burn in hell for this!"

The Assassin - Fearghus Maknab - suddenly stopped, looking taken aback, and then he started to laugh. He laughed for a good long time, a hearty and hale laugh that spoke of good health and good humor. Finally he stopped, and smiled warmly at Albizus.

"Oh ye silly man, I've been bound for hell since I was a wee lad and killed my first.... killing ye will hardly make a difference one way or the other."

Albizus de Alario began to scream, and then he screamed louder, and then after some time, he screamed no more.

Assassination Mission Success

Albizus de Alario



This person is no longer a threat, as the assassin that you sent has succeeded in eliminating them without fuss... and more importantly, without drawing any suspicion to the fact it was you who ordered the deed done.

Character Details



Fearghus Maknab Age: 34

Assassin
Subterfuge

Retinue

- Catamite
- Skilled Courtesan

Traits

- Cold Killer
- Murderer

Chapter 15

"Behind those walls are the English, lads!" cried Feradac of Peeblesshire, and his men bood.

"Behind those walls is England's last stand, they have no other forces throughout Ireland, Scotland or England, the Welsh are the only people to be held in servitude now!" continued Feradac, "Defeat them here, lads, and all that will be left are the English nobles cowering in their stolen cities along the French Coast, and THIS land! THESE countries! Will be Scotland's!"

His men roared in approval, and charged forward as the English holding the walls stared in horror at the vast Scottish horde, an unstoppable force that made their walls seem thin as printed paper and the armor they were encased in as safe as a house on fire.

And then the Scottish were on the walls and through the gate, as if the English defences were nothing.





"HOLD THEM BACK!" screamed Captain Aston in desperation, riding his men into the writhing mass of death that had smashed through the Gate, fighting back his own terror as the Scots howled and laughed and killed, "KEEP THEM OUT OF THE CITY!"

If his men heard, he would never know, as they concentrated solely on surviving from one second to the next, the Scottish seemingly everywhere all at once, and Aston cast about with his sword, striking down Scots who were replaced instantly by two more, three more, a score more.... dozens upon dozens, all of them eager to draw English blood and knowing this might be their last chance. How had it come to this? How had mighty England fallen to such lows? Not so long ago they'd been ready to take the last of Scotland's cities in the country, and now they were reduced to Wales and the French coast, and.... and.... and he was falling, his horse spilling from beneath him. He rolled as he'd been taught, coming to his feet with his head ducked to avoid a strike. Scottish Infantry were crushing his men all about and he howled in impotent rage, swinging his sword at the nearest Scotsman he could see.... and then he was down again, a massive weight and pain on his back and the coppery taste of blood in his mouth and the Scottish were everywhere they were everywhere they w-





On the walls, Scotsman roared and laughed and sang as they struck down the hapless English peasants and Billmen who had been drafted into fighting to hold the city. They were all the English had available to them that could be spared to fight on the walls, and they only fighting benefit they had is that if they died in sufficient numbers they might block the walls and keep the Scottish out. As they fought desperately, a cry rose from the back of their tightly packed unit, and they turned to see even more Scots climbing the walls, laughing and crying out taunting cries.





"RUN!" screamed one man amongst the peasants, and that was enough, they ceased their futile resistance and just charged, joined moments later by the Billmen, shouldering through the surprised Scotsmen and into the guard tower, skidding down the spiral stone stairs weeping and wailing, all thought of anything but flight gone from their minds.



Beneath the gate, Scots stood amongst the piled corpses of English dead, cheering and laughing as the Commander of the Crusader Knights rode up beside Feradac to report they held the Gate and the remaining English soldiers were fleeing.

"Send forth ye Knights," ordered Feradac, "Castle Caernarvon can be easily defended by six sheep and a simpleton... and the English might even be able to do it too, make sure the survivors do nae make it inside the Castle."

The Commander saluted and rode his men forward; tearing through the streets of Caernarvon watched from behind closed doors and shuttered windows by the people of the city. They rode along the walls of the massive castle, and the Commander muttered a curse as he saw the portcullis was closed, and through the bars he could see the survivors of Captain Aston's cavalry, safe inside.



"Damn their hides!" snapped the Commander, "Now we must lay siege anew inside the blasted city!"

But then came the cries and wailing of the surviving English infantry, and turning in surprise, the Commander saw the remaining English peasants running towards them, or more precisely, the portcullis of Castle Caernarvon.

"Step back, lads," he grinned, "Let's see how callous our foe can be."

The peasants reached the portcullis, throwing themselves against it and screaming to be let in, and inside the Castle Courtyard, the surviving Cavalry turned and stared with despair at each other. They had no Captain anymore, and no clear leader, and some of those men were related, if distantly. They themselves were only recently promoted to the Cavalry, a sure sign of the lack of troops available to the English in this abandoned corner of the English Empire.

"KILL THEM!" roared the Knight Commander.

"Dammit!" cried an English Cavalryman, swallowing the bluff, "OPEN THE GATES!"



The Portcullis groaned and then opened, the Cavalry on the other side screaming at the peasants to rush in, but the Crusader Knights were all ready moving, riding down the peasants and entering the Courtyard.

"FIRE BALLISTA!" cried an English soldier in desperation as he saw the Ballista troops standing by their weapon, transfixed with horror on the approaching Scottish... but then it was too late, the Scottish were on them.



Feradac rode through the city, his men cheering him and themselves, and the General smiled. His heart had been heavy since the death of Arcill, but it had been lifted somewhat since the news had reached him that the Inquisitor had been found dead, burnt at the stake by heretics who apparently had wanted to humiliate his good name by killing him as he had killed heretics in the past. It was a good story, and one seemingly accepted by the Church, which had pleased Feradac a great deal.

But not as much as this.

"BEHOLD!" he cried, "WALES IS IN THE HANDS OF SCOTLAND NOW!"

His men cheered, but he wasn't done.

"SCOTLAND'S PROTECTION EXTENDS NOW TO WALES, TO IRELAND, AND AYE, EVEN TO ENGLAND! THIS KINGDOM IS A UNITED KINGDOM! ALL COUNTRIES NOW ONE UNDER SCOTLAND! HAIL THE UNITED KINGDOM!"

"HAIL THE UNITED KINGDOM!" roared the men.

"HAIL THE UNITED KINGDOM!" he roared again, and then they all roared it together.

"HAIL THE UNITED KINGDOM!"



Following the broken siege of Cairo by Sicily, the Canmore Clan seemed to become blessed by one divine favor after another. Amongst all those who counted, Scotland was recognised as the greatest, richest and most powerful nation in the world, and to top it all off, the Clan was blessed by another marriage, when Domnall Canmore married Ragnailt Lesly.

End Of Turn Report

Military Summary			
Battles Fought	50	Battles Won	40
Troops Recruited	155	Troops Lost	0
Regions Captured	18	Regions Lost	2

Financial Summary			
Income:	37761	Expenditure:	34293
Profits:	3468		
Total:	11148		

Balance of Power	
Your Rating	Current Leader
Military: 1 (100%)	Scotland
Financial: 1 (100%)	Scotland
Production: 1 (100%)	Scotland
Population: 1 (100%)	Scotland
Overall: 1 (100%)	Scotland

Marriage Celebrations

Domnall Canmore
Ragnhailt Canmore



Celebrations erupt throughout the kingdom as news of the royal wedding makes its way to the far corners of the realm, and beyond. The people are already excitedly speculating whether or not their first-born will be a boy or a girl.

Upon the completion of Domnall's honeymoon, he was delighted to discover that his father and King Edward had decided he would accompany them on what they hoped to be the start of their Moorish Campaign. Less pleased was Nectan, who was informed he would be remaining behind in Cairo to Govern the City, and he made his displeasure clear.

"The fact is, Nectan, Domnall needs it more," Edmund explained to him in private, "I know, and more importantly, Edward knows, that you have the potential to be a great battlefield General. But we need all the sons of Canmore to be skilled in leading men in battle. Domnall must learn now while he has the chance to from Edward, whereas you will always be a great General, no matter if you are shown the way by Edward or take it yourself. I am proud of all my sons, Nectan, but only a fool would pretend that different sons do not have different strengths."

So Domnall Canmore found himself gone from the cities he had been raised in, away from walls and women, servants and libraries, tutors and taverns. Now he was in the desert that had surrounded his homes for as long as he could remember, riding a horse through the endless sands beside his Uncle and Father, watching as they administered to the Army and negotiated with mercenary Sudanese to join them. In a bid to gain favor with a Church that was becoming frustrated anew with Scotland, Edmund declared the Army for the Crusade, announcing they would make for Toulouse once they had dealt with a Rebel Encampment at Dongola. He believed Feradac would have reached Toulouse by that point and the Crusade would be over, but Scotland would receive the Pope's thanks regardless. Edward was a keen advocate for the Church, having grown into his faith over the decades, but he also had a master grasp of politics and knew when to use his relationship with the Pope to his advantage. Domnall watched all of this, taking note of what his Father and Uncle did even when they did not specifically tell him why.

Such as the overwhelming numbers they took with them to Dongola. At a glance one would expect it to indicate that King Edward meant to overrun the Rebel town through sheer force of numbers. But there was so much more to it, some of which was explained to him and some of which he gleaned for himself. Edward and Edmund had a Moorish Campaign planned, and needed to battle test their forces on an easy target first. The sheer size of the force was a telling warning to warring Nations like Sicily that Scotland was so mighty it could easily remove a force of such a size from its Border Cities and still leave them defended.



"Watch now, son," Edmund whispered to Domnall as King Edward gave his pre-battle speech to the men, "Ye'll note we have four battering rams prepared, and two catapults besides, and the Rebel Captain has paced out his men accordingly around the walls to try and prevent our entry. But appearances can be deceiving."

Edward finished his speech and the men responded with a massive cheer, the Sudanese apparently either understanding well enough to get the gist of his speech, or infected with the rising battle lust of the Scots.

"Now, this is what we call warfare of the mind," grinned Edmund, "Watch."

"NOW!" roared Edward, lifting his sword high, and before the startled eyes of the Rebels, the doors to the Encampment swung open as the Scots charged forward.



