

Chapter 20

Gille Petair of Ross-Shire had always been happy as a follower, or at least as happy as any true Scotsman could be when being told what to do. Feradac of Peeblesshire was a man he had been proud to follow, an accomplished General and true leader of men, but now he was dead, assassinated by cowards too scared to face him on the field. He did not suspect the English, what was left of their leaders had fallen far from the tree that had been William the Conqueror, but rather Milan, which had taken Rennes and killed Prince Alexander Canmore. Assassination seemed likely from those cowards, reports said they'd been too scared to ride into Rennes, too scared to meet the Scottish from anything but a distance, and even after they'd wiped out Alexander and his army they'd been too scared to enter the city until the night had passed and they were sure there were no more Scots left to stand against them.

But the English WERE Gille's problem.

Over 1700 English, almost the entire bulk of England's remaining forces, laid siege to Caen, almost doubling Gille's own forces. What made matters worse (and further added to Gille's belief that Milan was behind Feradac's assassination) was that England had borrowed Milan's strategy at Rennes, and brought with them not only battering rams, ballista, siege towers and ladders, but catapults.



Gille sat his horse behind the walls of Caen, checking his men were ready, giving a word here and there, sharing a joke, making an order. He had always been happy as a follower, but he had also always had a talent for leading, and the other Commanders of Feradac's men had been quick to choose him as their new leader.

"CATAPULTS AIMING!" cried a lookout on the walls suddenly, catching Gille by surprise. A winter storm had been gathering and looked ready to set it, and he hadn't expected the assault from the English to come tonight.

"GET THOSE MEN OFF THE WALLS!" he screamed, staring up at the soldiers who had been stationed on the wall more as a display. He heard the massive thudding noise of the catapults releasing, and watched through clenched teeth as soldiers streamed down the Gate Tower towards the ground.... and then the ground was shaking, the wall shattering beneath multiple impacts as the English used the catapults to maximum impact, all artillery fire focused at one point on the wall.

And the wall came down.



And Gille saw his chance.

He'd always been happy to follow, and he'd always had a talent for leading. More than that, from a young age he'd had a talent for improvisation and opportunism, and he showed it now as the wall came down and smoke and dust rose up, obscuring the massive hole in the wall AND the men behind it.

"HORSE!" he cried, "I WANT THOSE CATAPULTS REMOVED FROM THE FIELD, AND WANT THEM GONE NOW!"

To their credit, the men struggling to bring their frightened horses under control heard his command and instantly turned towards the hole in the wall and spurred their horses forward. They charged through the debris and stone, over the dead men who hadn't vacated the wall in time, and emerged through the smoke with their heads down and swords drawn. The English were all ready turning to concentrate on their next point of attack, sending in their siege tower as the catapults prepared to reload and focus on another point along the wall. They expected the Scottish to be stunned behind the wall, not all ready riding out to meet them, and it was the thundering of hooves that alerted the men manning the catapult, turning too late to do anything as the Scottish rode into them, roaring in fury and calling for vengeance.



The English Captain, Ambrose, was not without his own talent for improvisation, and when he saw that the English manning the catapults were being slaughtered by the Scottish Cavalry, he saw a chance.

"They've emptied the City!" he cried, "All men forward and take the City!"

The English charged forward, riding through the hole in the city wall, only to discover that the large number of Cavalry were not in fact the bulk of the Scottish Garrison. They charged into Gille's men and found themselves caught in place, Gille himself ordering more infantry trapped behind him to go through the gates of the City and hit the English from the side.

And then the Scottish Cavalry returned to the fray.





"THE SIEGE TOWER IS BURNING!" came the cry through the English ranks, and Captain Ambrose turned in despair to see it was true. The Scottish had held back a small catapult of their own and blasted it through the siege tower when it drew close, setting it alight. He cursed angrily, how had he managed to botch this seemingly impossible to lose battle? The Scottish had wiped out their catapults, they still held the walls, and they had turned the only accessible entrance to the city into a killing zone. He had to think of a way to turn this around, he needed a strategy and quickly.... and then the decision was made for him.

"AIEEEEE!" screamed one English soldier, and then another and another, and then all of them were screaming, and Ambrose realized he was screaming too, screaming and running, running from the Scottish but the Scottish kept coming and all Ambrose could think of was that he had to run, had to run, nothing else mattered but to run and run and keep away from the Scottish, keep away from the demons from hell that chased them.



Clear Victory

Battle Results				
	Men Deployed	Men Lost	Men Remaining	Enemies Killed
 Gille Petair of Ross-shire	1009	417	592	772 (921)
 Captain Ambrose	1740	1696	44	489 (0)

That night, as Scottish bodies were separated and prepared for funerals and English bodies were piled to the side to be disposed of later, Gille Petair of Ross-Shire received a message that he would keep for the rest of his life. The contents were short and simple, and as soon as he had read them he ordered his Commanders to gather a significant force to march on Bruges, where England's Prince Tostig ruled. Though the message did not state it, it essentially served as a Death Warrant for Scotland's oldest enemies.

England had been excommunicated.

Diplomatic Information



The following factions have declared that they are allies:

-  The Holy Roman Empire
-  Hungary

The following factions have been excommunicated:

-  England
-  Venice

Battle Deployment

Your forces attack an army of England



Your Forces

Scotland 

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

 Gille Petair of Ross-shire
615 men

Reinforcements: 0

None

Balance of power



Enemy Forces

England 

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

 Prince Tostig
236 men

Reinforcements: 0

None

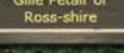
Attempt a night attack



Army



Family member

 Gille Petair of Ross-shire

75

Prince Tostig sat in Bruges, eyes wide as he stared out at the Scottish army sitting outside of his gate in the gathering gloom of dusk. They were eerily quiet, standing in the long grass where the snows had only recently melted, the storm that had marked the end of the Battle of Caen also marking the end of Winter.

"Why don't they say anything, my Lord?" asked his Second, Robin of Nottingham, staring out at the waiting Scottish, "They do not taunt, they do not challenge.... they just stand there."

"They have nothing to say to us," Tostig replied at last, struggling to gather enough saliva to swallow, "To those devils, we are all ready dead."



Gille lifted his sword and pointed at the gate as the sky darkened, and the catapult fired, the soldiers responding wordlessly as the English on and behind the walls felt the tension grow.... why were the Scottish being so quiet?



The gates burst open, and the Scottish moved as one, pushing forward in a wedge but moving silently, responding to no given order and saying not a word. For the English standing on the walls it was too much, the dark night, the wordless Scots, the firing of the catapult.

"Bugger this for a laugh, lads," grunted one soldier, and turned and headed down the stairs, quickly followed by the others on the wall, abandoning it as they moved deeper into the town. The Scots entered the city, the only noise the synched step of the soldiers, the clang of sword on armor, boots on grass, then paved roads. They still said nothing, made no noise, and Prince Tostig watched his men running and fought down an urge to join them. Everyone said the Scottish were devils, and he'd thought the death of Prince Alexander and Feradac would finally prove they were only men.... but this.... this eerie procession into his city.... were they really demons?

"I don't care if they are," he growled to Robin, "They've taken England and not been satisfied, now they'd take the last strongholds of our Empire? I'd rather die than see that.... CHARGE!"

"I should have stayed in Sherwood," sighed Robin, and rode in after Tostig whose wish was soon granted, he got to die before he saw the English Empire crushed.





As they'd slaughtered Tostig, Robin, and their Bodyguards, the Scottish had finally begun to make a noise, a low droning noise that built and built in crescendo, "AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

As they wiped out the last of the Royal Bodyguard, Gille Petair of Ross-Shire rose his sword up, and the Scottish finished the first and only sentence they would scream throughout the battle as they charged in to wipe out the last of the English.

"ALEXANDER!"



King Edward sat his horse in the unrelenting heat of the desert, staring around at the sand dune and what seemed an endless amount of dead bodies, some Scottish, most Rebel. His force had ridden up on a Rebel Band of 700, less than half of Edward's own. They had tried to run, and found their retreat cut off by the approaching Prince Comgell.





With the Rebels wiped out, the usual post-battle gathering of the dead and treating of the wounded was taking place, and Edward was taking the chance for a moment of introspection. Edmund joined him, and they walked their horses across the sand for a few minutes quietly, until finally Edward broke the silence.

"Edmund, do ye.... do ye feel old?" asked Edward, uncharacteristically nervous.

"I **am** old, Edward," chuckled Edmund, "We both are."

"Aye," grunted Edward irritably, "That's nae what I asked. Do ye **feel** old?"

Edmund thought for a moment, and Edward marvelled at how he still looked so much like the young lad who'd commandeered the Scottish fleet one drunken night so many decades ago and ended up conquering Egypt with him. Finally, Edmund answered, "Nae Edward, I don't feel old, I feel.... better."

"Oh good," grinned Edward, and Edmund was surprised to see his brother was relieved.

"Edward?"

"Alexander's death got me to thinking," Edward explained, "Ye sons are fully grown now, and we have grown to an age where most men would be in their dotage. But I dinnae feel old, I feel.... better.... as ye say. I feel just like I did as a lad, only smarter, stronger.... better."

"Ye've grown more modest with age too," grinned Edmund. Edward pulled to a stop beside a Highlander kneeling beside the corpse of another, and Edmund stopped too, racking his brain for the man's name. He wasn't surprised when it came to Edward's lips easily, he'd always known his men, no matter how many he'd personally led.

"Angus," Edward said, and Edmund was surprised to see tears streaming down the face of the white-haired, grizzly old Highlander as he looked up from the corpse. He made no other visible sign or sound of grief, and stood to attention when he saw it was his King, "From the Clan Donald, is it nae? This was your cousin, Rory?"

"A... aye," grunted Angus, looking down at the corpse beside him, "A good lad.... an old lad too, ye dinnae get too many of them. Bloody Rebel stuck a spear in his belly, Rory tore his throat out with his teeth."

"The Donald's have a reputation for being bloodthirsty," nodded Edward, "Our father spoke of ye Clan with respect, Angus, they gave Clan Canmore a great deal of trouble for quite some time.... he was glad when ye made peace, and I've been proud to fight alongside ye Clan for as long as I've been fighting."

"Thank ye, King Edward," grunted Angus, rubbing his side. Edmund looked closer, and realized the blood on Angus wasn't all dry, and it wasn't all done coming yet, "I've been proud to fight for ye."

Edward saluted, and Edmund followed a second later, Angus returning the gesture as Edward rode on. Looking back, Edmund noted Angus returned to a seated position next to Rory's corpse, apparently striking up a conversation with the dead man.

"Is he...." started Edmund.

"Aye, he's fought his last battle with us," grunted Edward, "Many Scotsmen did today, and many more will in the future.... Alexander's death has put me in a strange mood, Edmund. I dinnae feel old, but I **am** old, and I find myself fearing some nights that I'll go on feeling better than I did the previous day, but then one day God will call me home before my work here is done."

"I dinnae think it works that way, Edward," said Edmund, "Ye..."

"I know ye're not a believer, Edmund, ye never were," interrupted Edward, "But I am, and I dinnae question God's will, he works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform."

They rode up onto the crest of a sand dune and looked out across the plains, towards far distant Edessa. Once it had been a Turkish stronghold, now it was in the hands of - according to which rumor you believed - either the Rebels or the Mongols. The Horde had swept through Turkey as if they were nothing, and Scotland rode now to mop up after them and then deal with Genghis Khan's armies.

"Many Scotsmen have died in my service, and many more will," Edward repeated, and then laughed. It was a hale and hearty laugh, the laugh of the stubborn lad who had taken his Father's army to a foreign land on the other edge of the World and conquered an ancient Empire, "Oh but Edmund, one thing we Scotsmen have always been better at than killing is making more little Scotsmen."

He swept his arm out, encompassing the massive army of Scotsmen spread out across the desert almost as far as the eye could see, and proclaimed, "I think it is time we showed this Genghis Khan what a true Horde looks like."



Chapter 21

Milan's Captain Corsello watched as his men approached Caen and smiled, all ready imagining what it would be like to run his own city. Rennes had fallen before Milan's might, even if Scotland's late Prince Alexander had exacted a larger than expected cost from Corsello's countrymen.

Their intelligence told them that most of Scotland's fighting forces on this coast had gone to lay siege to Bruges, and as Corsello had expected, the English had completely failed to hold back the Scots. Even now, Gille Petair of Ross-Shire and his men would be lying drunk in the streets in celebration of their victory, leaving Caen essentially unprotected.

"Make camp!" called Corsello, "I want latrines dug and tents up before nightfall, and get to work on building siege gear, I want us in control of Caen within the wee...."

"Captain," interrupted his second, saluting, "Our scouts are reporting the Scottish garrison is massing at Caen's gate in preparation to march out and meet us."

"Oh excellent," laughed Corsello, "They save us the trouble of fighting our way inside to kill them, get the men into formation."

The Milanese quickly lined up, exchanging jokes and bawdy comments as they prepared to kill. The Scottish were devils, everyone knew that, but had they not killed over 1000 of the monsters at Rennes? Including their own Prince Alexander? No, devils these Scottish might be, but they bled and they could die, and the men of Milanese meant to kill more.

The Gates opened and Corsello grinned as he saw the Scottish lined up in neat little formations, all to make their deaths that much more efficient.

"Hold your lines here, men," he laughed, "We know from Rennes that they don't have the patience to wait us out, let them come to us. No need for us to tire our legs when soon our arms will be exhausted from all the bladework!"

His men laughed and held their position, but so did the Scottish, and Corsello frowned.... what the hell were they doing?

"Captain," gasped Corsello's second, after receiving a quick message from a breathless scout, "The Scottish are coming!"

"What are you talking about, fool?" grunted Corsello, staring at the still waiting Scottish through the open doors, "They're just standing there."

"No, Captain!" gasped the man, pointing to the North, where the forest separated the view of the shore from everywhere but atop the walls of the city, "The Scottish ARE coming!"

Corsello turned to stare, his mouth dropping open as saw a wave of Scottish Infantry and Cavalry emerging at a quick run from the trees.

"The Scottish are coming!" cried a Milanese soldier, but he wasn't pointing towards the Scots approaching from the woods, but towards the gates of Caen. Corsello stared back and forth at the two incoming waves and felt a sickening realization deep in his stomach.

It wasn't the Scottish who would be dying today.







In Edinburgh, Adam Canmore stared with despair at the piles of documents awaiting his attention. The death of his Father had hit him hard, and he'd gone into isolation for two weeks following the funeral, during which time his administrators dealt with the day to day running of Scotland's cities in the United Kingdom. But some duties could only be performed by a member of the Royal Family, and finally he had emerged from his mourning vowing to himself to prove he was worthy of his Father's love and trust.

But there was so much to running a Kingdom!

He didn't know how Edward dealt with the much larger lands on the other edge of the world, but he found himself swamped with treaty proposals, requests for trade, requests for military and geographical intelligence, requests for money to be paid to insure construction was completed, that repairs were made on time, that diplomats and other ambassadors were entertained. He envied his younger brother Aed, still living in far distant Cairo with the advisors who had served them both in their youth as tutors. He understood that Aed had recently even had a chance to see battle, repelling an attack by the Sicilians that had proved so successful that the madmen had finally relented in their war on Scotland and retreated back into the deserts to the West. Adam himself had

ridden with the army, but others had always done the fighting, the leading, the soldiering for him before he got a chance to test himself as a true man. He felt like he was a half-man, widely expected by all to be a Master at everything, but never actually tested in any field.

He checked the first report in a large pile all marked as urgent, and frowned as he read that the English were once more working in concert with Milan, allowing a large army of the latter to move through their lands towards Bruges. He stood and moved to his father's old war table, where a map of their United Kingdom and what had once been the French Coast lay. He peered at it critically, and moved some of the markers about experimentally, struggling to think 3 dimensionally as his Father had always urged. If he moved men here, would Milan move men there? And what of England? Would they sally forth from their last stronghold of Antwerp to fight alongside Milan?

In the end he frowned, returned to his desk and penned a missive for Gille Petair, ordering him to march back to Bruges the men he had only recently marched to Caen to face Milan there. He did not like to ask too much of the Nobleman, but with Feradac's death he was the most able General they had available in this part of the Empire.

"Let Gille's legend grow in the minds of the men," he said to himself, "And become a figure of dread for Milan. God knows I will never be."

Gille sat inside of Bruges cursing Milan. While technically no match for the vast power of Scotland throughout the world, locally they had the numbers advantage over the Scots based in what was now known as the United Kingdom. A force of 641 Milanese stood outside the gates, barely a third of Scotland's own forces, but these were the Elite, led by Argometto Legnano, a well regarded member of Milan's Royal Family. Gille, known for his ability to improvise on the field, knew that they would be expecting him to try and hold the walls and let Milan throw themselves against the stone. But he also knew the quality of Milan's fighters, and knew that if he gave Argometto the chance to build enough siege gear, he'd attack the walls at multiple points where only a single unit of men could defend. If that happened, there was every chance that Milan could take control of the walls, and then they could hold their ground and force the Scottish troops to charge into them.

"We'll nae sit caged in this city," he grunted to himself, then turned to his commanders, "Order the men to assemble at the Gate, we will sally forth and meet the Milanese head to head. Their troops are amongst the most disciplined fighters in the world, but we'll see how brave they are when 1500 screaming Scotsmen are charging them."





