

Chapter 67

Two men sat in a tent in high mountains far from human habitation, the heavy cloth of the tent rippling in the icy wind whipping through the high mountain pass. Outside came the faint noise of the wind and the movement of men, but the man sitting comfortably in light clothing seemed not to care, and the man sitting across from him heavily wrapped in furs only had ears for his "guest".

"So tell me what ye want to hear," chuckled the "guest", "It's nae as if I have anything better to do while we wait out the storm."

"Tell me again," whispered the man, eyes wide, "Tell me of..."

The Death of Domnall Canmore

A King was dead.

The hands no longer around his throat, the surviving King fell forward on top of his opponent, unwilling to release his grip on his opponent's throat until he was sure it was done. Finally, he released his grip and struggled to his knees, sucking in great lungfuls of air, fighting off the dizziness and blackening of vision as he attempted to regain his senses. He rose from knees to a crouch, hands on thighs, panting deeply before finally lifting to a full standing position and drawing in one final last great lungful of breath.

He stared around him at the gathered soldiers - his own men and the enemy - and finally he spoke, pointing at his enemies and giving the final order of the Battle of Constantinople.

"Kill them all."

And the Hungarians moved quickly to fulfill their King's orders.

The Scottish reacted almost as one, their shock to see their King defeated and dead broken by the sudden rush of the Hungarians. The first line fell immediately but those behind them were all ready bracing, standing defensively to try and hold back the immediate onslaught of baying, laughing Hungarians.

"PULL BACK! PULL BACK! OUT OF THE CITY!" cried Hew, desperate to get his men clear off the Hungarians who - for the moment - had been led near-supernatural strength by bearing witness to the death of Domnall Canmore.

"NAE! STAND AND FIGHT!" roared Angus in a fury, smashing in the face of a Hungarian who came too close, "FOR THE KING!"

"THE KING IS DEAD!" screamed Hew, and Angus twisted to glare at him... and took the hilt of Hew's sword directly in the face, knocking him unconscious. Hew ducked and caught the falling Scottish General, hauling him up over his shoulder - lent strength himself by panic - and ordering the men to beat as orderly a retreat as possible.

"What about the King's body!?" cried a soldier in dismay, and Hew shook his head sadly.

"It's just a body, worm food now!" he shouted back, grimacing as he saw the Scottish frontline buckling under the pressure of the Hungarians, "What made him is gone, and I'll nae sacrifice men to rescue an empty vessel! BACK!"

Istok rubbed at his neck as he watched the Scottish falling back, and turned to nod as a Commander strode up to give him salute, his eyes filled with awe.

"The survivors are pulling out of the city," he reported, "Shall we give chase?"

"Let them run, the cowards," grunted Istok hoarsely, wincing at the phantom hands around his throat, "It would serve us better for word to spread that their King died at my hands.... besides, where will they run? Kenez has an army of 2000 to the Northwest, few will survive the week, if any."

The Commander nodded and saluted again before rushing off to order the Hungarians to break off their pursuit and secure the city. Istok watched them go, left alone in the square once more, surrounded by corpses, including Domnall Canmore. Sure he was alone and unobserved, Istok dropped to one knee and supported himself with one arm against the cobbled stones of the square. He hacked and coughed violently and once again struggled to fight off the dizziness that threatened to overcome him, then allowed a cruel smile to cross his face as he stared over at Domnall's corpse.

"You were better than I gave you credit for, Domnall," he chuckled, then spat on the face - still locked in a shocked, choked expression - of the Scottish King, "But you weren't good enough.... you weren't Edward Canmore."

"All my life," said the "Host" of the Scottish man in the tent, "I have heard the legend of the Canmores and their prowess as fighters. To think that one of them could be bested in personal combat is... disappointing."

"And yet ye ask me again and again for the story," chuckled the Guest.

"There is an old saying," grunted the Host by way of reply, "A man enjoys his fortunes, but not so much as he enjoys the misfortune of his enemy."

"Then ye will enjoy the next part of the story," chuckled the Guest.

Angus' Revenge

"Will ye nae change ye mind?" Hew asked again, all ready knowing the answer.

Angus simply stared ahead of him, his face fixed with a disturbing, detached rage. Hew shook his head sadly, knowing that Angus knew as well as he that the "revenge" he was planning to take on the Hungarians was little more than a final, suicidal charge, "The Mauler's" way of dealing with his grief.

What really surprised Hew was the number of men who seemed willing to go along with him.

Shaking his head, Hew gave his own men - less than half the survivors who had escaped Constantinople - the order to begin moving out. Iasi was not too far to the North, but the Hungarians were between Hew and the City, and Constantinople between him and Nicaea to the East. His only option was to go West, through the heart of Hungarians territory but back up the path that Domnall had led them down, then take a sharp turn North towards the Polish border, where King Zygmunt would be sure to give them sanctuary.

But as he rode away, Angus spoke, the first words that he had spoken directly to Hew since he'd come to and discovered Hew had carried him out of Constantinople.

"Hew," the permanently sneering, heavily scarred, severely mentally disturbed Scotsman said in a quiet, harsh whisper, "It was.... it was good to be ye friend."

Hew was quiet for a moment, and then he saluted his friend before turning away and riding with his men away from what he knew would be Angus' last battlefield.

Battle Deployment

Your forces attack an army of Hungary



Your Forces

Scotland



Angus the Mauler
393 men

Reinforcements: 0

None

Enemy Forces



Hungary



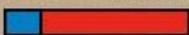
Captain Kenéz
1831 men

Reinforcements: 0

None



Balance of power



Attempt a night attack



Captain Kenez barked out a sharp laugh as he saw the pathetically small number of Scottish soldiers sitting exposed on the bare slopes of the hill, across from the ancient standing stones that predated Christianity. Kenez wondered briefly if they might get a chance to capture Angus and sacrifice him inside the stone circle, not to any God, just for the sake of humiliating him.

"Crossbows, move up to range and open fire!" Kenez ordered, "Be wary of the General! The King wants his head to go on a pike beside his Master's!"