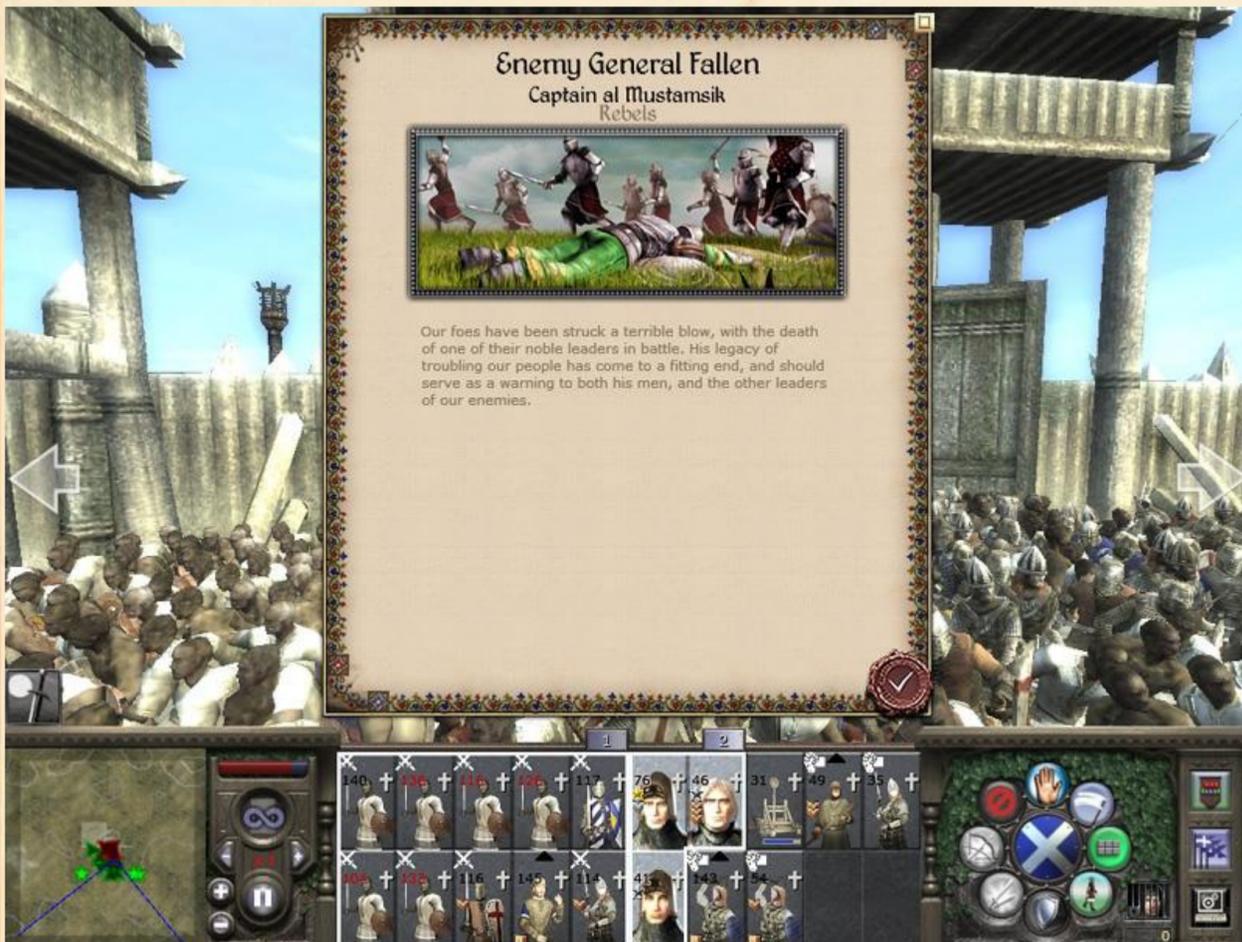
"Now the enemy are perplexed, horrified and scared," grinned Edmund, "Watch as the Rebel captain panics and calls his men to concentrate on the gate."

Action matched words, as the Rebel Captain bellowed for his men to follow, and they charged into the fray as Rebels desperately tried to hold back the Scottish howling at the entrance to the small town, swords swinging.



"Now the Rebels are helpless to think in their panic," Edmund said, continuing his education of Domnall, "Men who should be guarding other key points of entry will ride in to try to and help their friends. They will be too panicked to think we have had a spy infiltrate them and open the gates, so the legend of King Edward the Demon Scot will be in their minds.... what witchcraft or act of the Catholic God has opened their gate? Have their own Gods abandoned them? Ahhh and look, the Rebel Captain has pushed too far forward and is amongst our men, and he falls to his death before his own men... and the panic grows."





"Now his men are in desperation, and in desperation a man can find strength he never knew he had," Edmund told Domnall, who watched on spellbound from his horse, not far from Edward who was bellowing orders. So far they hadn't moved their horse from where they'd stood as Edward gave his speech, it was nothing like Domnall had expected battle to be. The way his Father spoke, it was as if it was all as prepared and rehearsed as a well-known play. Edmund continued, "So Domnall, we must crush their spirits before anger and desperation can mix together and create hope.... observe now, our battering rams, forgotten by the Rebels in the desperate battle at the Gate."





"Attacked from all sides now, all that is left for the Rebels is a desperate dash for survival, they run from our men, and our men give chase, and I need not tell ye what the result will inevitably be."



Prince Edmund turned to fix Domnall with a harsh stare, "Learn the lesson well, Domnall, sheer force of numbers alone will nae win the battle. A man does nae think in battle, he reacts. A good Commander will put his men into a position where their reactions turn the battle to his advantage, and the enemy's reactions turn the battle to their disadvantage."

Domnall nodded, he didn't know what else to say, only that battle was a far more complicated thing than his lessons or favorite war stories had taught him. If he was to command men like his Uncle, he had a lot of work ahead of him.

Domnall's next lesson was on a different type of warfare, that of diplomacy. After Dongola fell, news came that Nectan had repelled a Sicilian Force that had mistaken the size of King Edward's army for an emptying of the Cairo Garrison. Domnall could not help but think this suited his Father's purpose well, as it told the rest of the world of the might of Scotland's armies, plus Nectan now had

proved himself an able battlefield commander. Domnall had been in as many battles as his twin now, that being one, but he couldn't help but feel that Nectan had got the best of the deal, as Domnall's experience had been sitting on his horse in full armor in the desert heat while his Father lectured him. After news of Nectan's victory came news that Milan and Sicily had ended their previous bitter warfare, and Domnall could easily guess that the Sicilians had realized it was madness to war with Milan AND the Scottish at the same time. Edward and Edmund discussed an offer of Trade Rights between Scotland and Poland and eventually agreed to it after Edmund convinced Edward that more money was always a good thing, especially with a new campaign ready to be launched against the Moors. Nectan announced his betrothal to Eufemie of Bute, and Domnall was surprised to hear that they would not return to Cairo for the wedding. They were committed to the Crusade, which was taking longer than expected, and if they did not make even a token movement North soon, the Pope would start to think they were not truly committed to the Church.



Then Domnall learnt his next lesson - of Canmore moving against Canmore.

"Alexander is completely committed to annihilating the English," growled Edward one night in his Command Tent, sitting at his desk as he, Edmund and Domnall reviewed their maps, "He holds Feradac at Caen instead of pushing him towards Toulouse, and reports say the religious mercenaries have begun abandoning the army to move to join those that have all ready laid siege to Toulouse."

"The English tried to take Edinburgh, and Alexander vowed their destruction for the temerity," noted Edmund to Domnall, "But he was nae satisfied with taking Ireland, Wales, Nottingham and London... his rage is acting towards the detriment of the greater Scottish Empire."

"So send an order to Feradac directly," suggested Domnall, "An order from the King cannae be ignored."

Edward and Edmund shared a quiet look, one Domnall was growing used to and beginning to hate, a look that said that he was failing to grasp some deeper meaning.

"Reports and letters and orders have a way of getting lost when someone does nae want to hear them," Edmund finally said, "Feradac is our man, he always has been, and Alexander knows it, he will nae allow such a command to reach Feradac."

"Alexander is a true Canmore, and loves Scotland," added Edward, "But he suffers the same shortcoming that Edmund and I's Father had, he can nae see past Scotland. Our Empire will suffer if we lose the Pope's favor, and our enemies will grow bold. Sicily and Milan will see us as targets, and to the North, the Danes and the Spaniards will look at the Scottish coast. But Alexander does nae think to the long term, he thinks only of Scotland, and taking revenge on the English."

Domnall thought carefully, and thought he saw approval in his Father's face. Previously he would have spoken the first thing to come to his mind, now he tried to think deeper. Finally he spoke, "We cannae order Alexander to order Feradac to Toulouse, because the order may be "lost", and even if it were not, we would humiliate Alexander and damage his standing amongst the Nobles... creating the impression of a rift amongst the Canmores."

"Good lad," smiled Edmund, "So what do we do?"

Domnall thought again, looking at the problem from different angles. He had a reputation as an introvert given to outbursts of joviality, and many thought this meant he was usually lost deep in thought. But the truth was he preferred his own company, the result of being a twin perhaps, and often when he was alone he did not think at all, beyond the every day concerns and thoughts of any man. When he grew bored enough, he looked to others for company, and a well masked shyness was overcompensated for with bawdy jokes and heavy drinking. Now he was deep in thought though, and he surprised himself by speaking out loud as he came to what he saw an inevitable, if ignoble, conclusion.

"Scotland's war with England is accepted by the Pope because their King has been excommunicated," he said, "So if England's King is dead, the Pope is likely to reconcile the Church with the new King, in exchange for consideration from the new King for the privilege.... thus England will fall under the Church's protection once more, and Alexander will be forced to order Feradac to Toulouse.... but we dinnae have time to kill the King in battle, so he must be killed by other means.... an assassination?"

He looked up at his Uncle and Father, who wore blank faces as they stared at him. Finally, Edmund nodded, and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Assassination is a dirty word, lad," he said, "A grim word, and a bitter order for a Noble to make. Ye Uncle Alexander once told me of the use and need of an assassination network, and despite my own fondness for intelligence networks, I had to disagree with him. But they have their place, and sometimes expedience must be embraced over nobility."

"I despise them," grunted Edward, "But as ye Father says, sometimes for the good of Scotland, bitter decisions must be made."

Assassination Mission Success
King Symond



This person is no longer a threat, as the assassin that you sent has succeeded in eliminating them without fuss... and more importantly, without drawing any suspicion to the fact it was you who ordered the deed done.

Faction Reconciled
England



After much deliberation, the Pope has decided that these people have made amends for their blasphemous, disrespectful ways, offering them total reconciliation with the Catholic church. No longer are these peoples' lands fair game for the other Catholic rulers to treat as targets of conquest, lest they induce the Pope's wrath!

Prince Edmund lay in his tent, trying to escape the bitter heat of the desert. Word of the reconciliation of England had reached him

yesterday, and today had come word that Feradac was moving towards Toulouse. Domnall's idea of a week earlier had worked, though of course both he and Edward had all ready come to the conclusion before his son suggested it.

He was pleased with Domnall's progress; the lad was showing a capacity for strategy he had feared was not there. Even better, in Cairo, Nectan was proving an able Governor, and letters from his son indicated that the lad's desire to see battle had been quenched by his clash with the Sicilians. Everything was going as planned, and it seemed that after 1000 distractions, Scotland's long planned Moorish Campaign could finally begin.

"My Lord," whispered a voice, and Edmund was rolling up from his bunk, hand reaching for his sword in a flash. Who had entered his tent unbidden, unannounced by the guards..... and then he relaxed, when he realized who it was.

"My Lord," repeated Fearghus Campbell, Master Spy of Edmund's extensive network, "Forgive the intrusion on ye thoughts, but I have travelled as fast as I could through the desert to give ye this information personally, it could nae be trusted with anyone else."