"Crazy bastards," grunted Argometto, raising his sword high, "They mean to frighten us, men, are you frightened of these pig-ignorant bastards?"

"No!" cried his men enthusiastically, though they were actually not entirely too keen to stand and face 1500 screaming Scotsmen charging towards them.

"Then stand your ground, remember your training and KILL!"

The two sides met with a roaring clash of flesh on flesh and armor on armor, and then the sound of sword meeting sword overwhelmed all else as the Scottish pressed forward against the Milanese and the Milanese stood their ground.



"Ha!" laughed Argometto, "Is this it? This is what makes Scotland 'devils'? They run and yell? Where is the hellfire? Where is the brimstone, where is..."

"My Lord!" gasped Argometto's second, pointing to the sky, "FIRE!"

Argometto looked up and felt his mouth go dry as the very hellfire and brimstone he had been mocking made its appearance.





"By God," gasped Argometto, staring in horror at men and horses burning only a few yards from him,"....hellfire?"

"Catapult fire!" screamed his second as more flaming artillery smashed into their men. He turned to Argometto and grimaced when he saw the Nobleman was staring transfixed at the burning men, then turned back to the soldiers and saw they were beginning to stumble out of formation,"Hold your positions! Cavalry I want you to move around and destroy that catap-"

A flaming rock smashed directly into him, obliterating him in a second as Argometto's horse reared up and screeched, almost tossing the shocked General from his horse.

"Now ye bastards!" cried Gille, seeing the moment was right,"PUSH FORWARD!"





"Hol.... hold your pla..." gasped Argometto, trying to clear the image of burning men from his mind, "Hold your place and...."





Argometto's mind snapped off and instinct took over, even as a black haze of shock washed over him, his body was turning his horse and pushing it away from the Scotsmen. The Milanese struggling amongst their own dead and burning to survive saw him run and all discipline and spirit went out of them. They turned and ran, many dying as the Scotsmen slashed them down from behind, or they clashed and tripped over their own men - both living and dead - in their desperate attempt to survive. Those that made it clear ran as hard as they could for the forests as the Scots laughed and taunted them for their cowardice.

"Hunt down as many as ye can!" roared Gille, "We'll hammer home to these bastards the price of going to war with Scotland, even if we have to kill all of them!"



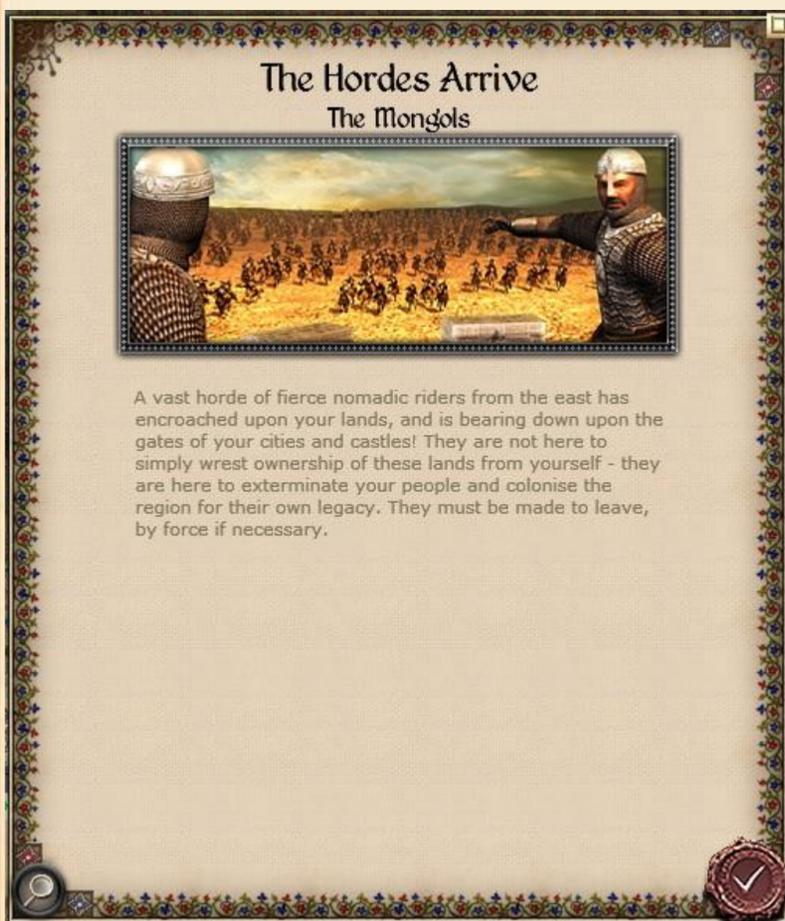


King Edward rode up over the sands and grinned as he spied Edessa in the distance. Word had reached him yesterday that Prince Comgell's adopted son Matad Macconel had captured the former rebel stronghold, which had also once been a Turkish city. City was a strong word, it was more like a fort where people had once lived amongst the soldiers, but now there was only room for soldiers.

"Edessa," grunted Edmund, riding up beside his Brother, "What a...."

"Shithole?" suggested Edward, and smiled when Edmund burst out laughing, "Aye Edmund, it's a shithole, but that shithole may well spell the end of the Mongol Horde..... or bring an end to the mad adventures of two Scottish Princes who got drunk one night and stole the Scottish fleet from their Father."

Edmund's smile faded, but Edward's remained broad, "Come, Brother, let's ride down to that shithole and make ready for a war the likes of which this world may never see again."



Gille Petair disrobed with a grunt, physically exhausted but feeling a happy sense of accomplishment. Bruges remained Scotland's, and Milan had been quiet since Gille had decimated Argometto's army and humiliated the Milan Noble on the field. England made a lot of noise and displayed their army outside the walls of Antwerp, but everyone knew the once mighty Empire was now a spent force of no real threat to anyone.

For the first time in a long time, Gille was beginning to think he might make it through these turbulent times alive, and had started thinking about his eventual retirement, when his military service was done he could purchase some land near Ross-Shire and move his family there. The quiet life was an appealing idea, and-

Gille Petair of Ross-Shire collapsed into his bed and jerked once, then twice, before going still. A figure slid out of the shadows and quickly rolled him under the sheets and posed Gille so he seemed to be sleeping, then pulled the small dart out of his neck and ducked it into a hidden pocket. Grinning silently to himself, the Milanese Assassin slipped first out of the chambers, then out of Bruges.

Gille's retirement had come early.

Faction Announcements

The following events have taken place within your royal family:

- Assassinated** **Fell victim to a foreign assassin**




Gille Petair of Ross-shire -
Family member
Bruges
- Retinue Expands**




Micheil the Balleol

Adulthood: +1 Dread, -1 Piety, -1 Morale for all troops on the battlefield, Decreases the chance of having children
- Retinue Expands**




Nectan Canmore

Adulthood: +1 Dread, -1 Piety, -1 Morale for all troops on the battlefield, Decreases the chance of having children
- Retinue Expands**




Allan of Midlothian

Military Engineer: +2 Command when assaulting walls, +50 Build Points (required for the construction of siege equipment)



Inside Caen, Captain Malcolm was shaken awake by a frightened looking servant. He sat up blearily and wiped his eyes, noting that the dawn was not yet risen.

"What's going on?" he grunted, angry at being woken so early.

"The Milanese army has returned!" gasped the servant, and Malcolm realized that he could hear men running, and commands being shouted, "The Garrison is assembling now!"

"How many, dammit?" he snapped, rolling out of bed and slapping away the servant's hands when he tried to help him into his armor, "Has that coward Argometto found a few more madmen willing to die for him?"

"Over a thousand, perhaps two!" gasped the servant, and Malcolm paused.

"Two thousand?"

"I dinnae know, Captain," moaned the servant, "But they stretch nearly the length of the city! And they have catapults like at Rennes!"

Malcolm cursed as he buckled the last of his armor on and stormed out of his chambers. So Milan had come back in force, had they? Well, the garrison might be depleted from Gille's rescue of Bruges, but he would be damned if he'd let them take HIS city. He'd fight to the very last man if necessary.

He had to admit to himself, that was a very real possibility.

Battle Deployment

Your forces are attacked by an army of Milan



Your Forces

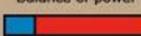
Scotland

Captain Malcolm
779 men

Reinforcements: 0

None

Balance of power



Enemy Forces

Milan

Captain Baldassare
1586 men

Reinforcements: 0

None

Attempt a night attack





Army Castle Agents



Captain Malcolm 78



Chapter 22

Captain Malcolm Hew appraised the situation quickly as he rushed to the city walls.

"Get those Crossbowmen on the walls!" he roared, "We'll pick the bastar-"

A massive vibration rocked the ground beneath his feet and cracks appeared in the wall before his eyes, and he let rip with a string of angry curses, "Scratch that lads, back away from that wall and HOLD YOUR POSITIONS!"



The walls came crashing down quickly under the onslaught of cannonfire, and Malcolm grunted as he saw his men shielding their eyes with their arms.

"LET THE DUST IN YE EYES YOU IDIOTS!" he roared, "WHAT DO YE NEED EYES FOR? MOVE INTO THAT GAP AND PUSH YOUR SWORD AT ANYTHING IN FRONT OF YE!"

The Scottish soldiers charged into the still cloudy, dust billowing remains of the wall, coming into almost immediate contact with the Milanese host as they moved in. This is what Malcolm had been hoping for, that the Milanese would be so confident in their numbers that they'd push immediately forward to the breach in the walls. Now they would have to engage the Scottish, which would negate the effectiveness of their Catapults, which could not fire without hitting their own men.

Suddenly a familiar rumbling noise filled his ears and he cursed again.

"WHO IS OPENING THAT BASTARD PORTCULLIS!?" he screamed, as he saw it jerking open, "I'LL HAVE HIS GUTS FOR A BLASTED KILT! THE BLOODY MILANESE ARE COMING THROUGH THE GATE! HIGHLANDERS!"

"God's Blood," grunted a Highlander as he swung his sword at a Milanese soldier trying to push through the breach in the wall, "Does he ever shut up?"

"I think he'll go on yelling when he's dead," chuckled another, "Come on, let's go kill the bastards!"

A group of Highlanders peeled off from the fighting in the debris and charged into the side of the Milanese coming through the gate, expecting all the Scottish to be at the breach. Malcolm cried out in delight, was that...? Yes! It was! The banner of the Milanese Captain, Baldassare. It jerked about as the Highlanders plunged into the side of the Milanese, then dropped and was trampled underfoot as Baldassare's planned triumphant charge into the city met an abrupt end.





"THE CAPTAIN'S DEAD!" cried the Milanese.

"WANT TO JOIN HIM, LADDIE?" laughed a Highlander as they crashed into the Milanese with renewed vigor, sensing the men in the gateway were losing their nerve, "Come here and I'll introduce ye to me axe!"

The Highlanders around him roared with laughter and that was enough for the men of Milan, who were suddenly scrambling backwards away from the terrible, unstoppable Devils that were Scotland.

"HOLD YE PLACE!" screamed Malcolm, "GUARD THAT GATE LIKE IT WAS YE ARSEHOLE IN ATHENS!"



The Milanese who had been fighting in the breach had given up and run as soon as they saw their fellows charging out of the City. The Scots who had fought them off moved to join the Highlanders at the Gate, where they stood and called and shouted for the Milanese to prove their manhood and come face them.

"Come on, men!" roared a Milanese Knight, red-faced beneath his helm as his manhood was called into question by the distant Scots; his parentage debated; and his sexual habits gambled on, "There are barely 500 of them, we outnumber them by a sizeable margin! I say we ride through them, over them! Grind them underfoot where they belong! FIGHT FOR YOUR HONOR!"

They charged, hundreds of them roaring as they passed under the arch of the gate and smashed into the Scots. The Highlanders at the front roared in delight and swung their axes eagerly, but found themselves lifted from their feet and pushed backwards. For a moment the men behind them provided resistance to the inexorable push of the Milanese, and then all of them were being pushed backwards, skidding through the dirt and snow.



"NOW!" screamed Malcolm in glee, "KILL THE BASTARDS!"

The Crossbowmen who had been holding back stepped forward, and the Milanese realized too late that they'd left their entire flank unprotected. A stream of crossbow bolts punched through armor like it was paper, and men dropped like flies, some screaming in pain, others dying with barely a grunt or gurgle. The forward momentum of the Milanese halted, and the Highlanders planted their feet firmly in the ground and began to slide around the enemy, attacking them from all sides.

"AH GOD! GOD HELP US!" screamed a Knight, and the panic spread like wildfire from man to man, the Knights losing their nerve once more and charging in the only direction the Scots weren't, back through the gates of the City.





The Scotsmen stood watching the Milanese run for a few moments, then let loose a loud cheer. Malcolm smiled and let it spread, then roared out angrily, "WHAT ARE YE STANDING AROUND CHEERING FOR? THERE ARE BLOODY MILANESE OUT THERE RUNNING AWAY, ARE YE GONNA LET THE BASTARDS LIVE TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY?"

The Scots let out a roar and charged through the gate, the remaining archers and Catapult operators who hadn't been broken fighting at the walls taking one look and then turning and running in horror.

"Aye," grinned Malcolm as he watched the Scotsmen chase down the fleeing Milanese, feeling a warm tingling of satisfaction spreading through his chest, "Nae Milanese bastard is going to take MY city from me."



Jebe The Tyrant - Dreaded Warlord of the Mongol Horde - stared at Edessa with black eyes that were impossible to read. Beside him was his younger cousin, Bayan, who showed promise in the art of killing. Jebe grunted approvingly as he watched Bayan's eyes moving over Edessa, its walls, the surrounding desert, the dunes, every possible mark of cover, every possible ambush site. The creatures that called Edessa home had known they were coming, of course, and in a pitiful attempt to protect themselves were feverishly surrounding their homes in high rock, replacing the wood.

The Mongols were Nomads; they did not live in villages, huts or cities. They made camp when they weren't riding, and the only time they weren't riding was when they were enjoying the benefits of their conquests - the wine, the women.... especially the women. Genghis Khan has forged their disparate tribes into a single conquering force, and kept them together by always having something to conquer. They were the human equivalent of a shark, they had to constantly keep moving, or they would fall apart.

"Skot-tish," grunted Jebe to Bayan, "That is the name of these creatures. The men we tortured to learn more of these lands feared them almost as much as us. Their Leader is Kanmor Khan, they say he is The Demon."

"A demon?" grunted Bayan, watching as their own Khan angrily beat a slave who had displeased him. The Khan did not like it when his tent was not up before he was ready to retire to it, he especially did not like it when he was told no women had been captured to service him. It seemed The Skot-tish had cleared all the lands surrounding Edessa of non-soldiers, in preparation for the coming of The Horde. This pleased Bayan, he liked a foe with a spine, it made it so much more fun to tear it out.

"No," smirked Jebe humorlessly, "THE Demon, the evil spirit these creatures believe holds sway over their lives and lands."

A horn sounded, long and deep, and the gathered soldiers were moving with eerie precision instantly, drawing their weapons and looking towards Edessa, where the Gate to the City was swinging open. The Khan cursed angrily and slit the throat of his terrified servant, leaping atop his horse and riding to Jebe and Bayan's side, shouting angrily, "What is the meaning of this!?"

"The Kanmor Khan appears to be a man, not a creature," hissed Jebe, and his teeth appeared as his lips stretched back in what was the closest he ever got to a genuine smile. The gates to Edessa had opened, and a single horse rode out, a single man atop it, wearing not a scrap of armor, dressed casually in strange clothes unfamiliar to Jebe, who wore furs despite the desert heat.

The man rode slowly, almost casually towards them, and all present took in not only his apparently languid pose, but his emotionless face and eyes hard as flint. Those were the eyes of a Warrior, the eyes of a Mongol... the eyes of a worthy opponent.

"You are Kanmor Khan?" challenged Jebe, as the man reached hailing distance.

"You are Genghis Khan?" replied the man coolly, his eyes taking note of everything - the numbers of The Horde (vast); their armor

"A pity," grunted the man on the horse, then raised his voice, "I AM EDWARD CANMORE, KING OF SCOTLAND!"

"Have you come to mewl and whine?" spat Khan Chaghatai, "Have you come to beg for life? To offer what you creatures call "dah-plow-ma-see? All that the Horde have faced have tried in one way or another to avoid their fate, but w-

"Oh shut up, ye oily-skinned love stain," grunted Edward, and for once Jebe had to work hard to maintain his stoic expression as he fought back a smile.

"I came looking for Genghis Khan!" yelled Edward, "I was given to understand he was the one man in this world I could look to as almost my equal... and instead I find a pathetic boy trying to convince himself and all else that he is a man, and a few thousand squat, fur-suited animals that somehow learnt to ride horses and pull a bowstring!"

He turned his horse about, deliberately showing his back as he began to walk his horse slowly back towards Edessa. He was perfectly safe, of course, and knew it. The Mongols did not ascribe to the same "rules of warfare" as other nations of the world, but Edward knew that they would look cowardly if they attacked a single, unarmored man on a horse.... especially with his back turned.

He paused after a few steps and looked over his shoulder.

"I'll nae order ye from my lands or threaten death on ye. Rather I will warn ye now that ye can spare yeself death at Edessa's walls, but ye cannae spare yeself death. Ye have passed into Scottish lands now, and ye life is forfeit. Take up ye swords and slay yeselves here where ye stand now, and save yeself the pain and humiliation of utter destruction at ou... at **my** hands."