His men laughed dutifully as across the long frontline of the Hungarians, crossbowmen rushed forward recklessly, eager to wipe out the Scottish and then get to work on embellishing the tale of their heroics to their wives and mistresses and tavern wenches back home. They moved forward quickly, far too quickly for their own good, just as Angus - who had been lent a chilling clarity by his rage - had hoped.

"Now," he snarled with cold, calculating rage, "FIRE!"





"Didnae expect that, did ye, ye bastards!" grinned Angus, watching as the frontline collapsed into anarchy trying to escape the Bombard and Rocket blasts that had been hidden from view by the Infantry and slope of the hill, "Archers, open fire!"





"DAMMIT! CONCENTRATED FIRE!" roared Kenez, furious that the Scottish had managed to hit them with a surprised blow and take the advantage in the battle, "CROSSBOWS, SLAUGHTER THAT FRONT LINE!"

Reacting to their Captain's command, the Hungarians let loose wave after wave of crossbow bolts across the gap between the two armies, directly into the unarmored Highland Archers. Dozens of men fell with terrifying speed, even as more Bombard blasts rocketed into the Hungarian ranks.

"CHARGE!" roared Kenez, "THEIR BOMBARDS NEED RANGE, DON'T GIVE IT TO THEM! SWAMP THEM! SMOTHER THEM! **KILL THEM!**"

Hundreds of Hungarians ran charging across the gap, and Angus' men turned to stare at him, waiting the command they knew must come. Through his grief and rage, Angus still felt pride to see his men still standing here, refusing to run, refusing to surrender.

"I would give ye brave words, and tell ye that nae situation is unwinnable... but I will nae lie to ye," Angus said, "We go to our deaths, lads, nothing I can say or do will change that. So all I will say is that every day of my life I have been proud to be a Scotsman, through good times and bad... now let's show these bastards how a real man dies... and take as many of them with us as we can!"

His men roared their defiance, and together they ran down slope directly into the oncoming Hungarians.





Prisoners Executed

Hungary



Grim tidings indeed... News has reached the capital that our enemy has executed the 51 men that they captured prisoner in our last battle with them.



"Kenez did not get his blood sacrifice, though he did get Angus' head... what was left of it," the Guest finished, "It was nae in a fit condition to go on a pike beside Domnall's, but Istok was pleased enough... especially when he received his next piece of news."

"Ahhh yes," chuckled the Host, "I would hear this tale again, too."

"I thought as much," nodded the Guest, "Ye are a sadist."

"You say that as if it was a bad thing," chuckled the Host, "Now tell me, tell me of..."

The Betrayal of Hew Mar

"A force of 400 Scotsmen have crossed the border, my King," reported the messenger, eyes on the floor to avoid staring at the Polish King's twisted, ripped apart jaw, the result of a near death experience in battle twenty years earlier against the Russians.

"So you spoke the truth," rasped King Zygmunt, turning to stare at the man seated near the window, staring almost bored at the snow-coated rooftops of Prague, "The Scottish have broken their Alliance with us, Domnall must be mad, to think he can do to us what he did to the Venetians and Danes."

James Bunnok nodded, the Scottish spy being careful to keep his face blank. Everyone knew that Zygmunt placed a high value on loyalty and trust, considering it had been a childhood friend who had saved his life by sacrificing his own all those years ago against the Russians. Bunnok had taken a gamble by coming to him with his allegations, counting on Zygmunt's fury and Prague's isolation to allow him to create the conditions necessary to start a way between Scotland and Poland. By the time Zygmunt discovered the truth, Bunnok would be long gone, returned to Constantinople and King Istok, his new Master.

Allied Character Details



King Zygmunt

Age: 42

Faction Leader

Command



Chivalry



Authority



Piety



Retinue



Siege Engineer

Traits

Aspiring Commander

Terribly Scarred

Very Loyal

Cruel and Cunning

Trustworthy

Feels Respected

Can Tell a Tale

Dauntless

Faction Leader

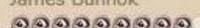
Some of this man's war wounds are difficult to look at, his ability to continue battling through such injuries is astounding.

+2 Authority, +6 to your general's hitpoints (how many hits your general can take before dying)

Spotted By:

James Bunnok

Subterfuge:



"Prepare my armor," rasped Zygmunt, "We will show Scotland that Poland's lands belong to Poland, not to Scotland."

Hew shook his head in disbelief once more as his men moved into position. They had made it so far, all the way through Hungarian territory to the Polish border, and only a day after crossing it, just as he'd started to relax and think maybe he might survive the nightmare of the past fortnight... the messenger from Zygmunt had come accusing him of breaking their Alliance and promising his destruction.

Reeling from the accusation, Hew has despaired to discover that Zygmunt had all ready marched nearly 2000 men out of Prague directly for their position, and now as the cold winter night darkened, he'd discovered that Zygmunt did not even intend to wait until dawn.





"Charge them," hissed Hew, furious to have had defeat snatched from the jaws of salvation, "My Father told me once that if you're going to go down, go swinging.... CHARGE!"





The initial charge sent a shockwave through the Polish and the Scottish surged through, sending soldiers tumbling and falling out of the way. For one brief, mad moment Hew thought that maybe, just maybe they would survive this after all, and he whispered a silent prayer of thanks to his Father.

And then the Polish they'd charged through came rushing back on all sides of him, and he found himself surrounded.

"Ahhh Father," grunted Hew to himself as his men were brought down all around him, "Fuck you, Father."



"They put up a good fight," rasped Zygmunt as he rode his horse through the corpses. For every man the Polish has killed, the Scottish had killed two, but in the end it had not been enough. He rode his horse to the high stack of corpses - horse and man, Polish and Scottish - where Hew had fallen, where James Bunnok sat looking with amusement down at the prone Scottish General.

He wasn't dead.

"May I kill him?" Bunnok asked Zygmunt with a grin, "Or do you want the pleasure for yourself?"