Edmund noted Fearghus' clothes and hair were unusually unkempt, his skin coated in dried sweat, his eyes more intense than ever.... this was important. He cast his mind back to the last he had heard from Fearghus, investigating the movements of the Turks to the north of Adana. The spy handed him a sheet of documents, and Edmund sat on the bunk and began reading through them, face curious at first, then frowning, then concerned. Finally he finished, and looked up at Campbell, who had not moved since handing him the notes.

"This information.... accurate?"

"Aye, as well as can be ascertained, my Lord," sighed Fearghus, "Were it nae for the suddenness with which the reports grew, I would have dismissed it as merely a childhood bogeyman, immature gossip of the actions of the Devil. Almost all of the reports are thirddhand, but something told me to investigate further, and I eventually tracked down a very unique man."

"How was he unique?" asked Edmund.

"He was alive," Fearghus stated simply.

"You will nae tell a soul of this but me," Edmund said at last, "Ye will return and find out what more ye can, and then ye will report directly to me. There is nae need to worry the King with this, and there is every chance this information can be turned to Scotland's advantage."

Fearghus nodded, and turned to leave, then turned back, "My Lord."

"Aye, Fearghus?"

"I've only heard one man spoken of like the man in that report before," the Spy said, "And that was King Edward."

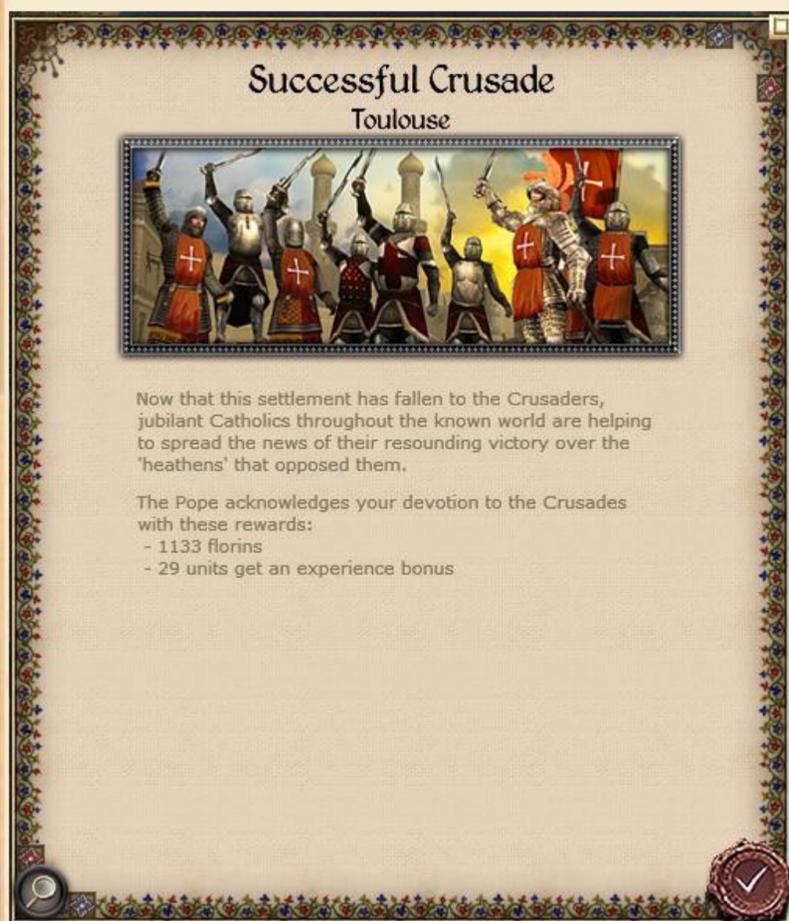
Edmund nodded, and the Spy left as quietly as he'd entered, the surprised guards peering into the tent where Edmund cast a weary wave at them to show all was well. He looked back at the report Fearghus had bought him, and shook his head in disbelief.... why now? He put the papers down, and leaned back, speaking the strange name written of in the report, a name that he felt sure would soon cast a shadow over the Scottish Empire.

"Genghis Khan."



Chapter 16

The Crusade was over, Toulouse conquered and given into the hands of the Papacy. For Scotland this was bad news, because Feradac had not reached the city in time to share in the glory of the victory and - more importantly - the favor of the Church. Feradac met a messenger representing the Pope on the road to Toulouse, who imparted to him coldly that the Pope "appreciated" Scotland's participation, and handed over an insultingly small amount of money for their efforts, less than 1100 florins. Given the size of Toulouse, the Papacy had likely gained hundreds of times that much from the sacking of the city.



"There's nae left but to return to Scotland," grunted Feradac, "We'll keep our camp here for the day, and set off tomorrow for the coast again."

That night, a messenger came to his tent and handed him an envelope marked with Alexander Canmore's seal. He broke the seal and rode the message inside with a frown, as the messenger stood patiently waiting.

Feradac, England's new King, Robert, has proven a more able and subtle leader than Symond. He has been infiltrating agents into London and York to instigate dissent, and several riots have had to be stamped out by the garrisons there. I am moving forces under the command of myself and Adam throughout the United Kingdom to deal with the unrest, but I need you to take the attention of the English away from their scheming.

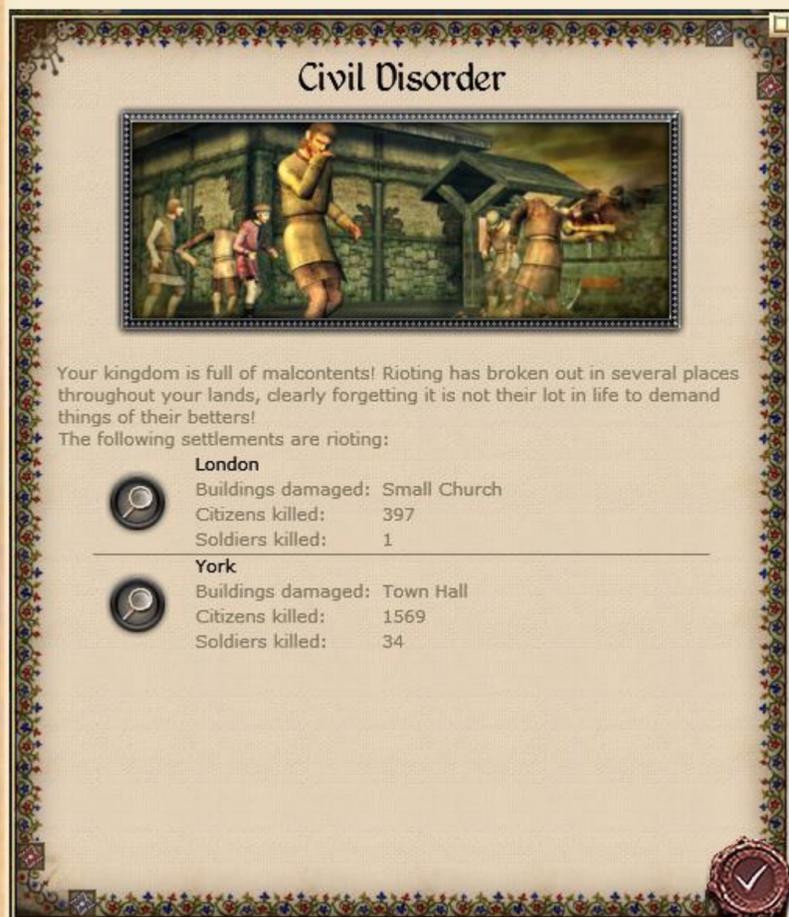
You will travel to Caen and lay siege to the Fortress there, if necessary you will take the Fortress from the English, and if further necessary, you will take Rennes as well. The Pope will not be pleased, especially in light of your failure to reach Toulouse in time, but we can deal with that problem at a later date.

Prince Alexander Canmore.

Feradac sat quietly fuming for a time, thinking about the implied blame Alexander was placing on him for his failure to reach Toulouse despite it being on Alexander's orders he had been delayed. He also thought about the implications of going to war with the English when they had only recently been reconciled with the Church. Finally, he turned and grabbed a sheet of paper, then an ink and quill, and wrote quickly and steadily for several moments before folding the message into an envelope, dripping wax onto it and marking it with his seal. He turned back to the messenger who had been patiently waiting all this time.

"This message is for the eyes of King Edward only, and must reach him at the earliest possible date," he explained, "Ye will give this message priority over all others, do ye ken?"

The messenger saluted and took the message, leaving the tent as Feradac sighed. For now he'd do as instructed and ride for Caen, and hopefully by the time he reached there, King Edward would have returned a message overriding Alexander's order.



Outside the tent, the messenger calmly led his horse to the edge of the camp, greeting the guards on the perimeter, then rode into the night. Several hours later he stopped to make camp, made a small campfire, and burned the message from Feradac without opening it.

"Edward is the King of Egypt," he grunted, "Alexander is the true King of Scotland, and ye will do as ye King instructs, Feradac of Peeblesshire."

Feradac sat outside the walls of Caen Fortress, which had started as a glorified French guardtower on the coast and ended up growing a small town around it. Now the English held it, with a tiny garrison inside designed more to keep the townsfolk in line than deal with a besieging army... especially a large force initially put together to go on crusade.

No message had come from King Edward, and Feradac knew that his liege would not simply ignore the message, which meant it had never arrived for him to read. That meant that at some point along the route the message had been lost or destroyed, probably deliberately, but he would have to deal with that later. For now, he could not defy the order of Prince Alexander, who was Brother to the King himself. Feradac might have been an adopted member of the Royal Family, but he knew his place.

Right now, his place was to decimate the English Garrison of Caen, led by Captain Alfred.



Our best bet is to meet them at the gate, their thinnest point of entry," cried Captain Alfred to his assembled men, a mixture of Armored Knights and poorly armed peasants give a day's rushed training and forced into service,"If they can only come at us a few at a time, we can negate their numbers advantage and hold them out."

Once the men were assembled at the gate, Alfred turned to a smaller unit of his most trusted men, and whispered quietly to them.

"The Scottish will ride through us like we were not there," he grunted,"I will stand with the man to keep them from breaking, once the battle begins you must climb to the walls above the gates and keep control of the towers. I hope to use the peasants as a slaughterhouse, a pile of the dead that slows down the Scottish enough for our archers in the towers to bring down as many Scots as we can. Our only hope is that our own dead form a wall with theirs and they are forced to pull back to build siege equipment, by which point we may be lucky enough to have reinforcements from the East."

His men nodded grimly and moved into position, as Alfred called out encouragement to the assembled troops before the Gate to the city, the massive doors shuddering and bulging as catapult fire slammed against them.... and then the Scottish were flooding through, an ocean of death crashing against the English.



NOW!" screamed Alfred, and his Knights broke off to travel inside the Guard Tower, up narrow spiralling stone stairs that they could defend forever if need be, allowing the archers inside to rain down death upon the Scottish trapped beneath the gate.