He rode on, and Jebe turned an eye to Bayan and Chaghatai.

"Prepare equipment to take control of these.... walls," spat Chaghatai contemptuously, "Make sure they can see us building them, but move the bulk of the forces back out of their sight.... I have a little surprise in store for these Skot-tish."

Work began quickly outside Edessa, as well as inside where work continued feverishly on building up the defences of the small stronghold. As the days of the siege passed, the forces inside grew used to seeing small units of the Mongols going through training exercises, never many all together all at once.

Then, one morning King Edward sat in the Banquet Hall eating a quiet breakfast with his brother Edmund and nephew Domnall when a runner burst into the hall bearing an urgent message.

"The Mongols, my King!" gasped the runner.

"Mmm?" asked Edward, looking unconcerned despite the possibility that several thousand Mongols were about to throw themselves at his uncompleted walls, "What of them?"

"They're.... gone!"

Chaghatai roared with laughter as he rode his personal army towards the river, flanked on either side by Jebe and Bayan.

"The fool, so like my Father," laughed Chaghatai, though he had never actually personally met his Father, who had no interest in any of his bastard offspring, "He thought to enrage me into attacking his walls, where our archers and horse would be useless and massacred.... he thought me a simple barbarian! But while he and the majority of his army sit in that offal pit, his cities lie ahead of us, emptied of their soldiers to face us where they thought we would be!"

"This is not the way of the Horde," cursed Bayan lightly under his breath, "Kanmor Khan challenged us to a glorious battle the likes of which has never been seen, we pretend to be preparing to face him with honor and.... we run!"

"We are not running," grunted Chaghatai with a dismissive wave, "We go to conquer.... and I will not have my authority questioned, Bayan, I am Khan. You would not have questioned my Father."

He rode ahead, and Bayan and Jebe exchanged a silent look that spoke volumes.

Chaghatai was NOT anything like his Father.

"Looks like we've been outsmarted, Edward," muttered Edmund, as they stared over the abandoned Mongol camp, "He's pushed his armies past us towards the coast, where our cities' garrisons are mostly under strength."

"Oh aye," grunted Edward, "This Khan of theirs.... a smart one, would ye nae say so, Domnall?"

Domnall stared at his Father and Uncle aghast, why were they taking this so calmly? The coastal cities were ripe for conquest!

"I sent Aradai and Khanzada Kublai north around the head of the river," Chaghatai was boasting, telling Bayan and Jebe at last what had happened to the other two Warlords, "They will have secured the bridge crossing at the river a day or so ago, and we can leave a force there to guard it against the Kanmor Khan following us. The Horde will be near full strength when it rides into their coastal homes, and we will burn their cities to the ground, and kill their pitiable defenders, and the women.... ahhh it has been too long since I took a woman, I look forward to that most of all. Do you think the Skot-tish women will try to fight back? That makes it so much more fun."

"I do not like this," grunted Jebe, ignoring much of Chaghatai's babbling, "The Horde's strength lies in it operating as one.... this breaking apart and rejoining will weaken us.... it may be the death of us."

"You are an old woman, Jebe!" laughed Chaghatai, not noticing the restraining arm Bayan placed on Jebe's shoulder. He had killed for lesser offences than what "his" Khan had just called him. Chaghatai remained blissfully unaware, still talking, "Over this dune lies the other half of the Horde, we shall be rejoined and then there will be no sto-"

He cut off suddenly, and his horse stopped, causing a rippling effect back through the long, long, long chain of horsemen and infantry following him.

"Ye ken what is the worst part, Domnall?" Edmund asked, once more using the lecturing tone that meant he was trying to teach his son a valuable lesson. Domnall looked at his Father, and then at his Uncle, and for the first time he realized they were not calm at all, they were in fact trying desperately to stifle laughter.

"The worst part, Domnall," laughed Edward, finally losing his control, "Is that piss-for-blood, bow-legged, oily haired bastard Chaghatai actually thinks I dinnae know all that happens throughout MY lands!"

"By all the Demons of all the Hells," grunted Jebe, as he stared down the sand-dunes towards the now revealed river and bridge, and on the other side what was **supposed** to be the other half of the dreaded Mongol Horde.





"Where are Aradai and Khanzada?" gasped Chaghatai in disbelief, as he stared at the Scottish army waiting patiently over the bridge.

"If they have any honor, they are dead!" snapped Jebe furiously, "This is the result of your "cleverness" you dungheap! You have split The Horde and trapped us between the Skot-tish and a man who is more of a Mongol than you will ever be!"

"HOW DARE YOU!" roared Chaghatai, "I SHO-"

He cut off suddenly as Jebe backhanded him, knocking him from his horse. The Mongol Warriors surrounding them had been watching impassively as their leaders argued, but now interest sparked in their faces. Their Khan had just had his honor and leadership directly challenged!

"That is why you will never be a true Khan!" hissed Jebe, "Genghis never said, "I should...", he just DID!"

He wheeled his horse about and stared at the waiting Skot-tish below, and gritted his teeth in that approximation of a smile he saved for occasions like this. He looked back over his shoulder at the Horde, diminished from its true potential size but still an awe-inspiring sight, "Those Skot-tish believe they have our measure! They've likely dealt with Aradai and Khanzada and believe that knowledge will frighten us, but they do not know what it truly is to be The Horde! We will ride to them, we will ride through them! And we will conquer as we conquered under Genghis Khan! Those with honor, follow me to battle! Those without, run like cowards, and enjoy the rest of your life as women! I curse you and the dung you will call your children, you are not true Mongols!"

He launched his horse forward and heard a massive rumbling as a great number of Mongols followed him. He knew his own men would, of course, and he believed Bayan would too. Chaghatai? He did not care, either Jebe would be dead by day's end, or he would be victorious. If the latter was the case, he would hunt down Chaghatai and kill him himself.

"Hold that line, men!" ordered Gawain Arthyn, staring with pleasure at the dark mass of Horde on the far side of the river, just now coming into view.

The son of Finguine Arthyn - who had died of the plague in Baghdad and passed on his right of succession to Scotland's throne to his adopted son Comgell - Gawain knew this was his chance to prove his worth to King Edward, who was technically his Grandfather via adoption.

His orders had come from a terrifying man who had appeared in the darkness, holding sealed orders marked with the seal of Prince Edmund. Gawain had followed the orders within without question, travelling in secret and being presented with an army designed for one purpose and one purpose alone.

To kill The Mongols.

His army had joined with two others, surely nearly the entire bulk of Scotland's Egyptian Holdings, and they had clashed a day's ride with two massive forces of Horde. Their battle had been inconclusive, but the Scottish had held the higher ground and forced the Mongols to retreat, something they had never apparently done before. Then they had moved to this bridge, the only major point near Aleppo and Antioch where an army the size of the Mongols could cross the river with anything resembling haste. Now his Pikemen held the bridge exit, and the Horde could only come one way.... straight into them.



Gawain had planned this battle carefully, working with strategies presented to him by the silent, mysterious man. He suspected this was Prince Edmund's rumored Spymaster, and indeed he always bought him strategies written up in the hand of Prince Edmund or King Edward himself. The Mongols used distance, speed and overwhelming numbers to decimate and destroy their opponents on the field, and the only truly effective way to deal with them was to force them to attack a city or castle or to use higher ground. What it all boiled down to was forcing them to come to you, and this bridge, they could hold them at...

"ARRRRGH LET'S GET THEM LADS!" screamed a voice, and Gawain twisted his head to stare in shock as a group of Scottish peasants, recruited to be used as cheap archer units, charged down the hill towards the bridge.

"What the hell are ye doing!?" he cried, but it was too late, the archers were pushing through the braced Pikemen and onto the bridge, hauling out their bows and arrows and levelling them at the charging Mongols.

"Crazy bastards," grunted Gawain, then put them from his mind. The peasants were units in from one of King Edward and Prince Edmund's other specifically designed armies, and he would worry about his own men, not them, "Archers, use fire! Catapults, let them get nice and bunched up and then unleash hell!"





Flaming arrows and massive burning rocks smashed into the tightly packed Mongols as they pounded screaming down the bridge. They died in scores, screaming and burning, catching other men alight, pitching over the side and falling flailing into the water below to drown. Gawain grinned as he watched them die, feeling a vindication he had never felt before. Fighting the soldiers on other nations on the field was a duty of all men, but the Mongols were different. They did not want to conquer to rule in the stead of the nobility, they wanted to annihilate everything different to them, to destroy civilization, to destroy and rape and kill and nothing else. They were war for the sake of war, a pestilence upon the world, and Gawain saw their deaths not as the honorable meeting of foes, but the extermination of a potentially lethal pest.

His Pikemen were holding their lines, the Mongol Horses impaling on the pikes and creating a wall of the dead to act a further barrier to their countrymen. The Mongol's feared archers could not get close enough to fill the sky with death, but Scotland's archers could, and they sent wave after wave of burning arrows into the mass of armored Mongols, who screamed not only in pain but rage and an alien hatred that was not the stuff of warriors or even barbarians, but animals.

"Hold your positions!" ordered Gawain, "We're obliterating them, lads! Don't get silly now, settle yeselves in a for a nice, long, boring extermina-"

He stopped in horror, watching as more units from the other Mongol Extermination Army flooded over the hill and down towards the bridge. They'd been ordered to hold in place, dammit, in case Gawain's men were overrun, what the hell were they doing?

And then he realized, the units charging were Turkopole Archers, mercenaries who Edward and Edmund had ordered them to buy due to their hatred of the Mongols. Now that hatred was overriding their orders, as they saw the Mongols dying in huge numbers and could not stand not to be taking part. It seemed that their enthusiasm was infectious, as more and more units from the army thundered by, including the man who was supposed to be leading them. Gawain watched in horror as the Captain screeched in delight and charged by him with Scots Spear Militia after the Turkopoles, whooping his defiance to the world.

"No dammit, no!" cried Gawain as he watched the Turkopoles thunder through his Pikemen from behind, knocking them out of formation as they smashed into the pile of Mongol dead, burst through and over and began laying into the Mongols on the other side. One Mongol in particular stood out to Gawain, a powerfully built horseman who screamed with fury yet retained an impassive face as he cut down anyone that came near him, "Catapults! destroy their front line before our own idiot reinforcements break through! Aim at that tough bastard at the forefront! Bring him down!"



The rocks smashed down all around Jebe, obliterating his men, blasting aside others, and he let loose an animalistic roar of defiance.

"I DEFY YOU, SKOT-TISH!" screamed Jebe, "YOU CANNOT KILL THE HORDE! THE HORDE IS IMMORT-"

A flaming arrow plunged into his eye and he screamed in pain, falling from his horse. He felt thoughts tumbling madly about in his head, most concentrating on the fact that he had fallen from his horse. A true Mongol did not fall from his horse, it was a sign of weakness, it was he was was he weak who was weak a week of what when di-



With Jebe down, the Mongols were momentarily without a leader or direction, and the charging Scottish reinforcements pushed them backwards, which had the side-effect of pushing them forward as well as anyone unfortunate enough to be in their path. Some of Gawain's Pikemen found themselves being dragged along, having to run to keep from being trampled, and pulled further and further along the bridge.

"Get back!" cried Gawain, even though he knew the Pikemen were powerless to stop their forward momentum.



A bloodied Spearman staggered out of the melee on the bridge on Gawain's side, and the General walked his mount to the mans side, grabbing his shoulder and fixing his eyes firmly on him.

"Tell me lad, and tell me true," he whispered, "Why did ye attack the bridge against orders?"

"Th... the Captain..." gasped the Spearman, "...he said ye wanted all the glory..."

"The damned fool," hissed Gawain, "This is nae about glory, we need to exterminate the Mongols now while we have the chance."

"Bu... but surely they're nearly all dead," moaned the Spearman, "We..."

"You idiot!" hissed Gawain, "Did ye braindead Captain nae look BEHIND the bloody bridge!"

He forced the Spearman's head around, and for the first time the man tore his eyes from the eye-catching sight of nearly 2000 Mongols.... and saw the other 2000 Mongols riding down the dunes towards their end of the bridge.

Bayan the Wrathful was coming to avenge his cousin's death.



"The... the Catapults?" gasped the Spearman.

"Ye glory seeking Captain has his entire army on that bridge," snapped Gawain, "And I'll nae turn Catapult Fire on Scottish men, I'll nae become a Mongol to kill the Mongols!"

On the bridge, the "reinforcement" army had finally realized their error and, seeing 2000 Mongols charging directly for them, their nerve broke. They turn and ran back down the bridge, slipping and sliding over a mountain of dead bodies both Mongol and Scottish, and Gawain waited for his moment.

"Prepare the Catapults and flaming arrows!" he ordered, "But dinnae fire till our allies are clear! Pikemen! The very moment our men are off the bridge, close tight the end and brace as if ye life depended on it.... dammit, it DOES depend on it!"

He watched, biting his lower lip anxiously. This would take precision timing, if the Pikemen did not close and brace in time..."NOW!"



The Pikemen charged forward in desperation, throwing up their pikes.... and the Mongols smashed into them with the full, unbroken force of 2000 Mongols behind them. They were sent flying, tumbling across the ground with hooves stomping over and around them, pikes dropped as they concentrated solely on staying alive.

"Dammit! Forward!" roared Gawain, "ALL UNITS MEET THEM AT THE BRIDGE AND HOLD THEM BACK!"

They smashed together, his Knights and Cavalry Bodyguard charging into the overwhelming numbers as he roared for the Catapults to fire, fire, fire! But the Catapults were abandoned, the operators fighting for their lives as the Bayan led his men forward and cut down the now unprotected archers. Gawain watched horses and men falling aside with sickening regularity as he fought in the thick of it, and then to his horror, he heard a familiar cry and turned his head to see his brother, Nevin, surrounded on all sides, and the Mongol bastards.....



"NO!" he screamed, and then turned his horse aside so that it faced up the sand dune, crying out, "RETREAT! RUN AND LIVE! RUN SOUTH AND LIVE! SOUTH!"

He spurred his horse forward, tears flowing from his eyes as he left behind the fighting and his brother.... his dead brother. He felt a coward, but he had to run now, he had to get the Mongols to give chase, this was their last chance now, if the men had just understood his final command.

Bayan screamed with true pleasure as he sliced a Skot-tish head from its shoulders, and heard their Warlord screaming for them to run, to run South!

"SOUTH!" he laughed, his blood up and his adrenaline flowing, he felt invincible! He watched with delight as the Skot-tish forces turn and ran from them, as all eventually did before the Horde. They had been worthy opponents, and given Jebe an honorable death, but now the day was his, and with this victory he was sure he would be accepted as new Khan of the Horde, "SOUTH!"

They pushed up the hill, Bayan laughing with delight. Death was coming for the Skot-tish, and nothing could stand in their way, noth....

And then he rode over the top of the sand dune and saw what was waiting for him.



Gawain breathed a sigh of relief, the third army under Captain Steaphan had followed their specific orders and waited for a worst case scenario, and now they stood rested and ready to crash into Bayan and his men as they rode over the sand dune.



"COME THEN!" screamed Bayan, eyes wide as he saw the Scottish thundering towards him, "YOU'LL FIND I DON'T DIE SO EASILY!"

Spearmen charged up hard against the Mongols, and a spear plunged through Gayan's armor, into his belly and out of his back. Blood erupted from his mouth to finish his final word, and then he was tossed aside with the rest of the dead





The Mongols stared at their dead Warlord, stared at the dead and dying around them, and for the first time in known history, the Mongols broke.

They did not beat a tactical retreat, as they had when Gawain met Aradai and Khanzada Kublai, they were not captured and thus defeated by default.

No, the deadly Mongolian Horde, now leaderless and seeing inescapable death approaching, broke and ran in terror, screaming and begging for mercy like so many had run from them.

Just like the Mongolians in the past, the Scottish showed no mercy.





Khan Chagatai watched the Skot-tish mopping up the last of what had once been his men and, despite himself, grinned. He was far enough distant to avoid a chance of attack by his surprisingly resilient foes, but thanks to the height of the hills looking down at the river and desert battlefield, he could make out most of what was going on.

He turned his horse and stared at his assembled men, who had been looking at him with disdain during the battle itself but now had nothing but expectant looks on their faces. They needed a leader and now they knew that - for better or worse - he was it.

"We ride north," he grunted, "For now we avoid the Skot-tish, till we can find Aradai and Khanzada and rebuild the Horde. We will fight the Turks, perhaps, or these free-men who call themselves Rebels. We will rebuild, and when we are ready, we shall have our revenge on the Skot-tish and Kanmor Khan."

Several hours later, Gawain Arthyn rode his horse slowly through the desert, surveying what should have been the greatest day of his life, if not for the death of his brother. He had at least recovered the body, and would see to it that Nevin had a proper, Christian funeral.

"General," saluted a soldier, approaching him, "We've assembled the prisoners, what would ye have us do with them?"

Gawain turned and looked at the silent, shocked faces of the kneeling Mongols, their hands tied behind their back. They had never experienced anything like this before, to not only be defeated, but to break and run.... and then be captured.

Prisoners Captured

The Mongols

Enemies Captured		
Unit	Men Captured	Ransom Value
Mongol Heavy Lancers	4	55
Mongol Heavy Lancers	2	28
Mongol Heavy Archers	7	103
Mongol Infantry	6	38
Mongol Infantry	4	25
Mongol Foot Archers	12	39
Mongol Heavy Archers	4	59
Mongol Infantry	32	202
Mongol Infantry	28	177
Mongol Foot Archers	7	23
Mongol Foot Archers	9	29
Mongol Horse Archers	1	10
Mongol Horse Archers	1	10

Total Ransom Value: 1960

What will we do with these prisoners of war?