Zygmunt's eyes danced with amusement as he looked down at the injured, furious Scotsman, who was glaring with hatred at Bunnok, obviously recognizing him.

"No," rasped Zygmunt, his eyes amused, "I have plans for him."



"A fine story," laughed the Host, clapping happily, "Though sometimes I wonder if you embellish your own part in it."

"Certainly not," replied the Guest - James Bunnok, "For one thing, ye'd ken if I lied, and I would nae want that now, would I?"

"Certainly not," chuckled the Host, "But though you do not lie, you do omit. You have told me why you betrayed your Masters to the Hungarians, because you were angry at being passed over for the role you had been groomed for, that of Spymaster.... but you have not told me how you came to come into **MY** service. You have told me of the death of Domnall Canmore, Angus the Mauler and Hew Mar... but not how Scotland fares under their new King, Aodh Canmore... you have told me that though Scotland remains the most powerful nation on Earth, it is beset on all sides by enemies... but you have not told me who, when, how or why. When will you tell me these things? My patience is not unlimited."

"Tomorrow," smiled Bunnok, "I will tell you on the eve of our passage out of the mountains and into the lands of the Scottish Empire."

"And what will you do when you have no more tales to tell me?" asked the Host.

"By then, you will have met with what is left of the Scottish armies in these lands," chuckled Bunnok, "And I will have a new tale to tell, one you will delight in having told to your allies and your enemies alike."

"Ahhh yes," smiled the Host - Timur the Pious, Warlord of a new "Horde" 9000 strong, "The tale of..."

The Timurid Invasion



Chapter 68

In the great spired palace of Delhi, Timur the Pious entered the great hall through massive wooden doors that slammed shut behind him. His footsteps echoed loudly against the high ceiling and walls, announcing his approach, though of course he was expected, after all he had been summoned.

Neutral Character Details



Timur the Pious Age: 30
Family member
Command: ★★★★★★★★★★
Dread: ☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹
Loyalty: 🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷
Piety: 🌿🌿🌿🌿🌿🌿🌿🌿

Retinue None	Traits Khan's Conqueror Proven Commander Sanguinary Merciless Mauler Cruel Leader Pious Ruler Generally Loyal Feels Honoured Night Fighter
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Spotted By: James Bunnok
Subterfuge: 🕸🕸🕸🕸🕸🕸🕸🕸

Command
On the battlefield, this man's will is always realised! He is a true master of warfare

The massive room had once been the harem of an Indian Prince, but the man who currently ruled Delhi had no interest in such activities. Timur respected this, even though his leader gambled and drank, they were forgivable transactions considering his restraint in other areas. His leader believed himself to be "The Scourge of God", and it was his dream to spread the word of God throughout the world... by whatever force necessary. He seemed to be divinely blessed too, considering the way he had taken the splintered, fractured realms once united under Genghis Khan and knitted them back together. He had destroyed the Golden Horde and conquered the lands of India, gaining riches beyond imagining for his people and dimming the memory of their past humiliations.

But Timur the Lame - for whom Timur the Pious was named - continued to look West, remembering that the greatest armies of the Horde under their greatest Warlords since Genghis Khan had traveled there and been utterly destroyed, causing the inevitable collapse of the Empire the Horde had built.

Now Timur the Pious approached the small, simple table near one of the great open windows that allowed air to cool the heat of the day. His leader sat on one table carefully considering the chessboard before him, and a white-skinned stranger sat on the other side, seemingly more interested in the Timurid Leader than the pieces on the board. Finally "Timur-i-Lenk" made his move, capturing the white pawn of his opponent and finally turning his attention to his young namesake, who had stood respectfully waiting.

"Tell me what you know of the Skot-tish, Timur," Timur-i-Lenk spoke, in lieu of his normally warm greeting.

Timur was momentarily surprised, eying the stranger and raising an eyebrow to his Khan. Timur nodded, indicating it was safe to speak, and Timur began a brief recitation of his knowledge of a people who fascinated him but who remained little more than legends, like the mysterious almond-eyed people to the East rumored to live behind a Great Wall that stretched the length of the world.

"The Skot-tish are a race of warriors, not unlike The Horde," he began, "White skinned and red haired, they sing as they fight and do not know fear. They are led by a dynasty of Khans who take the name Kanmor, and the mightiest of them all was Id-War, who bested Subutai the Merciless in personal combat before calling them a fresh Horde of Skot-tish to wipe out the last of Subutai's army. Id-War died and Dom-Nal took his place as Kanmor Khan, and legend says he could not be killed by blades, that he rode alone into the heart of the Horde itself and rode out the other side untouched, and that he pointed his finger at the last true Warlord of The Horde - Orda - and caused his heart to explode. The Horde was utterly destroyed, and those few who escaped and returned to our lands despaired, and the lands of the Horde were divided up and failed one after the other, until Timur-i-Lenk drew them back together as one and returned pride to The Horde."

Timur-i-Lenk smiled at the compliment, but the white-skinned stranger simply smirked and moved his chess piece, putting Timur-i-Lenk's King in check. Timur-i-Lenk scowled angrily and moved a piece to protect his King, then looked back up at Timur, "You have told me what any Persian knows, now tell me what you know of the Skot-tish, of their lands and their customs, tell me the things you know that only the greatest of our academics know."

As usual, Timur-i-Lenk had used the term "Persian" to describe his people, even though most of those people proudly called themselves Timurid. A man of God did not glory himself, and again Timur felt a wave of pride and love for the man he'd been named for, before noticing that NOW the stranger had started paying attention, even if he was pretending not to.