The Knight Commander stared down at horror over both sides of the gate. On the outside of Caen, the Scottish kept on coming up the hill, a seemingly endless stream of the devils. On the inside of Caen, the English were being decimated, and even if Alfred could have blocked their blows and cut them down, there was no way he could stand against the relentless weight of the oncoming Scottish tide.... and he did not.



Enemy General Fallen
 Captain Alfred
 England



Our foes have been struck a terrible blow, with the death of one of their noble leaders in battle. His legacy of troubling our people has come to a fitting end, and should serve as a warning to both his men, and the other leaders of our enemies.

"HOLD THIS WALL!" screamed the Knight Commander as he saw Alfred fall beneath the Scots, "ALFRED'S PLAN STILL STANDS! WE PROTECT THE TOWER FOR OUR ARC...."

A flaming stone fired from the Scottish Catapult smashed into the guard tower, partially collapsing it and killing the archers inside.

"Bugger the plan!" screamed one of the Knights, "Leg it, lads!"



"Don't let them reach Castle Caen and close the portcullis!" roared Feradac as he watched the English abandoning the walls, "Cavalry, after them!"

The Cavalry thundered down the streets of the small town after the fleeing English, who charged inside the walls of Castle Caen ahead of the horse, but not far enough ahead to close the portcullis and seal them out.





Once inside the castle walls, the result was never in question.... though Feradac couldn't help but think the result hadn't been in question since Alexander had given the order. Once the English had been amongst the mightiest in the world, now they were a threat only in Alexander's mind.



Prince Alexander was mad!

"Will he not be satisfied!?" growled Robert, King of England, as he paced about his dining hall. It was empty, and he was speaking to himself, and the two were not uncommon in Rennes nowadays. His was the blood of William the Conqueror, but the glory days of the former King were long behind England. He was ruling a Nation without a country, their holdings reduced to former French strongholds along what had once been the French coast. His Brother Rufus had sought to emulate their Father by conquering, and had thought Scotland's cities would be easy targets, abandoned as they were by the Scottish nobility in their mad jaunt in Egypt. But Alexander Canmore had returned and killed Rufus, and under Symond they'd been thrown out of the land of their ancestors, suffering the greatest humiliation the English had ever known.

Then Symond had died, and the weight of leadership had fallen onto his shoulders, and he'd thought for a small while that maybe the reconciliation from the Church would protect them. He'd thought that maybe Alexander would be happy with humiliating them, but now it seemed the mad Scottish Prince would not be happy until England was wiped off the face of the planet.

"Will no one take this weight from my shoulders!" cried Robert, whose dark moods of late had resulted in his empty halls. None wanted to be near him in case he turned his fury on them, "Will no one take away this responsibili-"

"Okay," chuckled a voice behind him as he felt his body lock up, every muscle feeling stretched to the limit. He would have fallen backwards, but hands he could not feel kept him up.

"

" he croaked.

"Oh that's just a paralytic," chuckled the voice as he saw - but did not feel - his body being lifted and turned towards the window, "It'll wear off in about a day and ye'll feel perfectly fine.... well... in normal circumstances ye would anyway."

Then King Robert of England was thrown bodily out the window, to the ground over a hundred feet below.

"Clever lad," smiled Edward, "But don't think merely in terms of financial gain, Scotland is all ready the richest Nation in the world. Think strategically of war, what do the Moorish Coastal Cities provide Scotland?"

Domnall thought for moment, then smiled, "A staging point for invasion of the Continent."

"Good lad," chuckled Edmund, "Now take the thought a step further, dinnae think strategically of war, but financial gain."

Domnall frowned, confused, but thought on it, looking at the problem from as many angles as he could until finally it dawned on him, "The impression of war?"

King Edward threw back his head and laughed.

"Aye, a clever lad and a good lad and a General yet! All ready Milan has come to us seeking to open greater diplomatic ties," he gestured to the ocean in the far distace, "If those across the sea know that within a few days sailing lies cities full of Scottish garrisons armed to the teeth, they will suddenly become VERY compliant in terms of diplomacy, trade and alliance."

"Also," noted Edmund, "Desert it may be, but once we take the Moors, Scotland will control half the world. We will truly be the mightiest Empire in the World."

Domnall laughed, truly there was nothing to could stop Scotland now.

In London, Prince Alexander gaped at the message in his hands, and stared up in horror at the messenger.

"This is nae joke?"

The messenger shook his head fearfully, and Alexander roared in frustration and swept aside his table as he leapt to his feet.

"Send word to Adam in Edinburgh, tell him to raise what force he can while still keeping control of the city and meet me in York. I will do the same."

The messenger nodded and rushed away as Alexander cursed. First that damned madman the Pope thought to tell Scotland what to do, and now.... this? He would raise an army as quickly as he could, but he could not bring all his men with the recent rioting problems in London, and he knew Adam suffered a similar quandary. They would do their best, but he did not think they would make it to York in time.

For the Vikings had come to test their mettle against the Scots.

Settlement Besieged

York
Denmark



This settlement has been surrounded by enemy forces and is held under siege. Though safe for the moment, there is no telling whether or not your foes will assault the walls soon, or attempt to starve your defenders out. Perhaps acting first may take your foes by surprise...

Chapter 17

Captain Cormac stared from the walls of York out at the Danish Army. He ignored the battering ram. He ignored the siege tower. He ignored the siege ladders. He ignored the Danish Captain, Skaapti, marching about importantly on his horse issuing orders to his Cavalry units. He ignored the Dismounted Huscarls, tough Danes the match of any English Knight.

It was the Vikings that worried him.

The Danish were a Christian Nation now, but they had never forgotten their Barbarian past, much like the Scottish. The Vikings were raiders, killers, fighters, drinkers. They were born for battle and revelled in it, and they knew no fear. They were like the Scottish Highlanders, a force so potent that they needed to be directed outward against the world; else they turn on the rest of the Nation and destroy it from within.

There were over 1000 Danes, and several hundred of them were Vikings, and the Garrison here at York held less than 700 men in total, over half of them simple town militia. Cormac had received word that Prince Alexander and Prince Adam had taken what men could be spared from London and Edinburgh to ride to their aid, but it was too late. The Danish were ready to attack now, and it was time to test the mettle of Scottish men against the legendary Viking Raiders.



"Here goes," grunted Cormac as he saw Skaapti motion his men forward, and the Danish Army began to move towards York.

"Eh?" asked the Highland Archer standing beside him.

"Nevermind," replied Cormac, "Ye just remember what I told ye lads to do."



"Spears, ye will NAE MOVE!" roared Cormac, looking down at the Spearmen in place behind the Gate to the City, spears in place to absorb any cavalry charge should the Danes take the Gate, "ALL OF YE MEN! REMEMBER MY ORDERS! FOLLOW MY COMMANDS! WE'LL SHOW THESE VIKING BASTARDS WHAT IT IS LIKE TO FIGHT REAL MEN!"

Him men cheered, and then Cormac turned his attention back to the approaching Danes, focusing on the Huscarls pushing the battering ram forward.

"FIRE!" he roared, "ALL ON THAT RAM!"

The Archers lined up along the wall lit their arrows and fired, sweeping down burning arrows on the Huscarls and - more importantly - their ram.

"Fools," grunted Skaapti, watching on his horse from a distance, "They concentrate their fire on the ram, and ignore the siege tower at their peril."

"They've reached the walls!" cried the Commander of the Religious Fanatics from his section of the wall.

"Keep them from climbing them, damn ye!" roared Cormac, cursing the fanatics left under his command. They were fierce fighters due to their religious fanaticism and total lack of fear of death, but they looked at everything from a religious slant, and were not pleased to be fighting fellow Catholics, "Archers, keep firing on that ram, damn ye!"

More and more arrows rained down on the ram, and finally it was too much, the treated wood unable to prevent the mass of burning arrows. The ram caught alight and quickly became a blazing bonfire, the Huscarls who had been pushing it retreating quickly from the flames.



"Fools," chuckled Skaapti, repeating himself, "They've destroyed our ram, but now our tower is too close for them to destroy in time. The walls are...."

"NOW!" screamed Cormac, and from behind the walls, kept back from the battle till now, the catapults were fired.

Two massive burning rocks soared through the air over the wall of York, Scots craning their necks to look at the missiles flying above them. At top speed, they smashed into the tower as it drew near the walls, tearing through wood like it was paper, creating instant kindling that quickly caught alight, the flames dancing to the larger wood and spreading.

"THESE WALLS ARE SCOTLAND'S!" roared Cormac, and a mighty cheer rang up from his men.





"We'll see," hissed Skaapti, incensed to see his Siege Tower in flames, with the only way into the City now through the ladders. The tower was burning, the battering ram had collapsed and burnt out, but the ladders were still against the walls, and now Danish men had reached the tops of the walls and were leaping over the top, axes swinging as they went to battle with the Scottish.



Now was the moment of truth, Cormac had suspected that the Danish would attack the walls at the Religious Fanatics. The Danes knew as well as he that the Fanatics were in York only because of the recent Crusade, and their passion was for killing heathens, not fellow Catholics.

He needn't have worried.

"THESE BLASPHEMERS BRING WAR AGAINST THEIR FELLOW CATHOLICS!" roared the Commander, "IN THE NAME OF GOD! THEY MUST DIE!"



The Fanatics threw themselves with reckless abandon at the Huscarls, smashing at them with the clubs, their fists, screaming in righteous fury as they threw the Danes off of the wall.

"Enough is enough," growled Skaapti as he watched the Huscarls dying at the walls, "Send in the Vikings."



The Vikings came, and Cormac ordered all men manning the walls to defend at the point where the ladders rested. The Vikings came, and they were as fierce and as deadly as their legend. The Vikings came, and they climbed ladders and killed the Scotsmen who stood in their way. The Vikings came, ignoring fiery arrows, swung clubs, swinging swords and thrown punches. The Vikings came, and they came, and they kept coming.... and something strange happened.

The Scotsmen held their ground. The Scotsmen kept fighting. The Scotsmen laughed and sang as they fought, even as friends and kin died around them. The Scotsmen goaded the Vikings, asking if this was the best they had, the best they could bring. The Scotsmen began singing as they fought, and the Vikings began to feel something they had never before felt in the heat of battle.

The Vikings became scared.



For the first time in as long as anyone could remember, the Vikings threw down their swords and ran in terror. As they ran, they screamed to each other that the rumor and legend was true. The Scottish were not men, they were Devils from Hell, and anyone who came against them did so at their own peril.

"SCOTLAND!" screamed Cormac as he watched Captain Skaapti turn and lead his men away in humiliation, following the fleeing Vikings, "SCOTLAND! SCOTLAND!"

"SCOTLAND!" roared the men on the walls.

"SCOTLAND!"



Prince Domnall entered the tent and immediately knew something was wrong, his Father was reading through a large pile of papers with a deliberately blank face, and his Uncle was pacing about the tent with a face blackened with rage.

"Domnall!" Edward almost shouted, "Good, good, this is important, lad."

"This is troubling," noted Edmund coolly, "Outside of the plainly obvious, it speaks of a well placed secret enemy."