Ransom
Release
Execute

"Many have died this day," grunted Gawain, "So many."

He turned and looked out over the desert again, and the mountains of dead bodies that would see the area called "Mongol Bridge Over Blood River" by locals for some time to come.







"So many have died," Gawain repeated softly to himself, then turned around and sneered at the Mongol prisoners, "I doubt the Devil will mind a few more, execute them."

Chapter 23

Gille Calline the Balleol settled into his seat with an audible groan, he was growing older, there was no doubting it. He smiled, looking out from his balcony over Rome, a magnificent city unlike any he had ever seen - and he'd seen many, he'd travelled every yard of the world and seen things beyond the ken of the common man, even beyond the ken of the educated ruling class. He'd known hardship in his time, slept in deserts and gone without food for days, been near death and had bounties on his head. Now here he sat in luxury in what many considered the greatest city in the world, complaining because his muscles ached from a hard day of sitting about discussing philosophy.

A knock at Gille's door interrupted his thoughts, and the inscrutable mask that made him such an effective Diplomat slid effortlessly onto his face as he called out, "Enter."

A messenger slid quietly into the room and handed him a small scrap of paper, on which were four words in a code devised by Prince Edmund's terrifying Fearghus Campbell, who was the only person Gille had ever met that he couldn't immediately read like an open book.

"Remain," Gille ordered the messenger as he read the note. He'd noted immediately the messenger was sweating and wide-eyed despite the cool weather, which meant he knew more than was good for him, "How?"

"My Lord?" asked the messenger, and Gille didn't bother to correct him on the improper use of title.

"How did it happen, what happened? You know," Gille said, slipping into Spanish effortlessly after the messenger's slight accent had indicated that was his country of birth. The use of the man's mother tongue had the desired effect of lowering his guard, and the messenger dropped his voice to a whisper.

"They say his Holiness was engaging in.... coitus," he whispered, "And his heart gave out from the effort."

"Coitus is nothing new for a Pope," muttered Gille, "There is something else, what is it?"

"His Holiness was.... "teaching".... a young Sicilian Noble, my Lord."

Gille grinned humorlessly, he didn't have to ask how young, he knew the names, ages, personalities, political leanings and private fetishes of every Noble in Rome, even those with no power or influence (that they were aware of).

"There will be a backlash from this," he muttered to himself, tossing a few coins the messenger's way and dismissing him, "The Sicilians may find their star on the wane, and the Church will hide the scandal externally, but act internally to address it. A time of religious purity is coming..... this may prove a great boon for Scotland and a terrible reckoning for our enemies."

The Pope is Dead

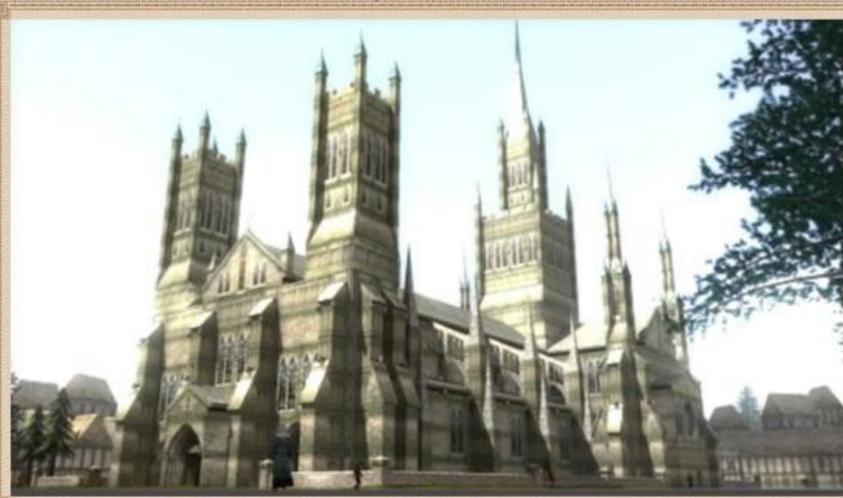
Pope Alferius the Missionary



His Holiness the Pope has passed on, ending another chapter in the history of the Catholic Church. Though the station never changes, the man who is recognised as Christ on Earth does... And with that change comes both the birth of new opportunities and the death of old agreements between the kings of Europe and the church. The College of Cardinals will soon convene to elect a new Pope from those who hold the most sway within the Vatican, the *Preferati*.

Pope Elected

Pope Maczeus



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 has found your faith wanting.

Diplomatic Information



The following factions are now at war with each other:

 Portugal
  Scotland

The following factions have broken their alliances:

 Portugal
  The Holy Roman Empire

The following factions have been reconciled:

 England

 Milan

 Venice

Overviews

The Pope

Diplomacy

Faction

Pope Maczeus the Righteous of Hungary

Age: 48 years old



Divine Connection
 Enemy of Heretics
 Immaculately Pure
 Purger of Heresy

Papal Standing



The more crosses a faction has, the more the Pope favours it.

Khanzada Kublai pulled his horse up short and raised an arm, and his army froze with the eerie precision that had seen crushed enemies of the past refer to The Horde as a singular being, some kind of insect-like hive mind - human locusts. The effect was somewhat diminished when there were less than 200 of them, however, and this was the position Kublai now found himself in.

Their disastrous clash with the Skot-tish had seen he and Aradai forced to retreat with no way to get warning to Chaghatai Khan that the Horde was riding into an ambush. Aradai had ridden North but Kublai had turned and moved South in the hopes of somehow getting ahead of the Skot-tish, only to arrive too late to prevent the massacre of Jebe and Bayan. Despite his own rivalry with the two Warlords, it had shocked and angered Kublai to watch two of the mightiest Warlord's of the Horde wiped out. He had continued South because the way North would only lead into more Skot-tish territory, and he'd decided to gamble on being able to reach one of the Skot-tish coastal cities, which Chaghatai believed to be completely emptied of troops.

They'd ridden mostly at night to try and avoid detection, and it was grating on Kublai and his men to have to move so silently and carefully, as opposed to their usual sweeping movement where the vast numbers of Horde would wash over any and all opposition.

"I hear hooves," he grunted, "A large force is riding from the North, in procession but not uniform.... they are NOT Horde."

"The Skot-tish?" asked one of the few Captains left alive to him, that was one of the Skot-tish's particular talents, killing commanders and leaving the rabble alive, "How could they have raised a new army so quickly?"

"Perhaps it is not a new army," grunted Kublai, "We may not have covered our tracks as well as we thought; this could be one of those cursed armies that killed Jebe and Bayan. Turn the man and prepare formations, they do not fight us at a narrow bridge today, but in open desert, let us see what type of desert fighters these Skot-tish are."

They formed up and waited, and the thunder of hooves grew and grew, visible dust clouds growing and growing as Khanzadai Kublai struggled to hold down the growing (and unfamiliar) feeling of dread and fear in his stomach. There were hundreds of them, numbers far outweighing Kublai's own pathetic few. He swallowed dryly and ordered his archers forward, both mounted and foot, but as they moved forward, so did the Skot-tish, and there were so many more of them... so many more.





As the sun began to rise, the contrast of sky against the black contours of the desert were broken by the silhouette of fleeing Mongols, running in terror from the Scottish. They were not broken, but retreating in cold horror, resigned to almost inevitable death.





Arrows rained down on them as the Mongols ran, and more and more of them fell, Khanzada Kublai pushing his horse to the limit as he charges at the front of his men, grimacing in humiliation and anger every time he heard another of his men fall. Finally their demon pursuers broke off, not wanting to move too far south away from Gawain Arthyn's army. But even after the Scots had stopped pursuing, the Mongols continued to run, until they'd charged so far that their horses were near death. Kublai counted the remains of what had been an army of close to 2000 before they'd entered Skot-tish lands, and buried his head in his hands when he realized he had only 43 left.





The Khanzadai moved away from his men as they tended to their horses and sat down in the sand, pretending to be checking his armor as he vented his frustration bitterly under his breath. This was all Chaghatai's fault; the idiot had broken up The Horde and removed their one unassailable strength, their huge numbers. What was he to do now? Less than 50 men left, lost in some deep stretch of desert far South from the rest of The Horde, massive armies of the demon Skot-tish between him and Aradai, the only Warlord that could truly be trusted to lead the Horde to victory now.

He stood up with a sigh, removing his fur hat to wipe the sweat from his forehead... and then stopped and squeezed his eyes shut to look to the deep south.... was that? It was..... dust rising, an army was approaching from the south!

"By all the demons of all the hells," grunted Kublai, "There is no end to them.... and they will be the end of us."



Aed Canmore - youngest son of the late Alexander Canmore - was disappointed... THIS was The Horde?

"Ach, there's nae many of them lads," he grunted, "But one is too many on Scottish lands! Let's at them, and be done with this bloody business quick!"







Aed watched as the nine surviving Mongols retreated, dismissing them from his mind. They weren't a Horde anymore; there weren't even enough of them to form a bandit group. They'd die in the desert, fall victim to bandits or be wiped out by a Scottish garrison on manoeuvres.

"My Lord," grunted a soldier, hauling one of the bow legged, oily haired Mongols to him. The man looked middle aged and defiant despite his capture, trying to maintain some dignity as he was forced to his knees, swords held to back.

"This is their Captain?" asked Aed as he slid from his horse and approached the kneeling Mongol.

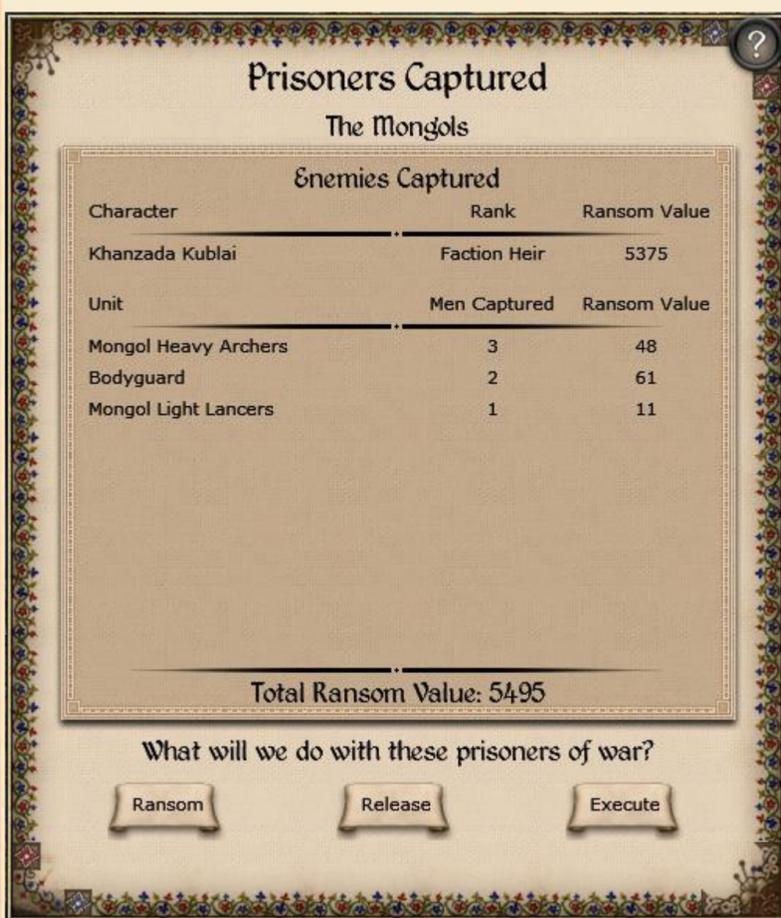
"I am Khanzadai Kublai!" spat Kublai angrily, "Warlord of The Horde, heir to the command of Chaghatai Khan. I rode beside Genghis Khan, I have killed men in their thousands, I do not fear you!"

"Anyone get any of that?" asked Aed.

"Nae, my Lord," laughed a soldier, "It's all 'gah la bahla' to me."

Unlike the Scottish forces to the North, most of the men in the South of what had once been Egypt were recruits from Edinburgh, York, London, Inverness and Nottingham. Those who had been stationed in Jerusalem, Gaza, Antioch, Apella and Damascus were a mixture of Scots and half-breeds from the former native peoples, and well versed in any number of languages. After they had first arrived in Egypt, Edmund had only been half-joking to Edward when he'd suggested they take a leaf out of the English's book and, "Fuck the native people out of their old culture."

"I imagine he's telling us what a big, strapping lad he is," chuckled Aed, "How many men he's killed and such. I imagine he'd be worth quite a ransom."



"I. a warrior am. first," grunted Kublai in halting Scottish and surprising his captors.

"Aye, I see," muttered Aed, then looked at his soldiers, "Let him up!"

The men exchanged surprised looks, then hauled Kublai to his feet and stepped back at Aed's gesture.

"Ye're a warrior first," Aed said, lifting a sword from the ground where a dead Mongol lay, "I'll nae ransom ye and humiliate ye, this was nae great military victory for me."

Kublai's eyes widened as Aed tossed a sword to him, almost fumbling the blade as he reached out and grabbed at it. He looked up as Aed drew his own sword, and a fierce grin crossed his face before he charged forward.

Aed stepped aside, grabbing Kublai's wrist and twisting it so the man dropped his sword. Twisting Kublai around, Aed thrust his sword into Kublai's chest and pulled the man close, staring into his eyes.

"Th... thank... you..." gasped Kublai, and then the light faded from his eyes and Aed let his corpse fall to the ground.

"Nae," whispered Aed under his breath, "Thank ye, now the men have seen my bravery and ability to fight."

Enemy Army Routs Aed Canmore



The last battle left so few of our foe alive that their pitiful collection of survivors has disbanded - preferring a fate of self-exile to certain death at the hands of our superior forces. They shall trouble us no longer.

"Are ye sure ye want to be here?" King Edward asked once again, and Edmund smiled.

"Aye for the last time, Edward," chuckled Edmund, "Domnall is growing tired of my lecturing, I thought it would do him good to run Edessa without me looking over his shoulder."

Edward shrugged and turned his horse back around to share a final few thoughts with Comgell and Matad, and Edmund struggled to keep his face looking bored. After Gawain had obliterated the Mongols, Edward had decided to ride from Edessa to the rebel city of Mosul, complaining that the building of the Mongol Extermination Armies had near bankrupted the Empire. A good city sacking was in order, to pump florins back into the coffers, and also - Edmund suspected - because Edward felt like killing some things again. Edmund had surprised Edward by insisting that he come along too, which was unusual, as Edmund was far better suited to (and preferred) the running of a city as opposed to the running of an Army. But he had been insistent, and Edward enjoyed his brother's company, so he had come. But his reasons for coming were far from enjoying the company of his Brother and King.

He was here to secure his sons' future.

"Mosul's garrison is a good size, but the Rebels are poorly armed and trained," their spy had told them, smuggling a message out of Mosul and guaranteeing that he could have the gate opened for them, "They will nae be able to stand against a concerted charge of Scottish men."

King Edward was relying on this, and Edmund was relying on other information the spy had brought to him alone. Now he watched his Brother, trying to hide the conflicting emotions and thoughts he was feeling, as Edward addressed the men, firing them up ready for War.... and then the time for second thoughts was over as Edward ordered the charge and Comgell and Matad spurred their horses forward.





True to his word, their spy had arranged for the gates of the city to open, but after Comgell and Matad were through, the portcullis suddenly crashed down behind them, unnoticed as they charged their Cavalry units into the backs of the fleeing Rebel Spearmen inside the city walls, and then braced for a counter-charge from the Rebel's Captain Kujuk.





"Get that gate open!" roared Edward in fury as he watched the infantry milling around the gate, "What is that bastard spy doing?"

"His job," muttered Edmund under his breath, and felt a wave of guilt wash over him.

Inside the walls, Prince Comgell had time to wonder where the hell the infantry was, and then Captain Kojuk was slamming their horses together screaming in fury and swinging his sword.

"Oh shut up," muttered Comgell, throwing his shield up and blocking the blow, then cleaving the Captain's head from his shoulders.



The Cavalry pulled back, dismayed by their Captain's death and seeking to retreat to the City Square where their spearmen had all ready retreated and braced. As Comgell and Matad gave chase, their blood up from their foes retreating, the portcullis keeping the Scottish infantry out of the city slowly pulled up.

"Finally!" roared Edward, "Get into that bloody city and kill!"

The Infantry piled in, Pikemen following the trial of dead Rebels towards the City Square while the archers took note of Rebel Infantry moving along the interior of the wall and opening fire on them.



At the Square, Comgell and his men slashed and cut down the Rebel Spearmen, Comgell constantly looking around now, confused by the lack of Scottish infantry... where the hell were they? Suddenly a scream caught his attention, and turning he gasped in horror as he saw his adopted son, Matad, surrounded by Spearmen stabbing at him as he lay on the ground beneath his fallen horse.



"MATAD!" screamed Comgell, and rode his horse into the Spearmen, slashing in fury at them, cutting them down one after the other as they surrounded him. They stabbed and slashed, piercing his armor in multiple places, blood streaming from him, but he kept slashing and striking them down, even as his horse collapsed beneath him. Spearmen kept coming and he dropped to his knees, but still he kept swinging his sword, plunging his weapon into Rebels again and again as his vision turned red first with rage and pain, then with blood, and then he saw no more.