"The Skot-tish come from a land of ice where the sun never shines, but Id-War and his brother Id-Mun defied their father and conquered the desert lands of Egypt. Like Genghis before them, they fueled an Empire on conquest, and spread their pagan religion to the lands they conquered. They worship the sun, and believe that its rising and setting represents a covenant between them and God of forgiveness and rebirth into paradise. Id-Mun was wise and cold, and he spied on his own people to learn their secrets, and was considered a Soothsayer. He spread rumor that Id-War was The Great Satan to spread fear of the man both amongst their people and their enemies. Id-war was a non-believer, he made only pretense of worshipping the sun, and used its Holy Men to further his own purposes. The Skot-tish excelled and flourished under the brothers, and when their men do not fight, they are drinking, or whoring, or fighting amongst themselves. They are a race of ill-tempered, arrogant infidels who know no fear."

"My goodness me," said the stranger with a strange accent unlike any Timur had heard before, "You really are an ignorant bastard, aren't you."

"HOW DA-" started Timur in fury, stepping towards the smirking stranger. But Timur-i-Lenk held up a hand and stopped him, shaking his head.

"You will learn to swallow your pride, my namesake," Timur-i-Lenk said, "And in return I shall grant you the greatest honor any has ever known. You will learn from this man, who has much to teach you, and he will help you achieve a goal above and beyond anything I have, or even Genghis Khan before me."

Timur's eyes widened at both the honor and the unexpected praise, while the stranger continued to smirk before turning back and placing Timur-i-Lenk's King back into check.

"Aye lad," said the stranger - James Bunnok, as Timur would soon learn, "Together, ye and me are going to destroy the Scottish Empire."

Over the next year, Timur learnt much about Scotland and Bunnok in turn learnt much about the Timurids. He was particularly interested in the fact that Timur-i-Lenk would not let anyone call him anything more than Emir, and that technically speaking he served a "Khan" who was ruler of the new Horde in name only - a near middle-aged incompetent who had spent his life living in luxury and never experienced a day of combat in his life. This "Khan" and his younger brother were the mere figureheads of an Empire ruled by Timur-i-Lenk, who in turn was grooming his namesake Timur and his fellow Warlords to take control of the Persian Empire when Timur-i-Lenk died. Bunnok was particularly interested in the fact that this young group of Warlords were all highly religious, forwent gambling, drinking and womanizing and apparently released their tensions and stresses in battle, making them particularly focused and disciplined when not at war, and particularly vicious and brutal when they were.

Neutral Character Details		Neutral Character Details	
 Husayn the Pious Age: 24 Family member Command: ★★★★★● Dread: ★★★★★● Loyalty: ★★★★★● Piety: ★★★★★●		 Umar Shaykh the Pious Age: 24 Family member Command: ★★★★★● Dread: ★★★★★● Loyalty: ★★★★★● Piety: ★★★★★●	
Retinue: None	Traits Mighty Warlord Promising Commander Driven by Rage Cruel and Cunning Merciless Leader Pious Ruler Generally Loyal Feels Honoured Night Fighter	Retinue: Pagan Magician	Traits Mighty Warlord Driven by Rage Merciless Mauler Cruel Leader Pious Ruler Generally Loyal Feels Honoured Night Fighter
Spotted By: Subterfuge:	James Bunnok ○○○○○○○○○○○○	Spotted By: Subterfuge:	James Bunnok ○○○○○○○○○○○○

Neutral Character Details		Neutral Character Details	
 Miran the Pious Age: 23 Family member Command: ★★★★★● Dread: ★★★★★● Loyalty: ★★★★★● Piety: ★★★★★●		 Khan Horkhudagh Age: 36 Faction Leader Command: ★●●●●●●● Chivalry: ●●●●●●●● Authority: ●●●●●●●● Piety: ●●●●●●●●	
Retinue: None	Traits Mighty Warlord Sanguinary Promising Commander Cruel and Cunning Merciless Leader Pious Ruler Generally Loyal Feels Honoured Night Fighter	Retinue: None	Traits Faction Leader
Spotted By: Subterfuge:	James Bunnok ○○○○○○○○○○○○	 Khanzada Ambaghai Age: 28 Faction Heir Command: ★●●●●●●● Chivalry: ●●●●●●●● Loyalty: ★★★★★● Piety: ★★★★★●	
		Retinue: None	Traits Drillmaster Budding Bureaucrat Promising Commander Generally Loyal Fair Fighter Heir Apparent
		Spotted By: Subterfuge:	James Bunnok ○○○○○○○○○○○○

Bunnok learnt that Timur enjoyed hearing tales of the misfortune and fall of the mighty, and correctly guessed that it was due to his childhood growing up in a fractured, once mighty Empire that was responsible. Timur learnt that Bunnok harbored deep resentment for not being as appreciated as he believed he should be, and that he'd betrayed Scotland and gone over to the Hungarians after the death of his mentor - a man named Nevin of Shetland - at which point Aodh Canmore had placed a different man - Eoin Makartane - as head of Scotland's deadly Spy Ring. Bunnok also learned that Timur was a supremacist, and believed that anyone neither Muslim or Persian was worthy of living. In reaction to this, Bunnok made himself invaluable to Timur and a favorite of Timur-i-Lenk, teaching the latter new chess techniques and getting the former addicted to his tales of the Scottish Empire... and learning ways to draw them out so Timur needed him around to hear more. Slowly, over the weeks and months that followed, they became something akin to friends, though Bunnok correctly suspected that Timur considered him more of a favored pet, while Timur correctly suspected that Bunnok found the motives and aspirations of Timur and his fellow pious Warlords amusing, and gave them assistance only because he had nowhere else to go.

Now, as they moved down from the high mountain passes, Timur was seeking once more to get more stories from Bunnok, demanding them in fact as he pointed out that as they moved into Scottish lands, he had to know everything about his enemy.

"You have told me in great depth the history of the Scottish Empire, from the voyage of Edward and Edmund, through to their deaths and the rise of Domnall Canmore," Timur was complaining, "You have told me how Domnall died, and his greatest General fell shortly after... but all that was over a decade ago, and you have long insinuated that Scotland has fallen from a great height, but even the death of a great King and great General does not explain why. So now you **will** tell me everything, all of the details, it is now a matter of necessity."

Bunnok listened respectfully enough, though his eyes sparkled with amusement as Timur's demands became more strident, and finally he relented.