"This" being what, exactly?" asked Domnall, used to his Father and Uncle talking amongst themselves as if all present were in on the subject of conversation. They were currently camped near Sicily's only coastal city on the edge of the world, and had been preparing to lay siege to it within the week.

"Last week we received a note," Edmund explained, placing down his papers, "Neither Edward nor myself told you of it, because we did not think it was anything you would need to worry about. It was a message from The Pope, expressing concern that we were spilling the blood of other Catholics in the form of the Sicilians. Coupled with Alexander's war against the English and the failure of Feradac to reach Toulouse in time for the Crusade, our normally rosy relationship with the Papacy was under strain. The Pope warned us that no King should expect blanket support from any Pope based on previous dealings, and that he was also concerned that Scotland had retained control of Holy Cities like Jerusalem and Baghdad while dishing out "crumbs" like Adana. He warned that if we stayed our current course, we could expect to be excommunicated within a year."

"That is grave indeed," frowned Domnall, "But you still planned to siege the Sicilians?"

"Time was on our side.... or so we thought," growled Edward, still pacing, "We'd take the city, the Sicilians would retreat, and then we would send a diplomat to make peace with the bastards. By that point Alexander would have dealt with the English finally one way or the other, since Feradac recently took Rennes from them and left the English but two strongholds in their Empire. Our relationship with the Church would be rocky for a few months that we'd sit out until monetary donations and the death of a few thousand heathens improved our standing once more."

"I take it something went wrong then?" asked Domnall.

"Today," sighed Edmund heavily, "We received a new message from the Pope, confirming personally what he'd already declared publicly. The Pope has excommunicated Scotland for warring with the Catholic Nations of Sicily, England and Denmark."

Domnall almost physically reeled from the statement, excommunicated from the Church!?!

"But... but the first message..."

"Was delayed!" growled Edward angrily, "Though we did not discover so until we went back to check the wording of his statement. We came to realize that somehow the message had been delayed - or rather, someone had delayed it - so we did not realize till too late that we were on the verge of excommunication."

"Someone has played us very well indeed," noted Edmund, "It could be any one of our rivals, or even one of our allies. Someone is seeking to gain at Scotland's misfortune, and now we face a dreadful problem... we have no reason to stop our war with Sicily, but apparently we also war with England and Denmark, the latter only confirmed by a message from Alexander that arrived yesterday warning the Danes had laid siege to York. Scotland is the mightiest Empire in the world, but even we can not stand against ALL the Catholic Nations, and that is now a very real possibility. Scotland may soon find itself at war with the rest of the World."



Later that night, Edmund sat in his own tent reviewing reports, messages and other communications from the last several months. He doubted he could weasel out the identity of whoever had laid such a clever trap for them, but there was no harm in looking. If the identity turned out to be hidden within, he would not forgive himself if he had not checked.

A cough caught his attention, and looking up he wasn't at all surprised to see Fearghus Campbell standing before him, having once more entered his tent undetected by either Edmund or the guards outside.

"I fear I know what you have come to tell me, Fearghus," sighed Edmund, "It has been a day for bad news."

"Aye, my Lord," nodded Fearghus grimly, "The tales of the Mongol Horde is no tale, they exist, their leader may be worse than the darkest tales claim, and they have been seen sweeping through the lands near Baghdad like a swarm of locusts, destroying all in their path."

"Madness surrounds us on all sides," growled Edmund, "At a time when Scotland is at its mightiest, we are at our most vulnerable... we must find some way to turn our misfortunes to our advantage."

He pondered quietly for a moment, and then his eyes widened.

"Who else knows of this Horde?" he asked.

"At the current time, the Turkish Leaders believe them to be bandits surrounded mostly by reputation and superstition. I suspect this belief is based on their inner knowledge that they could not stand against such a force. Other than that, I know of no other Nation that is aware of their existence.... they are not known for leaving survivors."

Edmund thought for a moment, then grabbed a blank page and began furiously writing. When done, he sealed the message and handed it to Fearghus, telling him, "You must get this to Gille Calline the Balleol, I do not trust it in any other hands but you and he, do you understand?"

Fearghus nodded, and quickly departed the tent, Edmund sighing quietly. He had just taken a giant gamble, but if it worked.... oh if it worked!

The Mongols Invade!



It is easy to become comfortable with the enemy you know, our familiar foes. But to discount the menaces that lurk beyond the known world is to risk a rude awakening that can become a nightmare. This nightmare is the Mongol invasion. The bulk of the Mongol forces have arrived not far from Baghdad, making it a dangerous place at best now.

Pope Stephanus grunted as he read another message warning of problems in Adana, where the residents were anything but the desperate Catholics in search of redemption they'd been painted to be. The Scottish really were a nuisance of late, and he wondered why a man such as King Edward - who had always served the Church faithfully - had turned his back on God.

"Your Holiness," whispered a servant reverentially, "A Scottish Diplomat is requesting an audience, shall I send him away?"

"No no, let him in," grunted The Pope, "I look forward to the distraction, and to venting God's fury towards Scotland to an actual person."

Gille Calline The Balleol entered, but the Pope's anticipation of unleashing righteous indignation was swept away in shock. Never had he seen the man so dejected, so bereft of his usual self-confidence and sardonic wit. The man before him was a wreck, his clothes dishevelled, his hair wild and his eyes hollow.

"Your Holiness," gasped Gille, dropping to his knees and stumbling towards The Pope, who recovered from his shock enough to offer his ring, which Gille eagerly kissed, almost sobbing.

"What is the meaning of this.... this display," demanded The Pope.

"I have received instructions, your Holiness," cried Gille, "Instructions to play the diplomatic game, to cajole and coerce where I can, to gain for Scotland what it wants, which is public reconciliation with the Church.... but they have gone too far this time.... man does not play politics with God.... no King can manipulate the Divine to achieve material gain on Earth.... I am a Scotsman, true, and a Diplomat as well.... but first and foremost, I am a Catholic!"

"It gladdens me to hear a man, especially a Scotsman, put God before King and Country," smiled the Pope, internally glorying in Gille's sad state. To see the man brought so low gave him a sense of satisfaction that, as Pope, he really shouldn't be feeling.... but to err was human, to forgive was Divine, "But what would they have had you do?"

"Play with the lives of men as if they were pawns on a chessboard," howled Gille, whose emotions had apparently fully breached the dam now, "To move one country against another in order to incur ye wrath against them, to ride to the rescue, to play the hero in an act of villainy they began. It was given into my power to offer Scotland's own holdings to perform these tasks.... but it is too much! It is TOO FAR! I WILL NAE DO IT!"

"Quiet, quiet my son," smiled The Pope, "You have done the right thing by coming to me."

"Aye, the right thing, I see it now," cried Gille, trying desperately to hold back his tears, still on his knees before the Pope. Then, a wild look of hope came over his face, "In fact I see it now... they have inadvertently given me the means to make a restitution they are unwilling too. If they would play with cities and the lives of men as if they were chess pieces, let me give those pieces to a man who would treat them with the respect and dignity they deserve.... a man who would look to their spiritual needs. Let me give it to God's man!"

The Pope raised an eyebrow in surprise, as Gille Calline raised to one knee and formally placed his hand against his heart.

"Ye Holiness, Pope Stephanus," he said, his face serene despite the tears still running down it, "I, Gille Calline the Balleol, as a duly empowered representative of the Scottish Empire, make offer to ye as a Gift with no expectations or requirements attached, the Holy City of Baghdad."

"Yes, yes Gille," laughed the Pope, clapping his hands merrily, "I accept, of course, you have done the right thing this day!"

"Aye, ye Holiness," replied Gille, an open and honest look of admiration and gratitude on his face, "More than ye can know."

Scotland

Gille Calline the Balleol

Relations: Terrible
Reputation: Deceitful
Power: Supreme
Wealth: 10574
Religion: Catholic

Make offer

- Trade rights
- Attack faction
- Give region
- Make single payment
- Regular tribute
- Map information

Make demand

- Attack faction
- Give region
- Make single payment
- Regular tribute
- Map information
- Request reconciliation

Neutral for 68 turns

We cannot refuse such a generous suggestion!
Your gift is welcome, and you have our gratitude.

Demeanour: Happily Accepted

Make offer

The Papal States

Pope Stephanus the Missionary

Priorities: Unknown
Reputation: Mixed
Power: Strong
Wealth: Meagre
Religion: Catholic

Allies & Enemies

Allies: None
Enemies: Rebels

Current Treaties:

None

Chapter 18

"Baghdad!" chuckled Pope Stephanus to himself as he sat at his desk. The meeting with Gille Calline The Balleol last night.... oh what a divine comedy! God himself had seen fit to break the usually reserved Scotsman down, and the result was that the Papacy now held control over one of the great Cities of the Holy Land!

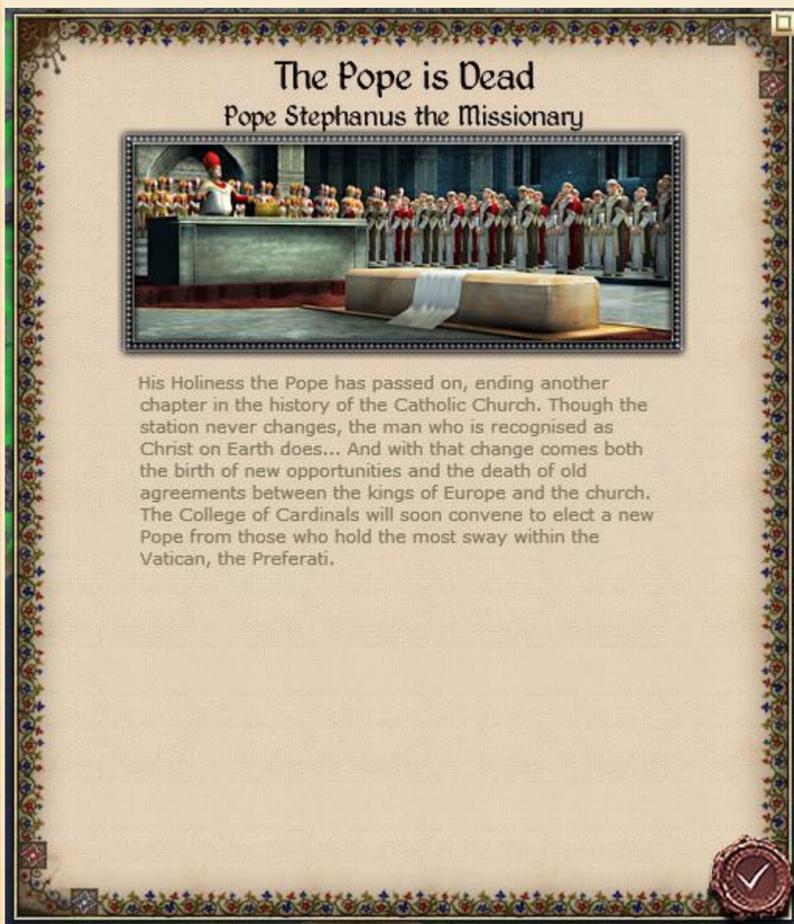
"Your Holiness?" asked a voice, and Stephanus peered up with surprise at a messenger that had entered unheard. He stifled a feeling of irritation at the disturbance of his revelry, he was after all The Pope, and meant to be above such petty emotions. He couldn't help but note a certain satisfaction, however, at the slightly awestruck look on the messenger's face, and he soon learned why, "Your Holiness, I come bearing a message regarding Baghdad... but you have all ready been appraised of the situation?"