"We've killed their Captains!" laughed a Rebel, and then the laughter died in his throat as flaming arrows rained down onto them. The Infantry had finally arrived.





Prince Edmund rode past the dead bodies to the City Square, where Edward was saying a prayer over the bodies of Comgell and Matad. Their Spy had explained to him that soldiers had forced their way into the Gate Tower and closed the gate, and it had been a wonder that he'd been able to make up a disguise, infiltrate the tower and take control of the gate again to let the infantry in. Edward had been enraged at Comgell and Matad's death, but the spy had spoken well enough to convince the King that he was not responsible for their deaths, but rather responsible for the successful capture of Mosul.

Now his brother was saying his farewell to the two men who had served him so well, and it was all Edmund could do not to vomit at his own part in their deaths. It was he who had ordered the spy to shut the gates after Comgell and Matad entered the city and not reopen them until it seemed impossible that the two Princes not die. All had gone according to his plan, and it was all to secure the future of his sons. He loved his Brother, but Edward had no true sons of his own, and could never know the importance of those blood ties. For him, the idea of Comgell as King of Scotland was no issue, because Comgell was his adopted Grandson, but for Edmund, the idea of his sons - Canmores true - being high ranking Noblemen under the Kingship of an adopted man was not tenable.

So he had done all but murder the two fine, upstanding Noblemen himself. If he had believed in God, he would have believed his mortal soul was in danger of hell. As it was, he felt hollow inside, despite all but securing the position of heir to one of his sons, whether Domnall, Nectan or Aodh.

He had achieved what he desired, but for the first time in his life, Prince Edmund Canmore felt old.

Chapter 24

In Bruges, Captain Kyle was going over the city plans for the thousandth time, discussing with his Commanders once more the best placement of troops to minimize losses on their side. Bruges seemed mostly safe from Milan for the present time, as Duke Puccio seemed obsessed with trying to take Caen after suffering loss after loss at the City. But England's last stronghold at Antwerp remained a small thorn in Scotland's side, as the now isolated former mighty Empire gathered its strength in hopes of retaking one of their lost cities.

A servant coughed lightly to get Kyle's attention, and he turned to see a Portugese Diplomat standing nervously waiting on him. He raised an eyebrow, then approached and took the man's proffered hand.

"Greetings, mighty Lord," said the Diplomat, and Kyle didn't bother to correct him on the title, let the man be nervous about him, "I am Theodosio Solaz, Diplomat of the Portugese Empire."

"I welcome ye to Bruges," said Kyle, "May I ask what business ye wish with us?"

"We would ask you to lower our swords and hear us out," said Theodosio, "The bloodshed between us has become meaningless, let us end this warring today."

Kyle kept his face blank, but internally he was startled.... end war with Portugal? Was Scotland ever at war with Portugal!?! He was saved by an aide who apologized for interrupting, and took Kyle aside under the pretence of passing him an important message. Once out of earshot of Theodosio, the aide explained quickly that Portugal had landed near Caernarvon months earlier, carried out exercises on Scottish lands, and then left on their fleet without ever raising a sword towards a Scotsman, raping a woman or burning a farm. Worried by more important matters, Adam Canmore had paid them no mind, but the Portugese had seen it as a brash hostile move towards the Scottish probably designed to improve their own standing with the rest of the world, and since been in a panic that Scotland would react.

"Very well," grunted Kyle, returning to Theodosio, "I agree that war between our nations is accomplishing nothing, let us embrace peace."

"AHA!" laughed Theodosio, clapping his hands with delight before remembering his place, "I thank you, noble Lord; let our peace last for all time. I will take up no more of your ti..."

"A moment," said Kyle, "Before ye leave, maybe our newfound friendship can be put to our mutual benefit. I have here maps of the known world, but they are out of date. Perhaps I could show ye how Scotland's holdings have affected world geography, and ye could do the same in regards to Portugal?"

Theodosio considered for a second, then shook his head, "No no, that is a grossly unbalanced deal, noble Lord, I cannot accept that."

"Oh," muttered Kyle, "Well I guess..."

"If you could just confirm on your maps Scotland's current holdings," interrupted Theodosio, "And in return I shall write you up papers granting Scotland trade rights throughout Portugal."

As Theodosio moved towards the notes, Kyle turned a wide-eyed smile on his aide, who silently chuckled and shrugged his shoulders. Who understood the Portugese?





In the dingy slums of Cairo, down narrow streets where poorly constructed homes that were barely more than huts fitted families running into double-digits, lived a woman practising a deadly profession. 50 years ago she had lived in the same rundown shack and practiced the same art, but risked no chance of death by religious leaders. That had been in the days of the Egyptian Kings, descendents of the mighty Pharaohs of old, Men-Gods whose families might even chance the dangerous slums to hear her speak. But now the Scottish ruled, and Cairo was a Christian City, and though she had continued her work over the decades, the small power she had wielded over the slums inhabitants was gone, their fear of her tempered by the knowledge that a word to the authorities would see her tried and executed for heresy.

The hanging curtain at the door of her shack was pulled opened and she raised her head from the old text she had been laboriously reading in the dim light, cursing her aging vision. She squinted against the light silhouetting the figure, then smiled a toothless grin.

"Patrick MacDougall, enter and be welcome," she cackled, and enjoyed the visible flinch the Diplomat gave when she identified him. Then he relaxed.

"Ye know me because these slums know me," he grunted, "I am a patron of what ye laughably call pubs in this dingy, sand cursed city."

"Aye," she grinned, "Ye've not worked ye trade for years, Patrick MacDougall, ye've been a drunkard and worse, wasting away ye talents and education and collecting ye pay from a Scottish Nobility that has forgotten ye."

He let the curtain fall behind him and crumpled into the seat across from hers, sneering as he looked about her shack and then at her, "Do ye put on that touch of Scottish accent? Or have the garrison fucked enough of the whores around here to make it ye natural away of speaking?"

She ignored the insult, placing aside her text and reaching to take his hands. He momentarily flinched and then let her hold on, watching as her eyes dramatically rolled back in her head and she let out a long, low moan.

"Save me the theatrics, soothsayer," he grunted, "Just tell me the future, ye ken what it is I want."

"Aye," she laughed, head still cast back, "Ye've crawled out of ye bottle long enough for ye hatred to overwhelm ye self-pity. Ye want to find out if King Edward will suffer a fate that will make ye feel somewhat better about the misery ye own life has spiralled in"

"JUST TELL ME HOW HE DIES!" screamed Patrick, and this time it was the Soothsayer who flinched, taken aback by his fury, "TELL ME THAT THE BASTARD GETS WHAT HE DESERVES!"

She dropped her head back and stared him directly in the eyes, and when she spoke it was in a droning monotone, "I see locusts spreading across the sky, a field of wheat laying open before them, and a white crowned unicorn standing in defence. I see the locusts descending on the Unicorn, swarming it and surrounding it in order to bring it do"

"I said enough with the theatrics," growled Patrick, and the Soothsayer heard such menace in his voice that she momentarily faltered, and he snapped at her, "The Locusts are the Mongols, the field is the Scottish Empire and the Unicorn is King Edward, I see that all as plain as day. Ye dinnae have to gild ye message, I'll pay ye better if ye simply speak plain."

"I see a great Mongol Warlord clashing with King Edward on the field of battle," she hissed, "I see the Scottish army overwhelmed and the fate of battle held in the balance. I see the balance tipped when the Mongol Warlord's head is the one held high.... and I see the King of Scotland lying dead and thousands lining the streets to mourn."

"Lies," grunted Patrick and staggered to his feet, swaying slightly. She realized he was drunker than she'd thought, and wandered uneasily if he was armed, "The Mongols are broken, their Khan flees in terror and their heir is dead at Aed Canmore's hands. Ye vision is nothing more than shite."

He turned to leave and she spoke once more, but it was his own voice he heard.

"I was aggrieved to hear of Prince David's death, my Lord, am I to take it from your part in the battle of Damascus that we are resigned now to accepting the fate dictated to us by King Edward?"

He turned in horror, and she smiled as her mouth opened and he heard once again the words of a dead man,

"Accept our fate? Nae, I will return the Crown to the proper Canmore hands if I must strangle the life from Edward the Pretender myself. We will make Scotland itself once more, this I swear."

Patrick reached into his pockets, fumbled with the contents, and then tossed a sack of florins onto the table before turning and fleeing.

He was known as Aradai the Wrathful, and Khanzada Aradai, new heir to the Khan of the Mongol Horde. He was young, but proven in battle and a figure of fear both to his enemies and his men, especially his men. Aed Erskyn had been watching him for some time now, the Scottish Spy given the task to infiltrate the Mongols by Fearghus Campbell, Spymaster of the Scottish Empire. Aed was a formidable man - the Spy Fearghus had recommended Edmund replace him with as Spymaster should he die - and proven up to the task, disguising himself as a Mongol and infiltrating the camp, where his flawless Mongolian and a past stitched together from information extricated from Mongolian prisoners saw him accepted instantly. In that time he had watched Khanzada fly often into great rage over the smallest thing, and his fury when news of Kublai's death had reached him had been a sight to behold. He often flogged the skin from those who he perceived as wronging him, and Aed had noted that the man seemed to take a perverse pleasure from it.

He was young, potent, filled with rage and incredibly dangerous.

Enemy Character Details

Khanzada Aradai the Wrathful Age: 28

Faction Heir
Command ★★★★★
Dread ☠☠☠☠☠
Loyalty 🪙🪙🪙🪙🪙
Piety 🪙

Retinue: None

Traits:
Mighty Warlord
Driven by Rage
Cruel and Cunning
Cruel Leader
Religiously Proper

Spotted By: Aed Erskyn
Subterfuge: 🕵🕵🕵🕵🕵🕵🕵🕵🕵🕵

After presenting his report to Gawain Arthyn, Aed - who was out of his filthy furs but still unshaven with a thick black moustache and long oily hair - was dismissed and instantly commandeered a horse to head for Edessa. He went with such haste not because he feared being present at the coming battle, but because he was desperate for a hot bath, shave and haircut.

By God, it might be the desert, but a man was still entitled to some civilization!

After Aed left, Gawain rode his horse out and stared at the desert stretching out before him as far as the eye could see, between here and Mosul there was nothing but sand and the odd small oasis.

And The Mongols.

Khanzada Aradai was riding this way, Aed explaining that the Mongol Warlord believed that Edessa had been left mostly undefended when King Edward took Mosul. He meant to take the city and hold it, possibly until Chaghatai Khan could rejoin him and they could rebuild their armies. Gawain's job was to stop him from reaching Edessa, but this time he would be facing the Mongols in open desert warfare, not at a bridge chokepoint where he could make the Mongols come to him.

He stared down the lines of his men, in formation now as they prepared for the coming of the Mongols. Gawain's strategy was simple, he found that the more complex a plan the more likely things could go wrong. His Pikemen were stretched out in a thin line, with archers lined up behind them and then the cavalry sandwiching an undermanned catapult. They'd borrow a page from the Mongols' book and blast them with arrows, forcing them to charge the Pikemen to try and break them and get to the archers behind them.





As the Mongols rode into view, Gawain ordered the archers to prepare to fire, and they rushed through the Pikemen to fire on the Mongols and then pull back. Gawain watched through gritted teeth to see if Aradai would take the bait, the man was apparently an accomplished commander, but Gawain hoped his rage would overcome his sense and he would order a charge..... and to his great relief, he did.



"PUSH THROUGH!" screamed Aradai as he plunged against the Pikemen, Mongol Horsemen all the way down the line doing the same, "DRIVE THROUGH THEM AND KILL THEIR LEADER! KILL IN THE NAME OF THE HORDE!"

"Piss on ye Horde," grunted Gawain to himself as he watched the meeting of Scottish pikes and Mongol Horse, then called out, "HOLD THEM LADS! DINNAE LET THEM THROUGH!"





Aradai screamed in impotent fury as arrows downed his men in droves and the Pikemen were pushed to their limit but did not budge. Unlike every foe that the Mongols had ever faced, the Scottish did not break and run but held their ground... and what was worse, they laughed! They taunted! They called for more!

"RARRRRGHHHHHHH!" screamed Aradai, "RARRRRRRGGGGGH!"

He turned and slashed at his own men around him, cutting a path through them as the astonished warriors fell before their own Warlord's sword. He rode clear of the milling clash of horse and man and screamed in humiliating rage, "RETREAT! WE CANNOT BEAT THEM HERE! RETREAT!"

"Give chase," Gawain ordered his cavalry, feeling a burst of vindication as the Mongols turned and ran, this time from a foe they had met in open desert, which was meant to be their speciality, "Cut down those you can, particularly their on foot archers. When next we meet, I dinnae want them to be able to field anything but mounted lancers. Now RIDE!"





Patrick MacDougall sat in a "pub" in Cairo, a place that would raise the eyebrows of any "true" Scotsman back home in Edinburgh. The walls were open to break the heat of the day, and men were expected to drink in the light! Pure-blooded Scotsman fresh off the boat from the United Kingdom sat laughing with half-breeds, quarter breeds and bastards, with the Sudanese and other mercenaries that made up the conglomerate peoples of the Scottish Empire. MacDougall fumed every time he heard these people referenced as "Scottish", and not for the first time he wondered how the world had gone and changed on him so harshly.

"HEY LADS!" laughed a voice, the noise spiking MacDougall's head, "JUST GOT WORD! PRINCE GAWAIN WENT AND KILLED HIMSELF ANOTHER BUNCH OF MONGOLS!"

A cheer rose up throughout the "pub" and MacDougall lowered his head even more, hissing softly between gritted teeth. The lying bitch of a Soothsayer had fooled him with her cheap parlor tricks after all, she must have had some past connection to the Highland Noble Robert, who'd deserted him along with Alexander when they'd sailed on their blasted Crusade and then ridden to Edinburgh's rescue. He'd told the bitch about their abandoned plot and she'd waited patiently for the chance to use the information on Patrick and get a nice fat sack of florins from him. Now the Mongols were all but wiped from the World and King Edward would go on living forever, just to spite him.

As Scotsman shouted each other drinks, Patrick forced a false smile and joined in the laughing and singing, feeling sicker and older with every passing minute.

"Sicily sent a Diplomat crawling to Caen and offered peace," chuckled Edward, sitting in Edessa with Edmund, "I do believe the time may come when Scotland only finds herself at war with TWO other nations!"

Hostilities Cease

Sicily
Scotland



The rulers of these two peoples have agreed to a truce, and for the time being have ceased open hostilities. It is not easy to forgive those who have previously been bitter enemies, and whether or not this peace will continue to last remains to be seen.



Edmund didn't laugh, and Edward sighed.

"Our Papal standing has improved since they made Maczeus Pope, he's a true believer and even ye must acknowledge that as good news," Edward tried, "And that idiot Duke Puccio has gotten himself excommunicated, turns out he was nae so cunning after all!"

Overviews

The Pope

Diplomacy

Faction

Pope Maczeus the Righteous of Hungary



Age: 49 years old

Divine Connection
Enemy of Heretics
Immaculately Pure
Purger of Heresy

Papal Standing



The more crosses a faction has, the more the Pope favours it.



Faction Excommunicated

Milan



Duke Puccio the Cunning

The leader of these people has truly fallen out of favour with the Pope, who has deemed it necessary to excommunicate him from the Catholic church. While this does not serve as an immediate threat to this Christian lord's position, it is likely that he will soon be at odds with both his people and other more pious Catholic rulers.



Edmund just stared at his brother.

"Oh fine," sighed Edward, "This is about Gawain, right?"

"Ye would make him heir to the throne of Scotland," grunted Edmund, making a statement and not a question, "Ye would give someone not of the Canmore Blood control of the Scottish Empire that WE built!"

"We are still at war with the Mongols!" snapped Edward, "Domnall and Nectan are fine lads, and they're finding their way as men. Nectan has been turning around our problems at Antioch, and Domnall has learned much about the ways of war, but you and I are both old, Edmund, whether we feel it or not. If I was to die tomorrow, I need to ken the King is someone who can conquer on the battlefield!"

"If we were to die tomorrow," Edmund retorted, "Gawain could rule for another 40 to 50 years, and my sons would be in their dotage by the time he passed on. Do ye honestly think he would nae name his own kin as his heirs?"

"I cannae think long term at this time," Edward shouted, standing up and pacing the table, "The Mongols..."

"The Mongols are all but broken!" Edmund yelled, rising to his feet as well, "The truth is-"

"My Lords," interrupted a quiet voice, and both men twisted about in surprise. Before them stood Fearghus Campbell, who had entered Edward's private office unseen by either them or the guards. Once more Edward felt a chill in the man's presence, he was like a ghost, even now at an age when most men were near their deathbeds, he looked ageless, "I bear grim tidings."

"What is it, Fearghus?" asked Edmund, who had known Fearghus almost as long as he'd known Edward and was one of the only men who could come close to reading the Spymaster.

"The Mongols are marching from the East, my Lords," Fearghus reported, and Edward barked a short, sharp laugh.

"Ye man Aed all ready told us, Campbell, Prince Gawain sent Aradai running like a scalded dog with its tail between its legs."

"Nae, my King," corrected Fearghus softly, "Further East than that, it seems that the Mongols never showed us their full strength."