"Ye would ken the current state of the Scottish Empire?" he asked, "Ye would hear of how Aodh Canmore struggled to hold together a Nation on the brink of revolt? Of the riots in Alexandria? Or the rebellion of Baghdad? Jerusalem? Edessa? Arguin? Of the declaration of War not just with Hungary and Poland, but with Portugal and the Holy Roman Empire? Of the extermination of Arguin? Of the Great Drowning of Men that wiped out thousands?"

Rioting!	Civil Revolt
Alexandria	Edessa
	
The ungracious malcontents of this place have taken to rioting! Regardless whether it is dealt with by force or reconciliation, order must be restored before things degenerate further.	The people of this settlement have mustered either the courage or insolence required to stand in defiance of noble rule, and have entered open revolt!
Citizens killed: 237 Soldiers killed: 15	Citizens killed: 878 Soldiers killed: 0
	Baghdad
	The people of this settlement have mustered either the courage or insolence required to stand in defiance of noble rule, and have entered open revolt!
	Buildings Damaged Small Church
	Citizens killed: 814 Soldiers killed: 0

Civil Revolt

Jerusalem



The people of this settlement have mustered either the courage or insolence required to stand in defiance of noble rule, and have entered open revolt!

Buildings Damaged
Market

Citizens killed: 1009
Soldiers killed: 0

Diplomatic Information



The following factions are now at war with each other:

- The Holy Roman Empire - Scotland

The following factions have broken their alliances:

- The Holy Roman Empire - Poland

Resistance is Futile!

Arquin



The few people of this place that remain have no misunderstandings about who their master is now, or their lot in life. Once your troops were ordered to butcher the local inhabitants, those that survived swiftly realised that they are ultimately expendable, and that defying their new governor will likely just lead to a grisly demise.

War!!!

Scotland
Portugal



We have entered open warfare with these people, they are now our mortal enemies. Though reconciliation may be possible, conquering them would be far more glorious!

The Great Drowning of Men



An incredible south-westerly Atlantic gale like never seen before has struck the north-western tip of Europe, lashing England, right across to Denmark. Unstoppable storm tides have swept inland, killing many, and conditions at sea are dire enough to make sailing for the brave and foolish only.

"Yes, yesss!" hissed Timur, "Tell me! How did those things happen? How did Aodh Canmore, a man you told me was prepared for all things at all times allow things to become so bad?"

"Apart from the storm," grinned Bunnok, "The blame can be laid squarely on the shoulders of Hew Mar."

"Hew Mar? The captured Scottish General? Explain!" demanded Timur.

"Oh I shall, I promise ye," chuckled Bunnok, "But first, would ye nae like to hear how Roy Macgoulchane rescued Domnall Canmore?"

The Rescue of Domnall Canmore

"Bring my brother home, Roy."

The words of Aodh Canmore echoed in Roy Macgoulchane's head as he sat at the head of the large army outside the walls of Constantinople. Aodh had been rocked by the shock of Domnall's defeat at Istok's hands, the death of Angus the Mauler and the capture of Hew by the treacherous Polish. Roy knew that the Scottish men under his command were all just as eager as him to not only take their revenge upon the Hungarians, but prove to the world that the Scottish were not a spent force.

What worried him were the Flagellants.

Crusade Called

Constantinople



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

You must create a Crusade army within ten turns to join the Crusade.

Flagellants



Soldiers	120
Experience	0
Attack	10
Charge Bonus	4
Weapon Type	Melee
Total Defence	4
Armour	0
Defence Skill	1
Shield	3
Hit Points	1
Recruitment Cost	90
Upkeep	70

Abilities at a glance

Effective against armour
Combat bonus in woods or snow
Good morale

Description

Flagellants are men who either through religious fanaticism, guilt over unspeakable acts or after suffering one too many tragedies have turned to an informal religious movement that practices self-mortification, most commonly through whipping. These tortured and deranged souls have banded together to go on crusade, armed with fanaticism, stern self discipline and a simple handweapon such as a mace.

The Pope had delivered a blistering message to the pilgrims who now flocked regularly to Rome to hear him speak, denouncing the Hungarians as blasphemers and heretics. He had announced their excommunication and declared a Holy Crusade against Istok at Constantinople, and despite Aodh's preference for the Pope to stay out of the secular world, he leapt at the endorsement to put out a call for volunteers to come and swell the numbers of the Scottish Army.

Roy Macgoulchane had been tasked with leading the army that answered the call, and been alarmed to discover it was made up primarily of flagellants. The religious fanatics were disciplined enough, but eerily silent, not interested in the camaraderie of camp life, and their self-mortification and glassy eyed stares were disquieting for the other men.

But Macgoulchane had a job to do, a Canmore to rescue and a "friend" to avenge. So, as he had all of his life, he made do with the tools at his disposal. He stared now at Istok standing on the walls, and listened to the jeers and taunts coming from the Hungarian King and his men.

"Have ye come to take Domnall Canmore home?" laughed Istok, "Or to join him? We drink together each night in my study, and I tell him how I plan to destroy everything he and his family worked so hard to build.... maybe you will drink with us from now on?"

"I want the gate to the city destroyed on my command," Macgoulchane ordered his Second, ignoring the taunting, "Send the flagellants in first, then follow up with the rest of the men, I want the fanatics to swamp Istok's men so they can do nae but fight them, rather than prepare a counter-attack."

"Or will ye accept the challenge ye cowardly King finally found the gumption to answer?" called Istok, still laughing, "And face me man to man, and see if there is at least one Scotsman with a set of balls in ye pathetic "Crusade"."

"I've had enough of hearing that voice," grunted Roy, "OPEN FIRE ON THE GATE!"