"Hmmm, no," grunted Stephanus, "Give me the message."

He took the envelope from the messenger and broke the seal, reading through the contents with widening eyes, whispering passages of the text out loud in his astonishment and growing horror, ".... unstoppable force..... laying waste..... rape camps..... slaughter of children.... Genghis Khan.... Baghdad..... BAGHDAD!"

"BAGHDAD!" he roared, leaping to his feet, his face turning red, the messenger stumbling back in shock, "BAGHDAD! SCOTLAND! THE BALLEOL! BAGH-"

"Your Holiness?" gasped the messenger, staring in horror at the red-faced Holy Father, clutching at his neck and make choking, gasping sounds. The Pope collapsed down behind his desk, and the messenger crawled desperately over to it and looked over the top, cringing as he asked, "Your.... Holiness?"



"We have an opportunity here, Edward," Edmund warned as they sat in the King's cabin, sailing along the coast towards Gaza. The Moorish Campaign had ended before it could begin, as Edmund had taken everything he knew about the Mongol Horde to Edward and convinced him of the wisdom in fortifying their Eastern Cities against a possible invasion. The handover of Baghdad to the Pope had been designed to put a buffer between them and the Mongols, as well as force the Pope to act (once removed) in their defence should the Horde come, but that would not be enough to stop them if Fearghus Campbell's assessment of their strength was accurate.

"The new Pope is likely to reconcile us, if historical precedent is anything to go by," grunted Edward, who was still angry that they'd not only abandoned the Moorish Campaign, but their skirmishes with the Sicilian army.

"I mean our opportunity to cast a vote for the new Pope," replied Edmund, "Our man in the College of Cardinals will vote as we instruct him, which provides us with a chance to gain the immediate favor of the new Pope."

"I know where this is going, Edmund," growled Edward, "Ye want me to order a vote for that Sicilian bastard, Lorenzo."

"Thanks to Sicily's work in the last Crusade, they've replaced us as Church favorites," warned Edmund, "While we are excommunicated, they enjoy the favor of the Church even as they attack us. If we support Lorenzo, he will look favorably at us and instruct the Sicilian King to concentrate on less formidable foes, such as Milan."

"Sicily laid siege to Cairo," hissed Edward, "I'll nae vote to make their man the most powerful person on the planet. We'll vote for Ansehelm from the Holy Roman Empire, they are our allies and better suited to the position of Pope."

"Fine," sighed Edmund, seeing he would make no progress, "But I want ye to know, Edward, this is a mistake."



Pope Elected

Pope Tomascius



A new Pope has been elected, heralding a possible shift in how the Catholic church wields its might, as well the manner in which it deals with Europe's royalty. It is an unfortunate time for those who could count on the previous Pope as their friend, and a moment of opportunity for those that could not.

His Holiness believes the flames of eternal damnation are too good for you.



You Have Been Reconciled!

Scotland



Good news indeed! The Pope has sent an emissary to notify you of his willingness to reconcile his differences with you and your people. Aside from being a great source of relief for your more pious subjects, this will likely make any acts of aggression from the other Catholic nations towards you come under much scrutiny.



Papal Election Results

Pope Tomascius of Sicily

Lorenzo the Missionary (Sicily) has been named the new Pope and guide to all Christendom. You were unwise to go against him. Your lack of faith shall not be forgotten.



Preferati

Votes

Lorenzo the Missionary



Benedek the Righteous



Ansehelm the Warmonger



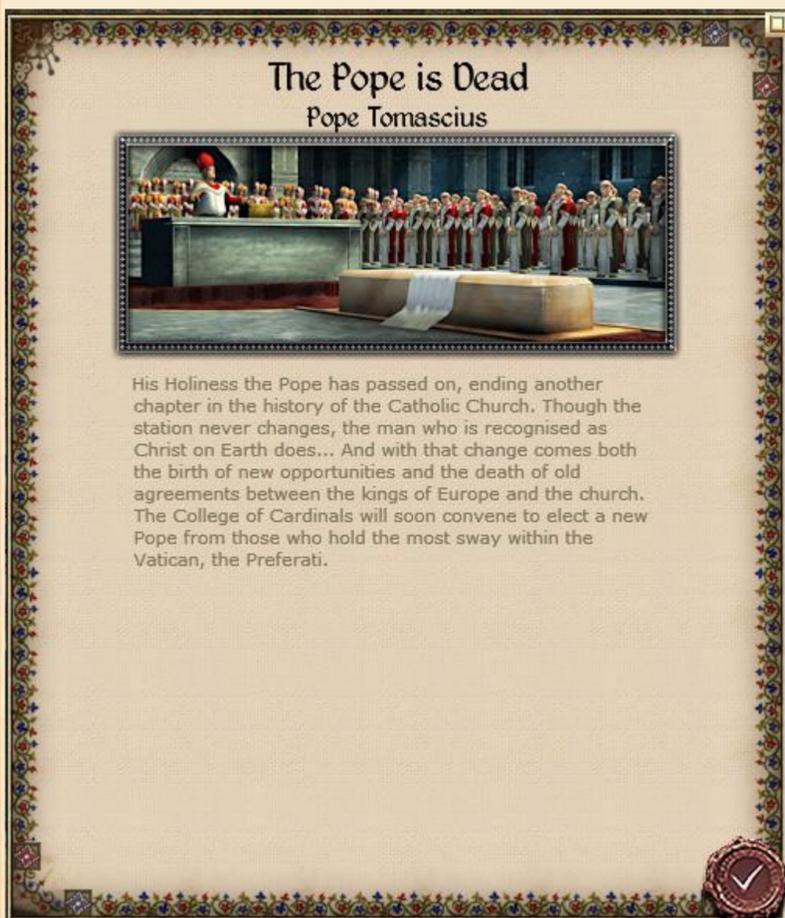
"Ahhhh, Blessed be," grinned Pope Tomascius, "The Divine arm of God protects Sicily, woe be unto her enemies."

"Yes, Your Holiness," smiled Prince Uberto The Crusader, who had been taught religion by Tomascius when he was but a Priest named Lorenzo. Now he stood in the private chambers of The Holy Father, the Christ on Earth, supposedly the conduit between man and God.... and a Sicilian through and though, "And the Scottish....?"

"The Scottish!" cried Tomascius, spinning about and raising an arm high. Uberto was used to such theatrics; Priest Lorenzo had been well known in Sicily for his dramatic sermonizing and passionate vitriol against those he perceived as acting against God and the Church, "THE SCOTTISH! The flames of eternal damnation are too good for them! Those ignorant, kilt wearing savages sit in the hallowed halls of Jerusalem, Gaza and Damascus! They hold the lands where Moses led his people to freedom! They have attacked the good Catholic nations of England, Denmark and God's beloved Sicily! And they had the temerity to order their Cardinal to vote against me!?!? SCOTLAND IS A BLIGHT ON THIS EARTH! SCOTLAND ARE THE ENEMIES OF GOD! SCOTLAND'S RECONCILIATION SHALL NOT LAST! THEY SHALL FALL BEFORE THE MIGHT OF GOD THROUGH HIS FAVORED NATION OF SICILY! SCOTLAND IS.... SCOTLAND IS....."

"Your Holiness?" asked Uberto, had words failed Tomascius? If so, it was a first for.....

"NO!" cried Uberto, staring in shock at the Pope as he crumpled to the floor clutching at his throat, his face turning black, "YOUR HOLINESS! YOUR HOLINESS!?!?!"



King Edward struggled to suppress a look of satisfaction as the Danish Princess, Cecile, curtsied out of his court with a completely open look of naked gratitude on her face. She had come begging for peace and an end to the war the Danish had started when they'd mistaken York for easy pickings and faced one of the most humiliating defeats in their known history. Edward, who was not keen to see Scotland facing Denmark, England, Sicily AND the Mongol Horde all at once had been happy to agree, though he'd made a point of appearing to consider the proposal carefully. He'd signed off on a trade deal with Spain earlier which had taken up a considerable portion of his day, and with this peace deal agreed between Denmark and Scotland, his day was done.

He left the Court, accompanied by servants, guards and advisors, listening with one ear to their incessant buzzing as he longed to get out of the city and back onto the field. The Royal Family had grown to a sufficient size now that he could leave others to run the cities while he conquered on the field. He refused to become like his Father had been, trapped in the Capital and fighting paper wars on maps. He had forged a Kingdom in his own right, and meant to fight for every yard of it, and to fight to gain every new yard he could.

He entered his chambers and blinked in surprise. Edmund was standing there waiting for him, but Edmund was.... young! Younger than he'd been when they'd gotten drunk and travelled to Egypt over four decades ago!

"Edmund?" he asked, shocked.

"Aye?" asked Edmund, turning in his chair beside the man Edward had mistaken for his brother, still looking strong and vital but with the gray hair and lined face that he had grown into.

"Aodh?" asked Edward, a grin crossing his face as he realized his mistake, "Lad, ye've grown into the spitting image of ye Father!"

"Dinnae insult the poor lad," laughed Edmund, as Aodh tried - and failed - to hide a pleased grin, "17 years of age, and a man now."



Edward clapped Aodh cheerfully on the shoulder, wondering if the lad had ever gotten over the naiveté that had seen Nectan and Domnall mock him so mercilessly. If the similarities to his Father were not just physical, then surely he had.

"Edward, the election of the new Pope..." started Edmund.

"I told ye all ready, Edmund," grunted Edward, "I'll nae allow our Cardinal to vote for a Sicilian. Aside from the fact the bastards brought war to us, ye know I am a true believer in the Faith, and I cannae vote for a man to be Christ on Earth when I believe he'll burn in hell when he dies."

"I would nae dream of trying to convince ye otherwise, Edward," Edmund acquiesced, then smiled up at Aodh, who seemed perplexed and concerned over the decidedly disrespectful way his Father and Uncle were talking off the Pope, "But ye are a realist even if ye are as stubborn now as ye were when ye were Aodh's age and we were killing English."

"So ye have a plan then, do ye?" asked Edward, his frown turning into a grin, "What have ye come up with this time, ye crafty bastard?"

"Oh this plan is nae exactly what ye would call subtle," grinned Edmund.

Pope Elected

Pope Alferius



A new Pope has been elected, heralding a possible shift in how the Catholic church wields its might, as well the manner in which it deals with Europe's royalty. It is an unfortunate time for those who could count on the previous Pope as their friend, and a moment of opportunity for those that could not.