"How many more, Fearghus?" asked Edmund, feeling that growing numbness that usually only came to him in a battle.

Fearghus hesitated for a moment, then answered.

"Thousands."

Chapter 25

"There are four Warlords," Fearghus had told Edward and Edmund, "Each leading an individual force of close to 2000 men. They are young, fierce and eager for blood, and one above all the others is the most dangerous, Subutai the Merciless. Batu and Orda are able commanders, and a threat to us, and Berkai believes he has been granted a holy quest to exterminate all "foreign devils". But Subutai is their leader, and called Genghis reborn by some. It is believed he has led this force into our lands to claim the right of Khan from Chaghatai."

Enemy Character Details



Batu
Family member

Age: 27

Command	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ● ● ● ● ●
Dread	☠ ☠ ☠ ☠ ☠ ● ● ● ● ●
Loyalty	🏹 🏹 🏹 🏹 🏹 ● ● ● ● ●
Piety	🕯 🕯 ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Retinue
None

Traits

- Khan's Conqueror
- Aspiring Commander
- Exterminator
- Cruel and Cunning
- Mean Leader
- Religiously Proper
- Loyal
- Feels Honoured
- Night Fighter

Enemy Character Details



Berkei the Pious
Family member

Age: 25

Command	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ● ● ● ● ●
Dread	☠ ☠ ☠ ☠ ☠ ● ● ● ● ●
Loyalty	🏹 🏹 🏹 🏹 🏹 ● ● ● ● ●
Piety	🕯 🕯 🕯 🕯 🕯 ● ● ● ● ●

Retinue
None

Traits

- Khan's Conqueror
- Seethes with Anger
- Cruel and Cunning
- Cruel Leader
- Pious Ruler
- Servant of Heaven
- Loyal
- Feels Honoured
- Night Fighter

Enemy Character Details



Orda the Merciless
Family member

Age: 24

Command	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ● ● ● ● ●
Dread	☠ ☠ ☠ ☠ ☠ ● ● ● ● ●
Loyalty	🏹 🏹 🏹 🏹 🏹 ● ● ● ● ●
Piety	🕯 🕯 ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Retinue
None

Traits

- Khan's Conqueror
- Promising Strategist
- Cruel and Cunning
- Merciless Leader
- Religiously Proper
- Loyal
- Feels Honoured
- Night Fighter

Enemy Character Details

Subutai the Merciless
 Age: 26

Family member
 Command: ★★★★★★☆☆
 Dread: ☠☠☠☠☠☠☠☠
 Loyalty: 🏹🏹🏹🏹🏹🏹
 Piety: 🕯️🕯️🕯️🕯️🕯️🕯️

Retinue	Traits
None	Mighty Warlord Proven Commander Driven by Rage Merciless Mauler Merciless Leader Religiously Proper Loyal Feels Honoured Night Fighter

Edward and Edmund had immediately sat down and begun writing orders after hearing the news, sending word to Gawain and his armies in the field, then to nearby cities to send out units that had been prepared originally to finally put paid to Aradai and Chaghatai. Edmund dispatched personal letters to Domnall, Nectan and Aodh and then joined his brother as they once again prepared to ride to war with the Mongols.

Patrick MacDougall frantically made his way through the narrow streets of the slums of Cairo, fear and hope warring within him. When news had reached Cairo that the Mongols had been reinforced in huge numbers, he'd realized that there was a chance the Soothsayer's vision could come true... King Edward could die!

But he had to be certain, so he was returning to demand another vision from the old hag, and nothing would stand in his way.

He pulled up short, staring in horror at the hag's shack, or rather the remains of it. All that was left was cinders, and upon the burnt remains was nailed a rough notice. He approached warily and read it, groaning in frustration when he discovered that after decades of performing her readings and visions, the Soothsayer had been executed for heresy.

He turned, thrusting the dead woman from his mind and instead thinking of finding a pub and crawling back into a bottle.

"My King!" grinned Gawain, stepping up and hugging his surprised liege. Gawain embraced him tightly, and then pulled back to arms length, clutching Edward by the shoulders as he grinned at him.

"By God it is good to see ye, again!" smiled Gawain, then hugged Edward again as the King stared horrified at Edmund, who shrugged and mouthed, "King Domnall."

Character Details

Prince Gawain
 Age: 18

Faction Heir
 Command: ★★★★★★☆☆
 Dread: ☠☠☠☠☠☠☠☠
 Loyalty: 🏹🏹🏹🏹🏹🏹
 Piety: 🕯️🕯️🕯️🕯️🕯️🕯️

Retinue	Traits
Tutor Shieldbearer Veteran Warrior	Dubious Iron Fisted Servant of Heaven Uninhibited Religiously Proper Dysfunctional Born to Command Marks of War Feels Appreciated Fair Fighter Disrespects Prisoners Promising Attacker Aspiring Commander Brave Can Tell a Tale Heir Apparent Night Fighter

Breaking off from Edward, Gawain approached Edmund with a grin, but the younger Canmore Brother stepped quickly to the side and grabbed one hand in a firm shake while clutching Gawain's shoulder, saying, "Good to see ye, Lad," before breaking off and stepping past. Edward hid a smile, and then his face became stern.

"Tell me of these new Mongols, Gawain," he grunted.

"They've learned somewhat from the mistakes of Chaghatai," Gawain replied, instantly becoming as stern and hard as his King. Edmund noted this with interest, the man might have been overly touchy, but once it came to battle he was all business, "There are roughly 8000 men approaching from the East, travelling together in force. Their sheer size means they lose speed, and they cannae all move as one so Batu and Subutai have formed a vanguard, but that vanguard still counts 4000 men."

"Do ye think they will come to us?" asked Edmund, "They must know by now that our forces ride to meet them, and if they ken anything of the layout of this desert they'll ken we mean to use it against them as ye did with Jebe and Bayan at Mongol Bridge."

"Aye, ye must understand the way they think, my Prince," nodded Gawain, "They ken we are here, but they ken that WE ken. If they turn and march South towards Baghdad, it will create the appearance of fear, and that will bring great dishonor on their Warlords, and that will lead to a lack of respect amongst their men, and that could lead to their Warlords being overthrown."

"Also," added Edward, "They will want to prove their might over their fallen brethren. Jebe and Bayan came at us in force and Gawain wiped them out, now they must prove their manhood and power by doing what Jebe and Bayan could nae, defeat us."

Edmund nodded, he'd thought as much but still found it difficult to believe that any men who could create an army the size of the Mongols could possibly have their strategies and tactics so completely overridden by what was essentially a pissing contest.

For the Scottish were waiting for the Mongols at a bridge much like the one where Jebe and Bayan had been decimated, and it would be certain death for Batu and Subutai if they tried to take it.



"This is suicide," hissed Batu, watching from a distance the barely visible Scottish army moving into position, "We will die in our hundreds on that bridge, Jebe and Bayan died on a bridge much like that."

"The Skot-tish will die in their hundreds," replied Subutai curtly, "In their thousands."

Batu sat nervously, hating the effect the other Warlord had on him. Batu himself was respected and (more importantly) feared for his fearsome nature, but Subutai was something different, a presence that overshadowed and cowed all else. He waited now to hear if Subutai would continue talking. Sometimes he expanded on his orders, other times he merely gave them and expected nothing more than total compliance. The trouble was knowing when it was safe to talk back without creating the impression you were interrupting him.

"Hundreds of Mongols WILL die," Subutai added at last, speaking emotionlessly, "That is their duty and honor, to die for the good of The Horde. We will pile ourselves onto the Skot-tish line until it buckles, and then we will burst through and open the whole of their lands to us. They will kill our men, we will kill their men, and when all is said and done, their men will all lay dead and those of ours who have survived will be the stronger for it."

He fell silent again, but Batu felt his gaze upon him like some dreadful weight, and finally when he could take it no longer he turned to stare at the only man he had feared since Genghis Khan.

"You," Subutai grunted, "Will lead the vanguard onto the bridge."

King Edward rode his horse to the head of his cavalry and looked over his men with a swelling of pride. The Scottish were the hardest and toughest men in the world, and the men of the Scottish army were tougher still. These men, the men who had fought tooth and nail against the Mongols were the toughest of them all, the strongest and bravest men he had ever known.





"Remember ye orders, Lads," he called out, "Yon bastards will come at us hard and try to punch through our lines. We must hold and bring them down slowly."

He turned and looked at his Reserve Commanders, set back from the rest of the army. They were all horsed, ready to ride at a moments notice, and he fixed them with hard glares, remembering the near disaster at Mongol Bridge on Blood River. His voice lowered to a whisper that only they heard, "And if any of ye move before ye are given the official word, ye'll answer to me personally."

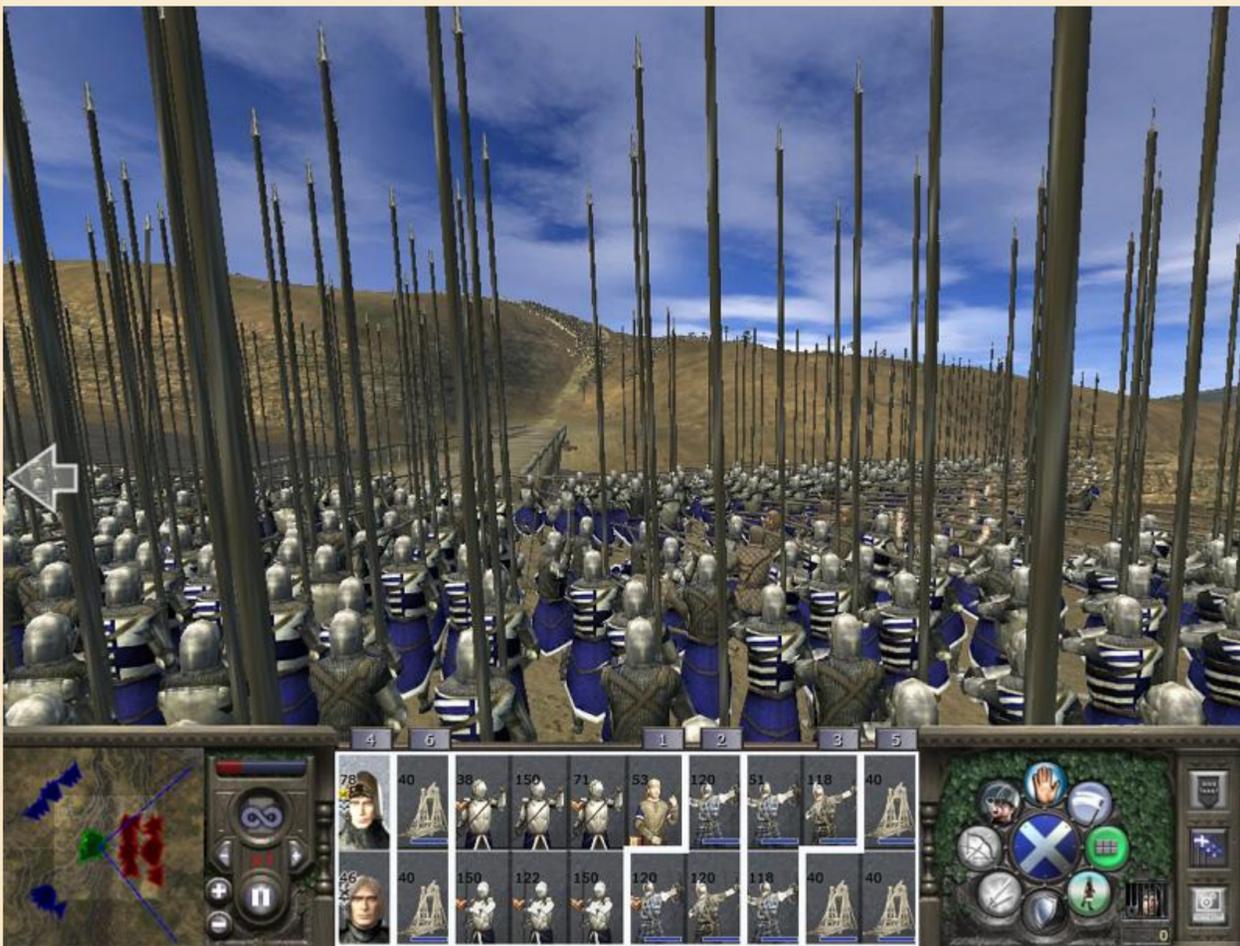
"These Trebuchets..." muttered Edmund, riding up beside Edward, "Would it nae make more sense to use our Catapults, they're more accurate and their operators experienced in their use."

"The trebuchets have a longer reach, Edmund," grunted Edward, "We'll need that today, and accuracy will nae be a concern as ye'll soon see."

"THE MONGOLS APPROACH!" cried a scout, and Edward moved forward to join his cavalry, leaving behind Edmund without a word. Edmund moved towards his own Bodyguard, unconcerned by the abrupt departure of his Brother, knowing he had other

concerns than a polite farewell. For Edmund's own part, he felt that familiar (and welcome) numbness washing over his body. His thinking would be clear during the battle, without emotional attachment, and he could worry about the death and horror later, when the important work was done.

"The Mongols, my Lord," noted one of his mounted Bodyguard as he arrived, repeating what the Scout had already proclaimed to the Army as a whole. Still, one could see why he had brought it up. Watching the Mongols approach was an.... unforgettable.... experience.



"It is ye army still," Edward noted to Gawain, "Ye have more experience against these men than I, so give ye orders as ye see fit."

Gawain smiled grimly, and then raised his sword, "Archers! Fire!"

The archers - strategically placed on two raised outcroppings overlooking the bridge from two sides - did as ordered, following both the order to fire.... and to use fire.





Batu gritted his teeth as he and his men thundered down the bridge with fiery arrows coming down on them from above, and Skot-tish pikemen waiting braced before them. This WAS suicide, the Skot-tish held the Bridge, they were on an upward slope that negated the Mongol's horse, and they had a high vantage from which to rain down fire and death. But suicide or not, now that he was committed to the charge, Batu's blood was up and he wouldn't have turned aside for anything. Life was never sweeter than when death was looming above you ready to strike.

And then the Mongol's smashed against the Skot-tish line.



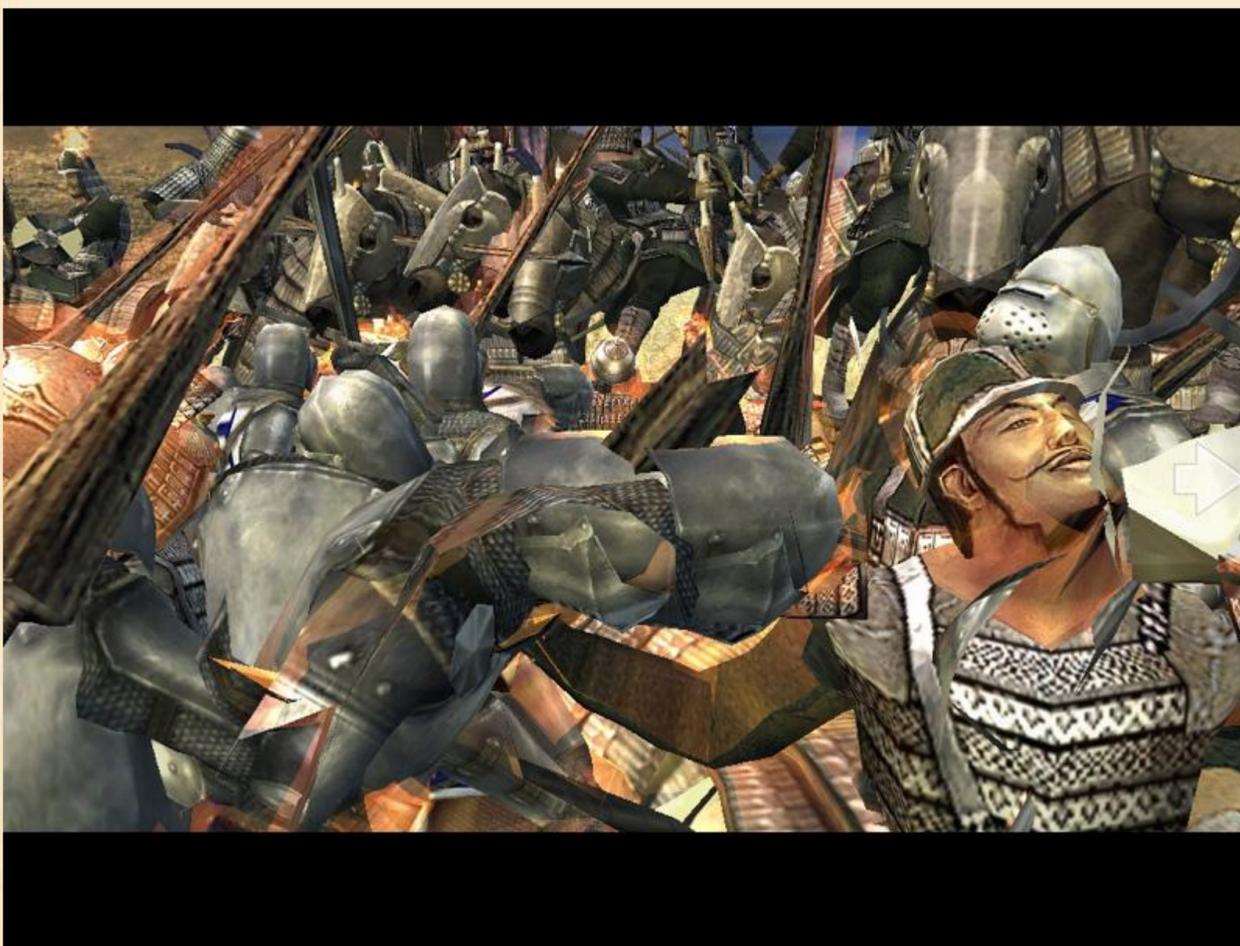


"Batu roared with laughter as he cast about with his sword in the crushing melee. The other Mongol horse were ramming into the back of the frontline and the Skot-tish Pikemen were true to their reputation and holding in place, their Pikes impaling horses and the soldiers themselves attacking the Mongols not killed by the charge. It was intense pressure on Batu's frontline, but it must have been even worse on the Skot-tish, and Batu realized that Subutai was right, the Skot-tish could NOT hold against this pressure, eventually the weight would give and then the Mongols would burst through in an unstoppable torrent.