Pushing through the shattered gates, the flagellants crashed into the first line of Hungarian defense and swamped over them. They did not ignore the pain and agony of the Hungarian swords and axes slashing into them, rather they exulted in the pain, welcoming each blow as a just punishment for their sins both real and imagined. In pain they found God, and they returned the "favor" by dishing out just as much if not more to their enemies. As they swamped and stabbed and tore through the Hungarians, the Scottish Infantry rushed through the gates and bypassed the fighting, heading directly for an oncoming unit of men that Istok had held aside, having predicted Roy's initial strategy. Seeing the Scottish coming for them, the Hungarians realized their surprise had been ruined and turned to retreat to the defensive safety of the City Square, inside which Istok was cursing as he realized that Roy was smarter than he'd given him credit for.

"Very well," he muttered, "Let's see how they fare against me, then."





"Sir, King Istok is leading the defense of the City Square," Roy's Second reported, "He is successfully holding back the Infantry."

"And the flagellants?" asked Roy.

"They have... finished.... with the Hungarian Infantry," reported the Second, gulping nervously as he remembered the sight.

"Send them into the square against Istok," Roy ordered.

"Yes sir.... in what formation? From what direction?"

"Hmm?" grunted Roy, looking annoyed, "Don't try to direct them man, they're the rabid hounds of God. You simply point them in a direction and let them off the leash... let's see Istok find a counter-strategy to religious fanaticism, send them all at Istok, all of them, all at once."



Istok snarled angrily as he watched the flagellants roll in like a tide, swarming over his men with no regard for their own safety. He cast about with his sword, quickly learning that it was not enough to simply cripple the insane hooded men, because even then they would still come after you. Instead, each blow was specifically designed to kill, as he decapitated heads, stopped hearts with hard lunges of his sword or crushed the life from lungs with the hooves of his horse. But as the trail of bodies behind him grew, so did the unshakeable trail of their living companions, all screaming for his blood, growing closer and closer as they hemmed him in. They weren't individuals any longer, they were a mob acting under a hive mind, a dark blob with hundreds of legs and arms and no faces - a foe that he could not fight one on one, a foe he could not hope to defeat.

As they dragged him from his horse and ripped away his armor, as they tore his body limb from limb in their howling, fanatical fury, Istok had time for a final emotion, one alien to him for most of his life, apart from that brief moment when he'd thought Domnall Canmore had him, here in this very square.

King Istok of Hungary felt fear.





As the men cheered - including the flagellants who were falling to their knees and crying out in joy to God for granting them victory - Roy Macgoulchane rode past them and straight to the palace of Hungary with his bodyguard. What few soldiers had been left to guard it had run the moment news of Istok's death had reached them, and Roy went unchallenged as he dismounted, charged through the massive doors and grabbed a terrified servant, demanding directions to Istok's study. The weeping man cried out directions and Roy tossed him aside, striding down the halls, up stairs, through corridors to the door at last, in which Roy knew Domnall Canmore could be found. A member of his bodyguard shattered the lock on the study with a mace and kicked the door in, and Roy shoved his way in, eyes instantly moving to the great oaken desk, and found himself face to face with Domnall Canmore at last.

"Ach, ye deserved better than this," sighed Roy, lifting the skull of the Scottish King from the desk. The top of the skull had been cut away and the interior coated to allow it to hold liquid. Istok had taken great delight in drinking "with" Domnall each night, a final humiliation that Aodh Canmore had been unable to accept. Roy settled down behind the desk and sighed, holding Domnall's skull in his hand and staring sadly at it, before turning to look at another skull that also graced the surface of the desk. This one was cracked and slashed in places, with half the jaw missing, and had apparently been used by Istok to hold quills and papers for his correspondence, "And ye deserved better too, Angus. Mad bastard that ye may have been, ye deserved better."

Roy Macgoulchane had "rescued" Domnall Canmore, and now he meant to see to it that his remains were returned to Cairo to be buried in the chamber of the Great Pyramid that held the bodies of Edward and Edmund and the ashes of Nectan.

Domnall would make the trip, but Roy would never see Cairo again.

"And now ye ken why I traveled East," Bunnok said after a moment of silence, "I served Istok in secret, and had all ready fled Poland because Zygmunt would be enraged when he learned I had lied to him. I could nae return to Scotland because my part in things would soon become apparent, and with Istok dead, how could I convince the new Hungarian King I had served his predecessor? So I traveled East, into a seemingly endless desert, following rumor and talk of far distant cities beyond the accepted boundaries of the world."

"And yet you end your "explanation" with another mystery, these words of Roy never seeing Cairo again," grunted Timur, affecting disdain even though he'd clearly been fascinated by the tale of the "rescue" of Domnall, "Do you think I will let you string me along any further? Soon we will cross the border into Scottish lands an"

"We are in Scotland now," interrupted Bunnok smoothly, and Timur blinked in surprise even as they continued along on horseback at the head of the seemingly endless line of 9000 Timurids, "We passed over what is technically the border five minutes ago."

"Then we have arrived at last," grinned Timur, "How long will we have to go before we find an army to destroy?"

"Perhaps another day's ride before our presence is noted, another three days for them to mobilize, and another day for our troops to meet," mused Bunnok, "We're still in the mountains, we have days of desert crossing ahead of us yet."

"The Timurids are no strangers to the desert," snapped Timur, "We will make fast progress. And so will you, tell me now how Aodh Canmore allowed his grasp on the Empire to loosen; tell me how Scotland found itself at war with Portugal and the Roman Empire... tell me why Hew Mar is to blame."

Bunnok grinned, and bowed theatrically, before launching into the tale of...

The Ransom of Hew Mar

Directly halfway between the Polish City of Smolensk and Scottish City of Krakow, one hundred Scottish soldiers waited alongside a very nervous Roy of Orkney, who had come to pay the ransom for the return of the captured General, Hew Mar.



Finally the Polish arrived, in similar numbers to the Scottish, horses drawing a cart in which stood a tied up man with a sack over his head. Roy let a low curse out under his breath and rode his horse slowly forward, leaving his men behind, though in the trees archers crouched hidden, arrows trained on the Polish opposite in case they broke their word of a safe meeting. The Polish Captain who had been charged with transporting Hew Mar pulled him roughly off of the cart and shoved him forward, Mar almost tripping and having to be roughly pulled upright. As he and the Polish Captain approached the Scottish Lord, Roy noted the odd shuffle in Hew's walk, which not even his bonds could be completely responsible for.