His Holiness believes the flames of eternal damnation are too good for you.

Papal Election Results

Pope Alferius of Sicily



Lorenzo the Missionary (Sicily) has been named the new Pope and guide to all Christendom. You were unwise to go against him. Your lack of faith shall not be forgotten.

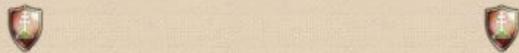
Preferati

Votes

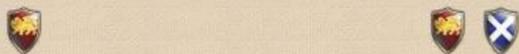
Lorenzo the Missionary



Benedek the Righteous



Phylipo Carnazza



He had been known as Lorenzo - a common name in Sicily, and a cause of confusion when the former Pope had been a Cardinal as well - but now he was Pope Alferius. He sat in one of the many richly appointed offices that were now his by right of the vote of the College of Cardinals, and the power at his disposal was.... unimaginable.

"Your Holiness," said a Sentry quietly and respectfully, "A diplomat from the Scottish Empire requests an audience."

"Send him in, please," smiled Alferius, looking forward to this. The Scots had been mad enough to have their Cardinal vote against his predecessor, and then him! Now would come the grovelling, as their barely reconciled Empire desperately tried to keep clear of excommunication once more. Well, Alferius had plans for them, and he didn't think the Scots were going to like any of them. Now that he was Pope, there was no force short of God that could prevent him from having his own way, and HE was the one who decided what God "thought".

The doors closed behind the Scottish Diplomat as he entered, and Alferius recognised Gille Calline The Balleol, a well known and well liked Diplomat who had dined with and maintained good relationships with Pope Stephanus. What he didn't recognize was the fixed expression of determination on the Diplomat's face, or the large sack he carried with him. Gille strode purposefully across the length of the office to the massive desk behind which sat the Pope, cursing himself for not standing earlier and now placing himself in a weak looking position. But he needn't have bothered, the normally subtle and careful Gille was acting under Prince Edmund's orders today, and he was anything but subtle.

"Your Holiness," he grunted, upending the sack he held and pouring a massive pile of florins onto the desk, "You have no problem with the Scottish Empire."

And Alferius, well known for his rather "uncatholic" tastes, stared at the money for only a few seconds before saying, "I have no problem with the Scottish Empire."

Chapter 19

"So," said Aodh Canmore, youngest son of Prince Edmund Canmore, "This is war?"

"Oh no, brother," chuckled Nectan, "This.... this will be a massacre."

The Scottish armies were on the move, Scots in their thousands moving North through the desert towards the Turkish border, or rather what had once been the Turkish border. The Mongols had invaded Turkey, and the latter Nation's leaders had quickly discovered that the Horde was anything but "a group of bandits surrounded by reputation and superstition". Now the Turks were locked in a life or death struggle with the invaders, and King Edward knew the time to stop the Mongols was now, before they took control of too much land.

King Edward, Prince Edmund and Prince Domnall were several days ride ahead, uniting their armies with Prince Comgell. Prince Nectan was riding with Prince Aodh, the latter ready and eager to experience battle for the first time and the former having no desire to see it again.

They had received news of a sizeable rebel force moving through the desert two days earlier, and Nectan had diverted to attack them. The rebels would be no match for the Scottish, but it would give Aodh a taste of what battle was really like outside of the songs.

"They're just.... standing there!" grunted Aodh, sounding offended as he waved his arm at the rebels on the desert ridge overlooking their approaching army.

"What would ye have them do, brother?" laughed Nectan, "Leap from the ridge and catch the wind? Fly down spears drawn and fire breathing from their mouths as they roar death upon us? This is battle, it is the desert, it's hot and they're in no hurry to die... there'll be time for that soon enough."



"Forward now," ordered Nectan in a loud voice, "Slow and steady lads, let's nae work up a sweat!"

The men laughed and began marching through the sand, Nectan and Aodh following with their cavalry in tow. The Rebels maintained a rough line on the higher ground, which technically should have given them the advantage in the upcoming battle. But even Aodh could see their armor was buckled, shabby and on the verge of falling apart, their swords, pikes and spears barely holding together. This rabble's true weapon was their size, which kept them safe from bandits, but not a well trained, well armored army of Scotsmen.

"It all seems so.... civilized!" grunted Aodh, watching as the Scots marched forward and the nervous Rebels held their line and waited for the inevitable clash.

"That'll change soon enough," replied Nectan with a smile, "They know their death is coming."

"Then why do they make a stand?" asked Aodh, confused, "They know they cannae beat us, why do they not run?"

"They know we'll chase them down, at least this way they can stand together, die together, and take some of us with them," Nectan explained patiently, "Plus there is always that thought at the back of the head that says, no matter what, that somehow they'll find a way to live through this."



And then the time for talk was done, and the battle was joined.



The leader of the Rebels, Captain al Adid, watched as his men were brutally slaughtered by the Scottish, and gritted his teeth angrily. They had no choice but to fight, and no chance but to die, but all ready he could see his men breaking and running in terror, simply making themselves easier pickings for the Scottish to kill off.

"RIDE!" he shouted to the rest of his cavalry, sitting on their malnourished mounts, "Into their flank, block them from the men and give those running time.... maybe some will live."



"Brave," muttered Nectan, watching, "But foolish, do ye see the difference between nobility and bravery, Aodh?"

"Hmmm?" asked Aodh, watching the battle unfolding in fascination.

"A brave leader will die with his men," Nectan explained, "A noble leader will do his best to keep him and his men alive.... ahhh, and

there we see my point proven."



"Now ye see the dirty side of battle, Aodh," smiled Nectan, not unkindly, "We've sat out horses and watched our infantry kill for us. Now the enemy infantry runs, broken by the death of their Captain. If we let them go, they may reform and return to harass us at a later date. So we ride after them, and we ride them down, and we kill men who are running with no thought but to live another second, and then another, and we take all those seconds from them. We are death, Aodh, and we show no mercy."

Nectan spurred his horse on and his men followed, and Aodh gulped heavily and then followed, forcing his stomach down as he accepted what was his duty as a Prince of Scotland.





Prince Alexander Canmore read the message, gritting his teeth and gripping furiously to the paper it was written on.

"Tracherous bastards," he hissed, "Those treacherous, unthinking bastards!"

"My Lord?" asked his Advisor, Ewen.

"Milan has laid siege to Rennes, which barely has any garrison to speak of."

"Why would Milan risk the Pope's wrath?" asked Ewen, perplexed, "Their position is not a strong one, and besides, Lord Feradac sits with a sizeable force only a few days ride away in Caen."

"THE ENGLISH!" growled Alexander, furious, "Obviously what money and titles the English have left have been used to bribe the Milanese, because the bastard English have gathered up the bulk of their remaining forces and laid siege to Caen."

"With the current civil unrest in London and Edinburgh," noted Ewen, "They know Rennes and Caen stand alone, and hope to take the cities along the former French Coast from us. But they have erred, my Lord, Feradac is a fine Commander and well known for his talent for battle. We may lose Rennes, but Caen will stand, and once the English force there is decimated, we can answer the Milanese's insult."

"I dinnae like the idea of abandoning good Scottish men to Milan," growled Alexander, "I fought with many of those men in the sack of Nottingham, duty in Rennes was their reward for lifelong service to Scotland."

"Perhaps Feradac will..." started Ewen, but was interrupted by the arrival of another messenger. Alexander took the message and read it, and Ewen was startled to see his face turn red as his eyes narrows and more and more teeth were exposed by a vicious snarl. He handed the message curtly to Ewen and stalked off to stare out a window, as Ewen read the note in horror.

Feradac had been found dead in his chambers in Caen, assassinated!

"This is unbelievable!" gasped Ewen in horror, "My Lord, what are we to..... My Lord?"

Alexander's shoulders had been hunching up and his hands had been closed into fists, but as Ewen had spoken, his shoulders had relaxed and his fists uncurled, and when he turned to face Ewen, the Advisor was surprised to see Alexander appeared.... calm.

"I know what I must do," Alexander said, and smiled.

Settlement Besieged

Rennes
Milan



This settlement has been surrounded by enemy forces and is held under siege. Though safe for the moment, there is no telling whether or not your foes will assault the walls soon, or attempt to starve your defenders out. Perhaps acting first may take your foes by surprise...

Settlement Besieged

Caen
England



This settlement has been surrounded by enemy forces and is held under siege. Though safe for the moment, there is no telling whether or not your foes will assault the walls soon, or attempt to starve your defenders out. Perhaps acting first may take your foes by surprise...

Faction Announcements

The following events have taken place within your royal family:

Assassinated

Fell victim to a foreign assassin



Feradac the Chivalrous -
Family member
Caen

Retinue Expands



Allan of Midlothian
Adultress: +1 Dread, -1
Piety, -1 Morale for all
troops on the battlefield,
Decreases the chance of
having children

Captain Donnchadh had fought and killed English at Nottingham, and helped take the city. He was close to fifty now, and feeling every year of it in his bones in this cold Winter weather, but he loved Rennes, and was willing to die to hold it against Scotland's enemies.

Now it seemed he had his chance.

"Hold here, men, we can't keep them from the walls!" he ordered, close to 1200 men standing prepared behind the gates to the City. Milan had sent only 1000, but the 1000 they had sent.....

Close to 100 Milanese manned six massive catapults and another 400 were lined up with crossbows in front of them. Between the crossbow men and the catapults were Spearmen, and behind the catapults the Milanese Captain, Francesco, had another 150 Spearmen. Donnchadh cursed their lack of Cavalry, with a few hundred horse they could have torn through the catapult operators and retreated fast enough to cut down losses, then sent in the infantry. In a one on one confrontation, Donnchadh had no doubt that the Scottish would decimate the Milanese, but without them.....



Donnchadh stood waiting with his men behind the gate, waiting and bracing for the smash of catapult rocks against the walls, and he waited.... and waited.... and waited.

"What the hell is going on?" he demanded, "THE TOWER? WHAT IS HAPPENING?"

From the Gate Towers where old soldiers too infirm to fight sat with bow and arrow ready to fire on any Milanese who came too close came silence, and then a quavery reply, "The bastards are nae doing anything, they're just sitting there!"

"What in God's name?" growled Donnchadh, then turned to his men, "Then we wait too, they want us? They'll have to come and get us!"

So they waited, waited inside the walls of the deathly quiet city for the soldiers of Milan to attack, for their catapults to begin firing, and they waited for hours, and the Milanese made no move, did not come forward to taunt and challenge, did not split their forces or come all at once. They simply stood, the adjusting of individual soldiers' stances the only sign they were anything more than statues.

Then finally, something happened, but it wasn't what anyone expected.

Prince Alexander Canmore arrived.

Reinforcements Alexander Canmore



Reinforcements have arrived! May their timely support bolster the men's morale, as well as their flanks!









"My Lord!?" gasped Donnchadh, gripping Alexander's proffered hand with astonishment, forgetting for the moment he should be bowing, "What are ye.... how are ye....?"