Then the killing would truly begin.

"THIS IS YOUR FINAL STAND, SKOT-TISH!" roared Batu, howling with laughter as he caved in a Pikeman's head, "YOU ALL DIE HERE! YOUR WIVES AND DAUGHTERS WILL SERVICE ME! YOUR SONS' SKULLS WILL MAKE MY THRONE! I AM BATU, WARLORD OF THE MONGOL HORDE! TREMBLE BEFORE THE MIGHT OF THE HORDE!"

"Shut ye gob, ye jabbering pile of shite!" grunted a Pikeman, and slammed his sword through Batu's throat as the Warlord leaned down to attack a nearby soldier.



Enemy General Fallen

Batu
The Mongols



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.



"Batu is dead," grunted a Mongol Scout as the cry ran back through the Horde on the bridge.

"Good," laughed Subutai with a short barking sound, "Another rival gone, order the men to prepare. When the moment is ripe we will tear through the Skot-tish."

On the Scottish hill, Gawain watched the Horde pressing mercilessly against the straining, bracing Pikemen. Fiery arrows rained down on the Horde and killed them in their dozens, but there were so many, they just kept coming.

"Time to relieve those Pikemen of their pressure," he grunted, "Trebuchets!"

Edmund turned his head and watched with intellectual curiosity as the new siege equipment only recently developed were put into practise by the Scottish for the first time.

It certainly made a very good first impression on the Mongols.





"Edward was right, accuracy was nae that important," noted Edmund as the Mongol vanguard was wiped out and a gap between the Scottish Pikemen and advancing Mongols was created, relieving pressure on them.



"REFORM!" Gawain roared down to the Pikemen, then smiled, "And good job, lads!"

The archers let loose a cheer from their outcroppings, and Edward, Edmund and Gawain's bodyguard let loose a roar of approval shortly after. The Pikemen grinned amongst themselves as they moved back into position at the end of the bridge, picking pikes back up and bracing as the Mongols on the other side of the bridge prepared a fresh charge.

Gawain grabbed a runner by the shoulder and leaned down to whisper into his ear, "When the Mongols are solidly onto the bridge, I want the Archers and Trebuchet to unleash everything they have. I want Batu's army to join him in hell before he gets lonely, do ye ken?"

The runner nodded and rushed off, and Gawain sat back up, noting with interest King Edward casting an appraising eye over him. What could that mean?

Then all thoughts other than battle fled his mind as the Mongols charged down the bridge once more and the Scottish army unleashed its might on the mindless, seemingly endless Horde.







Mongol Archers who had been steadily marching forward at the rear of the Cavalry towards the bridge wavered and stopped as they watched Batu's entire mounted forces wiped out. Those that weren't obliterated by Trebuchet were burnt to death, or struck by flaming arrow, or crushed by the falling horses of the dead, or made it to the other end of the bridge only to die at the hands of the Skot-tish Pikemen.

The Archers hesitated, and then lowered their heads and pushed forward.

"Why do they keep coming?" growled Gawain in disbelief as he watched the unmounted archers moving onto the bridge and certain death, "I've fought these men in their thousands, I've KILLED these men in their thousands, and I still dinnae ken, why do they keep on coming!?"

"Because they fear what is behind them more than what is ahead," muttered King Edward, watching as the Mongol archers were slaughtered mercilessly, "They fear Subutai."



Two remaining mounted Mongol Heavy Archers found themselves somehow, someway through the mass of surviving Pikemen at the end of the bridge. Their minds had shut down in horror from the bloodshed and death they had witnessed, and it was only instinct that kept them on their horses as the crazed animals bolted forward towards the Scottish archers, one of whom calmly lifted his bow and fired an arrow into the fleeing Mongol, setting him alight and dropping him in a flaming heap at the feet of his countrymen.



"This Subutai must be quite the monster to drive men forward into this," Gawain noted, staring at the burning Mongol horsemen.

"We'll have our chance to find out soon enough," grunted Edward, pointing over the bridge, "Here he comes now."

Subutai the Merciless had chosen his moment to smash everything left of the Horde Vanguard into the remaining Scottish Pikemen.

90 Scots to hold the line against 2000 Mongols.





"Gawain," snapped Edward, "We must give aid to the Pikemen!"

"Aye," nodded Gawain, "All Cavalry units forward!"

As the Scottish Cavalry began thundering down the slope towards the bridge, the Pikemen found themselves once more straining against the weight of 2000 Mongols. But where before they'd been close to 700 men bracing in place, now they were less than 90 and simply could not hold long enough for the Archers and Trebuchets to hammer at the Mongols on the bridge. Sheer force of numbers swept them aside, and the Horde burst through directly into the Scottish Cavalry, the two forces smashing into each other with terrific force as the Scottish fought desperately to hold the Mongols on the bridge and maintain the efficient killing corridor that had wiped out Batu and his army.



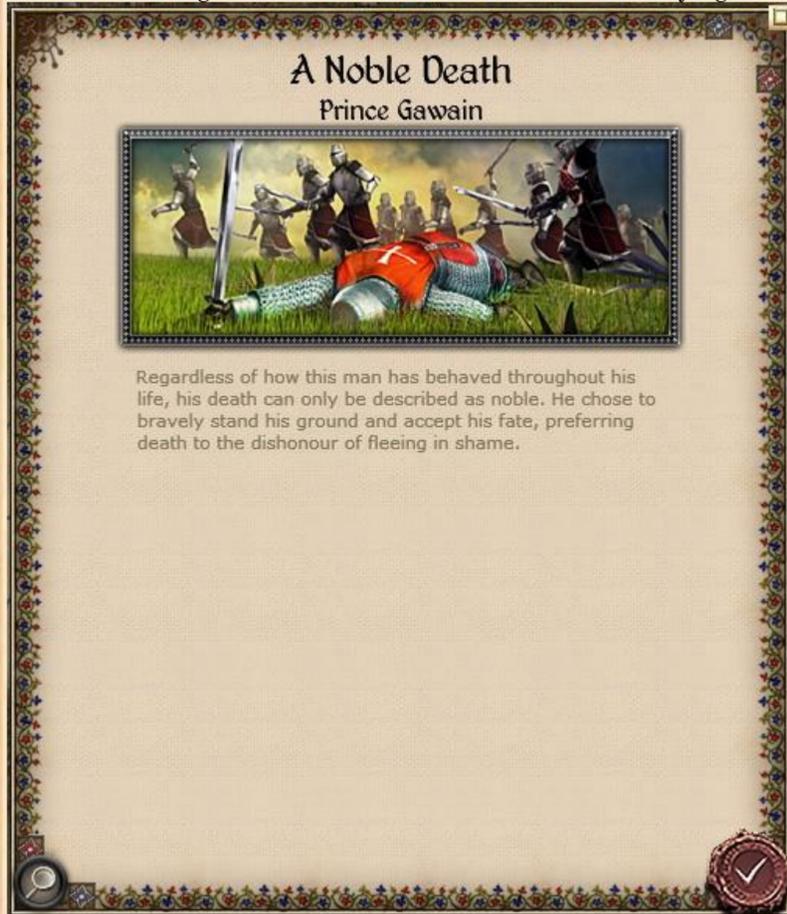


Edmund found himself in the thick of battle, not for the first time, but this was certainly the most intense situation he'd ever become embroiled in. He slashed effectively if roughly at the Mongols about him, still feeling the numb clarity that seemed so different to the wild, sometimes laughing bloodlust of his countrymen. In turn the Mongols swung at them, and his armor turned aside most attacks effectively, but he knew he was cut in multiple places. He felt a moment's amusement, if he survived this battle he'd finally have some scars to match the brutal war wounds that Edward bore without complaint. Then he heard a roar, and twisted his head about to watch in astonishment as a Mongol Horseman rode directly over his countrymen living and dead, sword swinging as he screamed in a fury that seemed to leave those around him struck dumb. He landed his horse between two Scottish cavalymen, swung his sword to the left and through the armor of the unlucky man even as he blocked the swing of the man on his right. Grabbing the still living opponent by his throat, the Mongol roared and hauled the Scotsman into the air bodily and flung him amongst those on foot amongst the horse, desperately trying not to be trodden underfoot while fighting their enemies.

"That would be Subutai, I take it," Edmund muttered under his breath, and then the flow of battle pulled him away from the Mongol Warlord.

"MONGOL!" roared Gawain, and Subutai twisted his head to stare with a fierce grin as the young Scottish General charged at him, "I KILLED JEBE! I KILLED BAYAN! I KILLED BATU! NOW I WILL KI..."

Subutai lifted his arm and pitched his sword with tremendous force directly at Gawain, and the sword plunged into his neck, lifted him from the horse and sent him crashing into the ground. Subutai threw back his head and roared with laughter, vaulting from his horse and tearing his sword from Gawain's throat as the dying General gurgled and coughed up blood.



"Is this the best the Skot-tish have?" laughed Subutai, slashing down an approaching Scotsman on horse as he galloped by. He looked about, finding himself outside of the main flow of battle at the bridge-end, then twisted about with his sword up as he sensed eyes on him.

"Nae," whispered King Edward Canmore, stepping down from his horse, "Ye've nae faced me yet."

The Scottish Cavalry was beginning to fall back yard by yard as the inexorable weight of the Horde continued to bear down on them. Archers and Trebuchet continued to thunder down on those on the bridge, but more and more were clearing the Bridge and stretching out onto open ground. Mixing with and fighting the Scottish, the Trebuchet were effectively nullified, and the Archers could not open fire without running the risk of killing their own men.

Prince Edmund clutched at his left arm which hung uselessly at his side, his sword long since lost inside the belly of a Mongol. One of his mounted bodyguards was leading his horse away from the battle as Edmund cursed the loss of the bridge. The Mongols were gathering in force on the shore now, and soon they would rush up the slope where only archers and now useless trebuchet remained. The Mongols own archers would easily pick them off, while Mongol Mounted Lancers would run down those that tried to run. He needed to regroup with his men, find Edward and-

Edmund's thoughts cut off and his horse came to a stop, as did that of the man leading it. He sensed the din and roar of the battlefield fading around him as both Scotsman and Mongol saw what he had seen.

King Edward Canmore had engaged in single combat with Subutai the Merciless, dreaded Warlord of the Mongol Horde. Now the survivor sat his horse before the remaining Scottish Cavalry and the gathering Mongol Horde, staring with hard eyes at his enemies.

And Edmund and the gathered men stared in disbelief at the sneering face of Subutai the Merciless.

Chapter 26

"I see locusts spreading across the sky, a field of wheat laying open before them, and a white crowned unicorn standing in defence. I see the locusts descending on the Unicorn, swarming it and surrounding it in order to bring it down."

"I see a great Mongol Warlord clashing with King Edward on the field of battle. I see the Scottish army overwhelmed and the fate of battle held in the balance. I see the balance tipped when the Mongol Warlord's head is the one held high.... and I see the King of Scotland lying dead and thousands lining the streets to mourn."

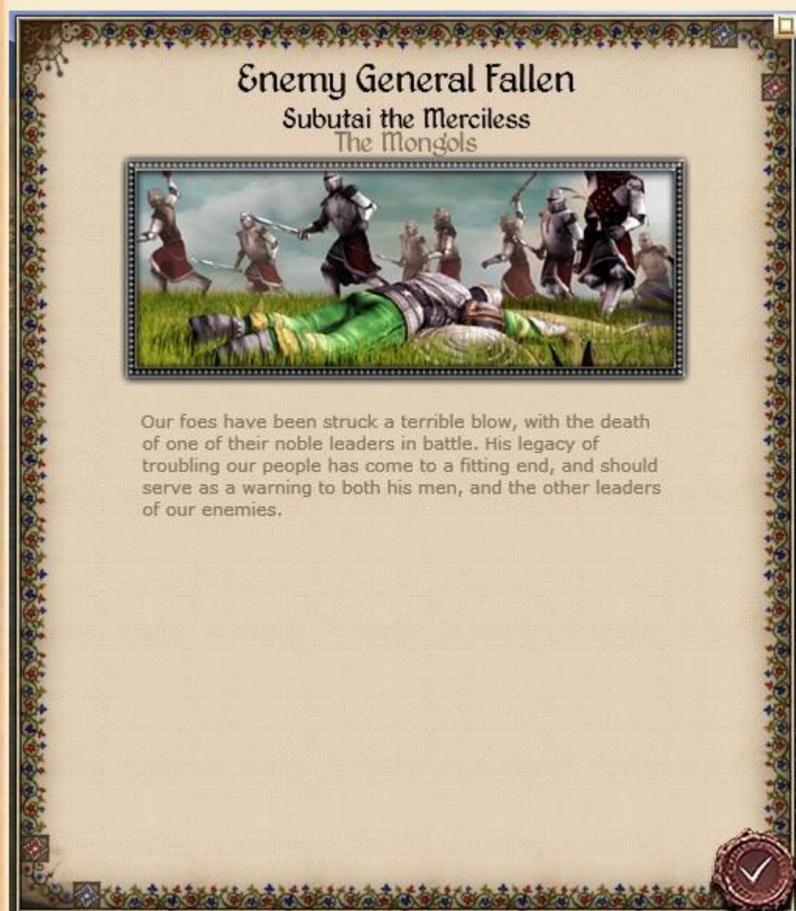
So had spoken the Soothsayer in Cairo, and now her vision was coming to pass. King Edward Canmore had engaged in single combat with Subutai the Merciless, dreaded Warlord of the Mongol Horde. Now the survivor sat his horse before the remaining Scottish Cavalry and the gathering Mongol Horde, staring with hard eyes at his enemies.

And Edmund and the gathered men stared in disbelief at the sneering face of Subutai the Merciless. The battle was at its tipping point, and it was the Mongol Warlord's head held high.

Held high by King Edward Canmore, sitting his horse and staring down the Mongol Horde as he clutched the severed head of the Warlord by its bloody hair.

"This?" he growled in a low whisper in the preternatural quiet of the battlefield, "This is Genghis Khan reborn? This is the great Mongol Warlord? This is the death of Scotland?"

THIS!" he screamed, pitching the severed, still sneering head of Subutai into his horrified men, "THIS IS NOTHING BUT A PIECE OF SHIT!"



The Mongols stood uncertainly in a circle around the head of their Warlord, not only shocked by the death of the apparently invincible Subutai but also left leaderless.... what were they supposed to do now?

"Edmund," grunted Edward, and for the first time Edmund realized his brother was barely able to sit upright, covering his obvious pain and discomfort behind a stern mask that only someone as close to him as Edmund could see through, "Lead the men up the hill, leave these broken bastards here."

Edmund turned and looked back at the gaping, gawping Mongols, then nodded and lifted his good arm, ordering the cavalry forward. They moved past Edward, who waited for the disturbingly small number of surviving Scottish horse to pass before speaking to the assembled Horde once more.

"I am going to ride up that hill now, if ye come up after us, we will kill every last one of ye. If ye turn and try to retreat, our archers and trebuchets will bring ye down in ye hundreds and we'll hunt the survivors down till none are left. I suggest ye take ye own lives here and now, for ye'll nae take Emperor's Bridge from Scotland, and one way or the other, ye **WILL** join Subutai and Batu in hell this day."

Then he turned and slowly rode his horse up the hill as the shell-shocked Mongols watched him depart, standing calf deep amongst the dead.



He reached the top and bit back a groan of pain. His men were staring at him with awe, forgetting for the moment what the Mongols were sure to remember at any moment, the Scottish were outnumbered by a considerable margin. Subutai had fought like a demon, and at one point had been close to choking him to death. It was madness for a man in his mid-sixties to think he could beat a 26 year old Warlord at the peak of his physical fitness, especially a madman like Subutai who was filled with rage and not a small portion of insanity. But Subutai had failed to take something into consideration.

Edward was Scottish.

"Trebuchets fire on their position," Edward ordered, "Runners, the time to fill ye orders is now. I want our reserve infantry here on the double. Archers, if those bastards down there grow some balls, pull ye swords and hold them on the hill until our reserves arrive."

Edmund rode up beside Edward, concern on his face.

"Edward, are ye-

"I dinnae have time to be anything but fine, Edmund," snapped Edward, sweat running freely down his face as it took on a paleness Edmund did not like, "This battle is nae over yet."

Down on Emperor's Bridge, the Mongols ducked uselessly as a flaming rock smashed into them, and they pushed forward to escape the flaming death. In their haste, one of them kicked Subutai's head away, and it was as if the action broke the spell Edward had cast on them. It finally sunk in that Subutai was dead, but they were alive.... and there were far more of them than the Skot-tish.