Reaching the centre of the gap between the Scottish and Polish, Roy waited patiently as the Polish Captain removed the sack from Hew's head, revealing the Scottish General was standing weaving, eyes rolled back in his head and mouth hanging open.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Roy.

"He did not take kindly to being detained," chuckled the Polish Captain, and Roy noticed his unshaven state, his unpolished armor and almost indifferent gait for the first time. He noted that the Polish soldiers in the distance behind him were similarly slovenly, and raised an eyebrow, surprised to see such ill-discipline, "We had to drug him, he'll recover fully in a day or so."

Roy frowned, then lifted the heavy sacks of money laid over the back of the saddle of his horse, tossing them to the ground in front of the Pole.

"The ransom," he snapped, "Take it and get out of my sight."

The Pole grinned and hauled the sacks of money up, carrying them back to his men and crying out in triumph, the men laughing and gathering around to slap him on the back and offer congratulations. As Roy dismounted and guided the stumbling Hew back to the Scottish men, he heard the Poles talking about finding the nearest tavern and drinking it dry, and was shocked by their words. The money should surely be going to their King, what in the world was wrong with them, everything about this screamed that something was wrong.

But despite his instincts screaming that something was off, they were able to mount up Hew and tie him to his saddle and ride away without incident. Despite this, the longer they rode and the closer they grew to Krakow, the more Roy's concern grew. Something was wrong, he could feel it, and he just did not understand what it could be.

They stopped for the night and Hew fell instantly to sleep the moment he was laid on the ground, having said nothing throughout the day. Roy wondered what drug they had given him to put him into such a state, and hoped that the next morning would find him better. The next day, however, Hew could not be roused from sleep, and ended up being slung over the back of a horse and tied in place as they rode on towards Krakow. Finally, as the sun was setting behind them, the city came into sight, and in the early evening they rode through the city gates, and almost as if returning to a Scottish City had registered with him, Hew Mar woke from his slumber.

"What is this?" he rasped through a hoarse throat and swollen tongue, "Where am I?"

"Krakow, Lord Mar," spoke Roy respectfully, "We have returned ye to Scottish lands."

Hew stared at him for a moment, and then his eyes widened in horror and he began thrashing about on the back of the horse, crying out to be cut free. Roy was shocked by the sudden outburst, and ordered the soldiers to cut him free, looking about nervously as the Guards on the gate stared on and people moving through the streets began to gather around the scene. Hew slipped free of the horse's back as his bonds were cut and immediately had to be restrained as he screamed nonsense, shouting that "it was everywhere" and that "they wanted to bring us all down with them," and he had to "get out of here, he would kill them all!"

"Mar, compose yourself!" snapped Roy angrily, "There are people watching, show some dignity!"

For the first time, Hew seemed to notice all of the people gathered around, and all the fight seemed to go out of him as he slumped in the restraining arms of the Scottish soldiers.

"Damn them," Hew muttered miserably, "They've done it, they've used me as a weapon the bastards... we're all dead men, dead men."

"What are ye talking about, Mar?" demanded Roy, "Start making sense, man!"

"Poland is dying," Mar moaned, eyes huge as they stared up at Roy, "Bodies line the streets and the people are half mad from paranoia, lack of food and the loss of most of the people who run their cities on every level.... a Great Mortality has struck Poland, The Black Plague is killing thousands and now they have used me to spread it to Scotland.... we are all dead men... WE ARE ALL DEAD MEN!"

And Roy realized at last why the Polish soldiers had been so ill-disciplined and claimed to be spending all of the ransom money, they had been dead men walking themselves, plague bearers carrying a human weapon to strike against a mighty foe before going to overindulge in life's pleasures before their own inevitable death.

The Great Mortality had arrived in Scotland.



Chapter 69

Moving an army was a slow process at the best of time, but moving an army of 9000 was even slower. Factor in the thin mountain passes they were traveling through and the time taken to move became even longer.

Throw in five prayers a day for the Warlords of that army and as many of the troops as wanted to join in and it became a farce.

James Bunnok sat on a rock near the barren, thin rocky mountain pass that Timur and his fellow Warlords had traveled up to make their prayers, eating an apple apparently nonchalantly, though his eyes took in everything around him, filing information away for later use.

"You offend us by not taking part in prayer," Timur grunted as he moved Bunnok's way, his prayers for the day finished. He had "cleansed" himself with sand due to the need to conserve water, and made an odd sight standing before Bunnok now.

"I'd offend ye more by taking part in a prayer I dinnae believe in," Bunnok observed.

"Now that I know more of your religion, it shares many basic tenets with our own Faith," Timur offered back, "Surely a conversion to Islam wo-

"I have a gift for ye," interrupted Bunnok, pulling a scroll out of his sleeve and catching Timur off-guard. The Warlord frowned and took the scroll as the other Warlords passed by, each casting a distrustful glance at Bunnok as they passed. They were jealous of the meals Bunnok took nightly with Timur, and the fact the two were often locked in conversation while riding at the head of The Horde. Now Bunnok knew they were burning to know the contents of the scroll he had handed to Timur, but too proud to admit it. They moved into the thin rocky path and expertly made their way down it towards the giant canyon where the massive snaking trail of the Timurids was currently at rest. It was an easily defended position should anyone be mad enough to attack them, and the scouts and guards were placed in high positions that would alert them to any approaching army. Bunnok had assured Timur time and again there were no Scottish nearby, despite the fact they'd crossed the border several days earlier, but Timur did not believe in taking chances.

Alone together on the cliff where the Timurid had taken his prayers, Timur noted not for the last time to himself that he had technically left himself open to attack if Bunnok was not as "loyal" as he claimed. But Bunnok had never so much as made a move to put himself in a position to attack, and Timur wondered if this was a proof of loyalty or that Bunnok knew that there were always silent guards watching from a close distance. Putting such thoughts from his head, Timur rolled open the scroll, and caught his breath as he realized what he was looking at.