"I could nae leave the brave men of Rennes to face these Milanese bastards alone now, could I!" laughed Alexander, loud enough for the men to hear, and they cheered. Donnchadh had fought beside Alexander many times, and even dined at banquets and spoken with the men freely enough, Alexander was a merry man when in his cups, and got on well with the common soldier. But now, his Prince seemed almost serene, abnormally calm considering the situation. He'd travelled by boat through seas ruled by the still powerful English Navy, landing on the coast and effectively stranding him and the men he had brought with him at Rennes. There could be no retreat, they would either hold Rennes or they would die trying.... but Alexander did not seem concerned, even when the seemingly impregnable nature of the enemy formation was explained to him, as well as their preternatural stillness.

"If they will nae come to us, we must go to them," Alexander said, "They hope to drag us out of the City and hold us on the field, we must ride into them and draw them back into the city, where we can wipe them out a piece at a time. There will be death, but that is nothing new to any Scottish fighting man."

"My Lord," said Donnchadh, bowing his head, "I will lead the men into the field."

Alexander raised an eyebrow, and Donnchadh spoke quickly, before his Prince could over-ride him.

"We lack cavalry beyond your bodyguard, my Lord, and if you rode out the Milanese would swarm over you beyond our ability to defend. If you were to fall in battle, the men would lose heart, your presence alone here keeps them brave."

"They are Scotsmen, that makes them brave," corrected Alexander, still looking serene, "But aye, ye shall lead the men. Dinnae die, Donnchadh, ye are a good drinking companion, and a good man besides. Draw them back to the City Walls, then we will deal to them."

Donnchadh saluted, and then lead him men out through the gates of the city, and discovered quickly that the Milanese definitely were NOT statues.

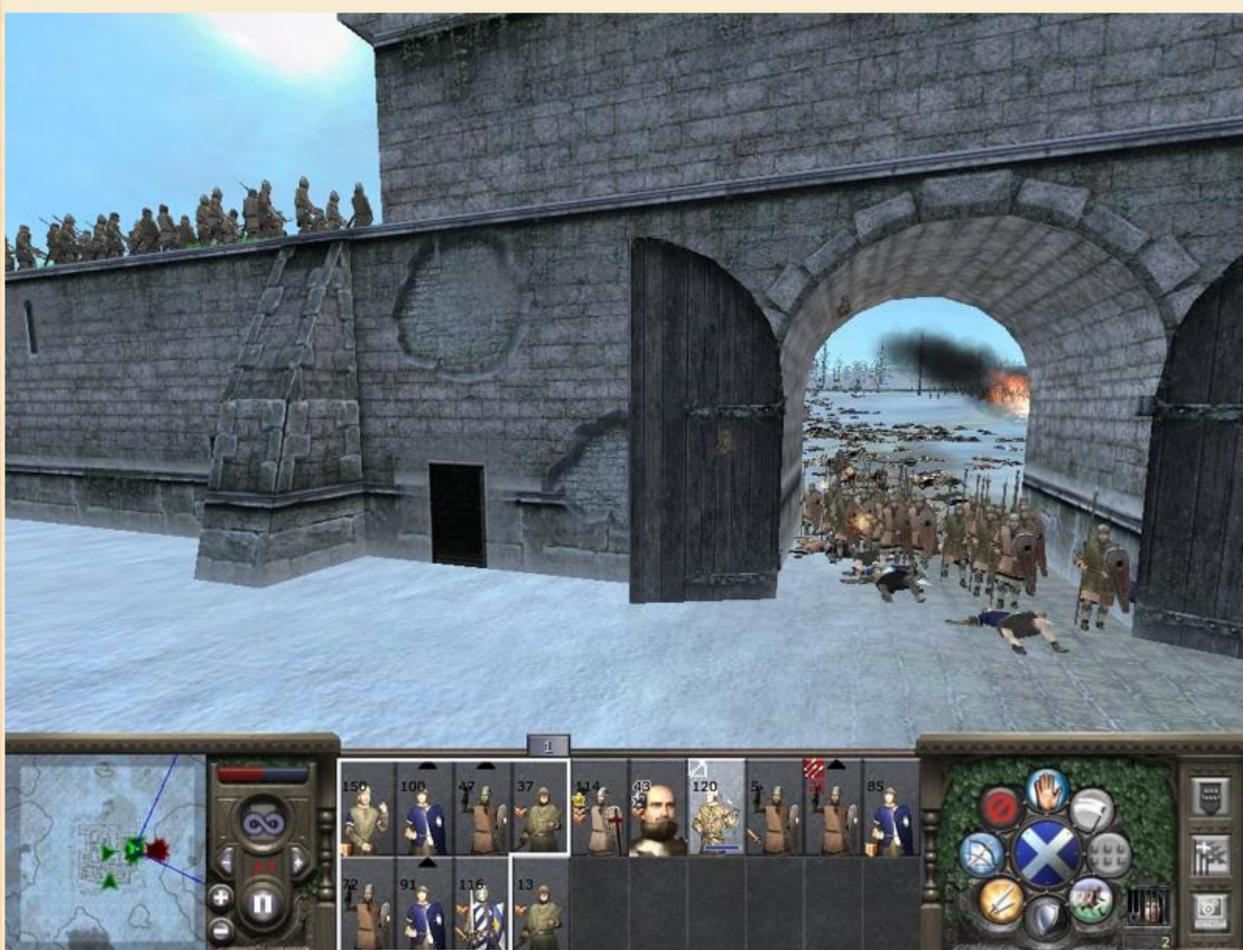
Milanese died, but many more Scottish died in the process. Milan had finally found a way to match the infamous ferocity and bloodlust of the Scottish, by pitching them not against men, but a flood of crossbow bolts and the high velocity impact of massive flaming rocks fired from catapults. Scots died in scores, burning and screaming, whole frontlines falling to fired crossbows.... but they kept coming, leaping over their dead to clash with the Milanese, and to revisit death upon them.





"ENOUGH!" roared Donnchadh, "Back to the walls, drag the bastards back with ye!"

They charged back, hearing the roar and smash of the catapult rocks slamming into the ground near them as they moved at full speed, back through the gates where the rest of the Scottish army waited, ready to slam into the Milanese.



But the Milanese never came.

To the horror of the Scottish, once they had moved back through the gates, the Milanese simply seemed to stop, then march quickly back into their pre-battle formations. Once back in position, they stood still and waited, seemingly statues once more.

"Madness," gasped Donnchadh.

"Any man is mad who would go to war with Scotland," replied Alexander, again calm despite the failure of their plan, "We cannae hold here and wait for them, and they know it. The siege of Caen means no help is coming, the ocean to the West and North is controlled by England, and Milan holds the South, Rennes simply cannae survive for long with that army there.... we must ride out again, and

try once more to pull them back to the city."

Donnchadh did not believe the plan would be any more successful this time, but he agreed with Alexander's assessment. They could not simply wait inside the city for Milan to come to them, they had to take the fight to them... but they were likely to be wiped out in doing so, due to the damned catapults. Donnchadh did not fear death, as a soldier he'd made his peace a long time ago, and all ready lived far longer than he expected. What he did regret though, was that Alexander had come to the City out of a feeling of duty to them, and now it seemed this could be his last stand as well.... and yet, the Prince remained calm.

"Follow me lads, it seems these Milanese bastards need to be taught that a war means actually fighting! Shall we teach them!" Donnchadh roared, and felt his heart swell with pride as the Scottish roared and followed him without hesitation. As he moved out through the gates, he looked back and saw Alexander calmly sitting his horse, a serene look upon his face, and felt a burst of love for the men. Truly he was blessed to have such a man as his Prince.

He never saw Alexander again.





With the death of their Captain, and massive losses amongst their units, the Scotsmen broke and ran, forgetting their original plan to try and draw the Milanese back, simply desperate in their panic for the relative safety of the walls.

But despite the fleeing of their enemies, and the massive cost in lives both to themselves and Scotland, the Milanese simply moved back into formation once the battle was broken off, and went back to their eerie, preternatural waiting game.



Prince Adam Canmore took the message without a second thought until noticing peripherally that it was marked with the seal of his father. Smiling, he waved away a servant who was pouring him wine and cut the message open, reading the contents with growing alarm.

My beloved son,

As you read this, I am likely dead. I will not say that you should not mourn for me, only that you should know that I died on my own terms, and was glad of it.

As I neared my Father's final age, I came to realize how much of his long life he wasted. A once mighty warrior, reduced to sitting in a castle fighting diplomatic wars, bureaucratic wars and political wars. I finally come to the full realization of why Edward and Edmund abandoned Scotland, and saw what I was in danger of becoming, which oddly enough was what I'd always wanted to be, my Father.

The thought that cheered me was you, Adam, my truly beloved son. Unlike my Father, I pride myself on having raised a lad who not only surpassed me, but loved me. You have made me proud, Adam, and left me safe in the knowledge that when I die, a true King of Scotland will rule these lands, no matter if the title passes from Edward to Edmund's brood.

I could not let the men who had served me throughout my life die at the hands of Milan, but I could not save them, either. All that was left for me was to die with them, and to die in battle, a true soldier, as I always longed to be. Edward was supposed to be the General, Edmund was supposed to be the Governor, David was supposed to be the Prodigy, and I was supposed to be the Soldier. So I have gone to almost inevitable death, Adam, but I have gone with a glad heart.

Forgive me for leaving you, my son

Your Father, Alexander Canmore.

Alexander sat his horse in Renne's town square, listening to the Scots talk of Milan as they had always been spoken of. They were not human, but devils sent from hell, demons with the patience of statues, who needed no food or sleep. He listened, and waited for the swell of panic to rise almost, to breaking point, and then he cried out in a voice that crackled with authority and silenced them all.

"I thought I came to Rennes to fight for Scotsmen!" he roared, voice dripping with contempt, "But maybe I was wrong, maybe the English still rule this city, since ye appear to have water in your veins, not blood!"

He had their attention now, and struck, knowing it was now or never.

"The Milanese stand outside our city not because they are demons or statues, but because they FEAR DEATH IN THIS CITY! They

know that if they enter, we will destroy them! So they sit outside, and when we bring death to them, they use machines to fire huge rocks, they use crossbows to fight from a distance... because they FEAR US!"

He turned his horse, raising his sword high, "So I say, let us ride out to them, let us ride through their rocks and crossbows, and ride into them with our swords swinging and our spears stabbing. They will kill Scotsmen? Well they must learn that death comes to all those who would battle the Scottish, whether we win or lose, death rides with us! LET US SHOW THEM WAR! REAL WAR! LET US SHOW THEM DEATH! LET US SHOW THEM HOW REAL MEN FACE DEATH AND MAKE THEM SPEAK FOREVER OF THE COURAGE OF SCOTLAND!"

His men, faces fervent and eyes blazing with fanaticism, let loose with a massive roar of assent. The cry reached outside to the waiting Milanese, who exchanged concerned looks.... what were the devils up to now?

And inside the city, Prince Alexander Canmore led his men into battle a final time.