"CHARGE!" roared a Mongol Warrior, and Edward winced. They were coming too soon, the first of the Reserve Infantry had only just arrived, lightly armored Spearmen exhausted from their quick charge across the desert to join the battle.





The Mongols were disadvantaged by the slope they had to run up, but their sheer numbers allowed them to keep pressing up into the Spearmen as they struggled to stop them. The sheer weight of their numbers forced the Mongols to spread out, which in turn allowed them to press against the remaining Scottish forces on the hill. Even spread thin, they outnumbered the Scottish, and began pressing them back, their proximity to the Scots negating once more the Trebuchets.



"Hold them! Hold them!" roared Edward as the Mongols pressed forward eagerly. The death of Subutai was forgotten now; they were once more The Horde, a hive-mind of destruction that could not be stopped.

And then a Catapult blast smashed directly into their centre.

"SCOTLAND!" roared the Reserve Infantry as the Catapult operators began reloading, while Hospitaller Knights led forth Crusader and Feudal Knights, Spearmen and - feared the world around, with tales of their ferocity even reaching the distant Mongol lands of the East - Highlanders.

"I warned ye, ye bastards!" cried Edward, "DEATH TO THE MONGOLS! DEATH TO THE HORDE!"

And the Mongols confidence - only so recently won back - broke.



The Mongols ran, the Scottish gave chase, and across and around Emperor's Bridge - named for a Byzantine Emperor who died defending it from the Turks - both Scots and Mongols lay dead, just as Subutai had predicted.

But Subutai had been wrong; the nation that made up the greatest numbers of dead was not the Scottish, but the Mongols.





The Scottish chased down the Mongols, breaking them into small groups and exterminating them mercilessly. The Highlanders laughed and taunted the fleeing, screaming Mongols as they brought them down, and back on the hill a single Mongol horseman sat staring in horror at the dead behind him, the fleeing Mongols before him and the greater part of the Scottish army directly in his path.

"Demons from Hell," gasped the Mongol, "They are truly not human, I must warn Berkai and Orda. The Horde must know that when we rode West we left the world and rode into Hell."

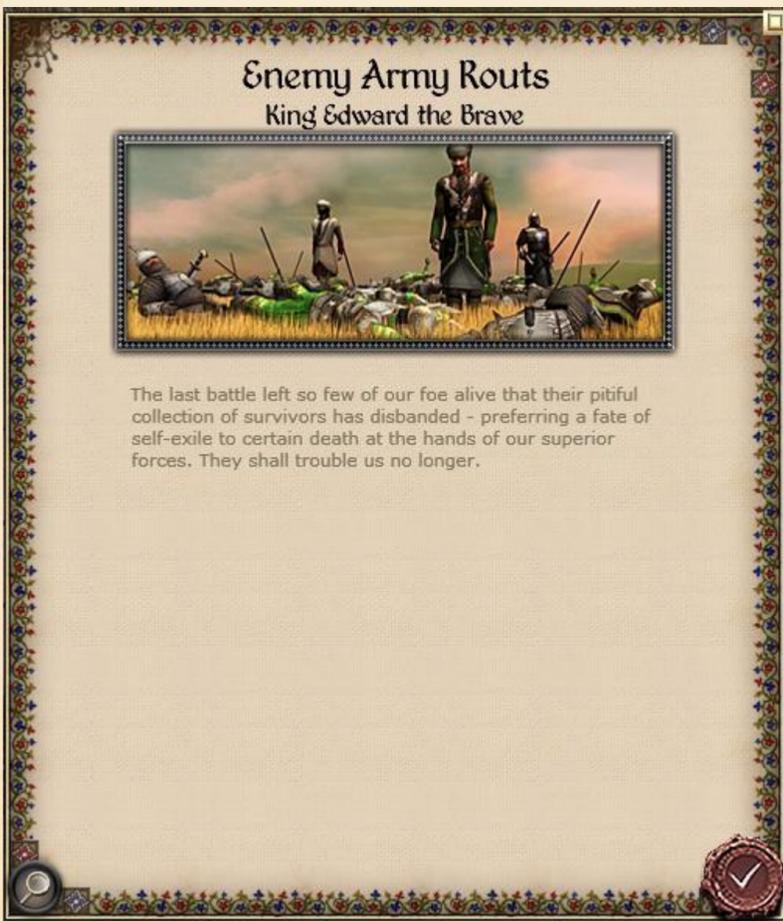
He turned his horse, and then an arrow caught him high in the neck at the same time that several more smacked into his horse, and they both collapsed.





King Edward sat beside Edmund and smiled as he watched the Horde being run down, his army moving into formation around him as he stared over the body-clogged bridge. His body ached, he was sure he'd broken a few ribs in his fight with Subutai, and his neck would be bruised black and blue from the choking the Warlord had given him. But he was alive, and he would live. The Mongols remained a threat, but nothing like they had once been. They could not threaten Scotland, and while Berkai and Orda were still separated from Aradai and Chaghatai the Horde could be kept isolated from forming a greater whole. They would be wiped out, of that he had no doubt.





"Edward, ye need attention," Edmund snapped, "Ye're putting up a brave face, but I can see ye are need in medical attention.

Edward turned to dismiss his brother's concerns, but then stopped as he saw Edmund's face. His brother was pale and sweating profusely, one arm hung limp and he was breathing heavily.

"Edmund?" Edward asked, eyes widening as Edmund's eyes rolled back in his head and slumped forward and almost fell from his horse, stopped only by Edward grabbing at him, "Edmund!"

The innkeeper swallowed nervously as he rapped once again at the door. Cairo was hanging under a heavy heat unusual even for the Desert City, and there was an ill feeling in the air. His mood wasn't helped any by the man standing behind him, who cleared his throat impatiently as the innkeeper knocked again.

"Open the door," hissed the man, his accent unfamiliar to the innkeeper, who nevertheless recognized the note of authority. The Innkeeper opened the door and the forbidding robed Inquisitor pushed past him, snapping, "Patrick MacDougall, you have been seen attending the home of a known heretic, and named by her during her inquisition as a heretic yourself. You will come with me and answer these."

The Innkeeper's brow furrowed even more as the Inquisitor's voice cut off, and his eyes widened as the man exited the room with an emotionless face, heading towards the stairs.

"What of MacDougall?" he asked, and the Inquisitor turned a blank face back on him.

"The Devil has claimed the coward all ready," he growled, and continued on his way. The Innkeeper looked into the room MacDougall had paid for through the month, and sighed in frustration when he saw the dangling legs.

Why would the man kill himself during this time of celebration for the city? Surely he'd heard the news that King Edward had been victorious against the Mongols?



In Mosul, King Edward sat by the bedside of his beloved brother. Edmund's wounds had been greater than he'd known, and the Doctors claimed he was beyond salvation. Edward could scarce believe it, other than being confined to his bed and too weak to walk about, Edmund seemed otherwise normal. Edward himself - a week after the battle at Emperor's Bridge - was already over the worst of the aches and pains of the battle, with his ribs bandaged up as they went through the maddeningly slow healing process. If any of them had been likely to die, he thought it would have been him, but instead he felt as fit as ever.

On their first day back the Doctors had performed their cutting and stitching and told Edward his brother would die before the night's end.

On the second day, Edmund had been awake but too weak to talk.

On the third day he asked for food.

On the fourth day he refused a Priest's request to perform the last rites for him and hear his deathbed confession, snapping tiredly that he would not be a hypocrite at the end of his life. The Priest had been shocked to hear Edmund freely admit what all knew, that he was an atheist, and even more horrified to hear Edmund say that if he was wrong, he'd rather die wrong than a hypocrite who recanted his sins out of fear. Despite his own strongly held religious beliefs, Edward had never been prouder of his brother.

On the fifth day, Edmund called Edward to his bedside and told him that he would make a confession, but to him and not God. He admitted that he had deliberately brought about the situation that led to Comgell and Matad's death. Edward listened to his brother's tearful confession of what he claimed to be the only action in his life he felt guilty for, then placed a hand on his shoulder and told him the truth. He'd always known. Edmund had smiled before slipping into a peaceful sleep, saying that they'd always warned him not to underestimate his brother, the genius.

On the sixth day, Edward sat with his brother and told him what he knew Edmund was waiting to hear. With Gawain dead, there could be no doubt who must be the new heir to the Scottish Empire. It was fate, a mirror of their own youth. Two Scottish Princes - brothers - had left Scotland and come to Egypt to achieve a mad dream, and against all probability they'd succeeded. Now as they reached the ends of their lives, two Scottish Princes - brothers - would succeed them. Domnall would be the King of Scotland when Edward died, and his twin Nectan would be his heir. Edmund clasped his brother's hand and thanked him, and Edward felt a wrenching deep inside of him as he prepared for his brother to die. But once more, Scottish hardiness won out over Death's implacable grip, and Edmund fell into a deep slumber.

On the seventh day - today - Edward sat with Edmund on a balcony overlooking Mosul and the desert beyond. He'd been moved from his bed to watch the sun set and smiled as he felt the sun's rays on his face.

"Father would be proud despite himself, I think," Edmund said, "We've built quite the Empire for ourselves, have we nae?"

"Aye," smiled Edward, "And ye sons will expand it. Domnall is a good lad, even if he still has much to learn. But we were the same, in our youth, and he comes from good stock."

They sat quietly together for a few moments, and then Edward asked the question that had been bothering him for all the years that his own faith had grown.

"Edmund, if ye do nae believe in God.... what do ye think will happen to ye when ye die?"

"Who knows," smiled Edmund and Edward was surprised at the serenity in his brother's eyes, "I have studied much of death, one can hardly live in Egypt and nae. Some believe the mind plays a final trick, creating infinity in a moment, giving a man more joy than we can believe exists and distracting him from the end. Others think we just.... stop. Others believe our bodies return to dust, and eventually the dust becomes something again - an animal, a man, who knows, maybe a tree!"

He laughed, a carefree sound that broke Edward's heart, "I dinnae know, and I honestly dinnae care. I have lived more in my life than 1000 men, and I have confessed my only regret to the only man whose opinion matters. I sit here in a City we conquered, my sons' futures assured and my life lived well. I sit in the sun with my beloved brother, and I think to myself.... this is nae a bad way to die at all. Nae, it's nae a bad way to die at all."

Edward and Edmund sat in silence for several minutes watching the sun set, and when Edward finally turned to speak again, he saw Edmund sitting with a small smile on his face, staring with unseeing eyes into the desert.

"Nae Edmund," smiled Edward sadly, taking his brother's cooling hand in his own, "It's nae a bad way to die."

And thus, seven days after the battle with the Mongols had ended; it claimed its last victim. Edmund Canmore was dead.

A Noble Death Edmund the Mean



Domnall Canmore received the message of his Father's death in the middle of the night, woken as he slept. He sent the messenger off and sat at the foot of his bed, reading the message penned in his Uncle's own hand over and over again. Some of the best memories of his life were riding with his Father and Uncle as they prepared for their aborted Moorish Campaign, and now he felt ashamed for his recent feelings of anger towards them both. He'd been left in Edessa while they rode first to Mosul, and then against the Mongols at Emperor's Bridge, passed over in favor of Gawain.

Now he saw what a blessing in disguise that had been, for Gawain was dead, his father was dead, and now he was heir to the mightiest Empire in the world. What a fool he'd been to feel disrespected, he'd give up all he now had if it meant his Father could live again.

Character Details



Domnall Canmore
Governor
Command
Chivalry
Loyalty
Piety

Age: 27

Command: 3 stars, 10 dots
Chivalry: 3 stars, 10 dots
Loyalty: 1 star, 10 dots
Piety: 1 star, 10 dots

Retinue
None

Traits

- Legacy of Chivalry
- Understands Logistics
- Night Fighter
- Totally Closed
- Brave
- Crude
- Natural Commander
- Fair in Rule
- Feels Disrespected
- Speaks of Loyalty
- Swift to Judge
- Social Drinker

As his brother sat in his room absorbing the news of his Father's death, Aodh Canmore knelt in the Chapel with tears streaming down his face, hands clasped together as he begged God to forgive his Father and accept him into heaven. The most important figure in his life outside of God was dead, and Aodh was terrified that his Father's well noted lack of belief would see burn in the fires of hell.

"Please, dinnae punish him, merciful Father," sobbed Aodh, "Please!"

Edessa - Minor city



Aodh Canmore
Family member
Command
Chivalry
Loyalty
Piety

Age: 23

Command: 2 stars, 10 dots
Chivalry: 2 stars, 10 dots
Loyalty: 2 stars, 10 dots
Piety: 2 stars, 10 dots

Retinue

-  Mentor
-  Military Engineer
-  Pagan Magician

Traits

- Legacy of Chivalry
- Servant of Heaven
- Generally Loyal
- Night Fighter
- Promising Tactician
- Talent for Command

Early in the morning in Antioch found Nectan Canmore at his table eating breakfast when the message of his Father's death arrived. He read the message with shock, stunned at the news despite the knowledge that his Father had been badly injured in the battle with the Mongols. He stared at the breakfast table, all hunger for food gone as he announced with a trembling voice the dire news.

As heartfelt commiserations were offered, his Advisor knelt beside him and asked him if he wanted to cancel his usual early morning training session and clear his day's meetings with the city's bankers. He stared ahead for a few moments, and then nodded thanks to those expressing their sorrow before answering.

"Nae, death comes to all men, but the work of the living must continue."

Antioch - Large city



Nectan Canmore
Governor

Age: 27

<p>Command: ★★☆☆</p> <p>Chivalry: ★☆☆☆</p> <p>Loyalty: ★★☆☆</p> <p>Piety: ★☆☆☆</p>	<p>Mostly Rational</p> <p>Legacy of Chivalry</p> <p>Austere</p> <p>Generally Loyal</p> <p>Promising Strategist</p> <p>Mean with Money</p> <p>Farming Knowledge</p> <p>Natural Commander</p> <p>Promising Attacker</p> <p>Promising Commander</p> <p>Marks of War</p> <p>Fair in Rule</p> <p>Conscientious Trainer</p>
--	---

Retinue

-  Adultress
-  Mercenary Captain
-  Intrepid Explorer



In Cairo, young Aed Canmore was laughing with some of his favoured men during a late afternoon training session when the messenger brought the news. He read it with a grim face, and then called over his men.

"Lads, I've bad news," he told them, "My Uncle Edmund has died of his wounds."

The men stood to attention and thumped their chests at the news, and Aed grinned. His Uncle had always been kind, but never overly interested in him. But these men had known and respected Edmund, and it was their respect that Aed craved. He'd killed Kublai to make them see he was a true fighting Scotsman, and trained with them so they could see he wasn't some noble fop given command because of his blood.

"Forget today's training," he said, "Go into the city, spread the news, and have a drink on me. Raise your ale to Edmund Canmore, and may it be a long time before we met him again."

His men saluted and moved off, clearly grateful to Aed for his generosity. He smiled, he couldn't stand ale himself, but the men loved the stuff, and anyone who got his round in was all right by them. They would go into the city and let them know of Edmund's death, and then they'd drink to his memory and get maudlin, and then they'd tell happy stories and get merry, and at the end of it all they'd remember it was Aed who had given them that joy. Life was a series of small victories like this, and Aed silently thanked his Uncle for giving him the opportunity.

Cairo - Capital



Aed Canmore
Governor

Age: 19

<p>Command: ★★☆☆</p> <p>Chivalry: ★☆☆☆</p> <p>Loyalty: ★★☆☆</p> <p>Piety: ★☆☆☆</p>	<p>Abhors Drink</p> <p>Lame of Loins</p> <p>Generally Loyal</p> <p>Religiously Proper</p> <p>Night Fighter</p> <p>Talent for Command</p> <p>Marks of War</p> <p>Feels Appreciated</p>
--	---

Retinue

-  Mentor



A week later in Nottingham, Adam Canmore stood naked in front of his mirror, frowning.

"I need to train more," he moaned, clutching at his paunch, "Do ye think the men mock me for my lack of muscle?"

"Oh darling, you're perfect as you are," purred Cassandra, his Mistress now of many years.

"Aye," smiled Adam, and she faked a moan of appreciation as she saw his pathetic excuse for a manhood rise at the sight of her nude form, "Cassandra, sometimes I feel ye're the only one who truly understands me, who values me. Since my Father died I..."

She let his voice drone on and gave appropriate responses at the right times. She had heard all of this before, heard him moan about his insecurities and fears and secret belief that his men did not respect him, which was why he ruled so harshly over them. She amused herself by counting the number of warts on his nude form, long since past any revulsion at the sight of them. He paced about like a woman in front of the mirror and she had to suppress a cruel smile as she imagined mimicking him for her "true" lover later tonight. Robert the Highland Noble was cruel as well, but in a way that excited her like Adam never could.

He continued droning on and she thought back once more to the message he had received, read and dismissed immediately earlier in the day. Prince Edmund had died over in that Godforsaken desert on the other edge of the world, and **THAT** excited her, because it meant that Adam Canmore was now one step closer to the Throne of Scotland.

New Faction Leader

King Domnall



A new ruler has been crowned, and the people of the realm are already eagerly anticipating the prosperous future that they are entrusting him to lead them to. May his reign lead us to distant shores, greater conquests and lasting prosperity.