It was the world.



"I recognize that stretch of coast from our own maps," grunted Timur, fighting to hide his excitement, "Our lands are not shown on this map?"

"The accepted knowledge is that the world stretches north in a field of ice, west into the sea, and south and east to desert," smirked Bunnok, "Eventually the edges of the world are reached and break off into the void, in which the world sits in the centre, circled by the sun. This is what is known as the "Universe", or "Creation" if you prefer, and it the product of God's work.... or in other words, they dinnae ken what is beyond the limits of their maps, and so they claim there is naught. Scotland kens from its run-in with Genghis' Horde that somewhere in the Eastern Deserts there are tribes of nomads and a city called Transoxiana, but that is all."

"The blue is broken and divided," noted Timur, "These people you call Romans have split Scotland north and south, and the people you call Polish have split them east and west, while the Portugese burrow into their holdings to the west, and rebellious men overthrow the rule of their betters wherever the Scottish are most stretched.... truly, how has Scotland come to this?"

"I told ye," grinned Bunnok, "The Black Plague, worse than any plague that came before it, when Hew Mar was returned to Krakow he bought the plague with him, Poland's "gift" to Scotland. The Polish had been gutted by the plague, losing thousands, and by the time they realized they had erred in listening to my advice, they saw the plague as their way to level the playing field with Scotland."

The Great Mortality Spreads



Life in the civilised world has become more morbid and bleak than in known history. Every man woman and child is accustomed to the sight of their people stacked in piles before being burned... In the vain hope that the fires may cleanse this foul doom from the land.

Although not everyone is falling victim to its deadly embrace, the plague is still decimating the population everywhere it travels.

Death Stalks The Land



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

Settlements Affected

- Alexandria
- Jerusalem
- Gaza
- Acre
- Genoa
- Granada
- Yerevan
- Caesarea
- Toulouse
- Bern
- Nicosia
- Iconium
- Dijon
- Tbilisi
- Marseille
- Milan

Death Stalks The Land



- Duisi
- Marseille
- Milan
- Trebizond
- Tripoli
- Zaragoza
- Ajaccio
- Valencia
- Cagliari
- Constantinople
- Rhodes
- Smyrna
- Iraklion
- Nicaea
- Adana
- Naples
- Palermo
- Characters Affected**
- Ellen Canmore
- Ada Canmore
- Aed Canmore
- Cennédig of Renfrewshire

Death Stalks The Land



- Ellen Canmore
- Ada Canmore
- Aed Canmore
- Cennédig of Renfrewshire
- Allan of Midlothian
- Aed the Chivalrous
- Ranald of Carnavarane
- Allan of Berwickshire
- Steaphan of East Lothian
- Ádam the Cruel
- Duncan the Killer
- Cormac Feniss
- Aidan of Fife
- Cennédig of Ayrshire
- Rory the Chivalrous
- Eoin Makartane
- Gawain of Shetland
- Nevin the Clever
- Captain Edmund
- Captain Eoin
- Citizens killed: 37021

"After that..." chuckled Bunnok, "Well, there is a saying ye may have even amongst ye own people, that the grass is always greener on the other side?"

"I understand your meaning," grunted Timur, finger tracing over the Scottish borders.

"Despite **KNOWING** that the plague made no distinction between man, woman, animal, noble, commoner and that it recognized no borders, the peoples of other Nations claimed that Scotland was free of the plague, or that their physicians could cure the fatal condition. So they invaded, and the Scottish found themselves - for the first time in over 100 years - too weak to defend themselves..... because the plague **WAS** in Scotland, there was **NO** cure."

The Great Mortality Continues



While the lands that were first stricken by the Great Mortality are beginning to discover a life beyond the plague, many places that had been spared this doom are now feeling its full effects.

Though talk of this truly being the end is becoming less likely with enough survivors to prove the point, this creeping doom is still the most feared thing to stalk the lands of Europe for even the bravest of men, being dubbed "The Black Death" these days.

Death Stalks The Land



- God bless us! The cursed plague has struck, with good folk perishing within a short while of contracting the vile malaise. If this is divine punishment as some say, then the people must have sinned terribly!
- Settlements Affected**
- Aleppo
 - Alexandria
 - Cairo
 - Gaza
 - Acre
 - Caen
 - Damascus
 - Angers
 - Nottingham
 - Caernarvon
 - Mosul
 - Genoa
 - Granada
 - Yerevan
 - Caesarea
 - Toulouse

Death Stalks The Land



- Toulouse
- Bern
- Metz
- Antwerp
- Antioch
- Nicosia
- Iconium
- Rheims
- Dijon
- Tbilisi
- Marseille
- Milan
- Cordoba
- Frankfurt
- Algiers
- Tunis
- Paris
- Trebizond
- Tripoli
- Bruges
- Zaragoza

Death Stalks The Land



- Zaragoza
- Rennes
- London
- Toledo
- Ajaccio
- Valencia
- Leon
- Cagliari
- Magdeburg
- Constantinople
- Krakow
- Rhodes
- Smyrna
- Iraklion
- Nicaea
- Adana
- Naples
- Palermo
- Characters Affected**
- Ellen Canmore
- Ada Canmore

Death Stalks The Land



- Ellen Canmore
- Ada Canmore
- Farquar Erskyn
- Aed Canmore
- Cennédig of Renfrewshire
- Allan of Midlothian
- Lachlan of Angus
- Aed the Chivalrous
- Allan of Berwickshire
- Captain Edmund
- Steaphan of East Lothian
- Ádam the Cruel
- Malcolm Makfulchiane
- Duncan the Killer
- Algune the Broiss
- Cormac Feniss
- Allan of Nairnshire
- Aidan of Fife
- Cennédig of Ayrshire
- Hew Mar
- Roy of Orkney

Death Stalks The Land

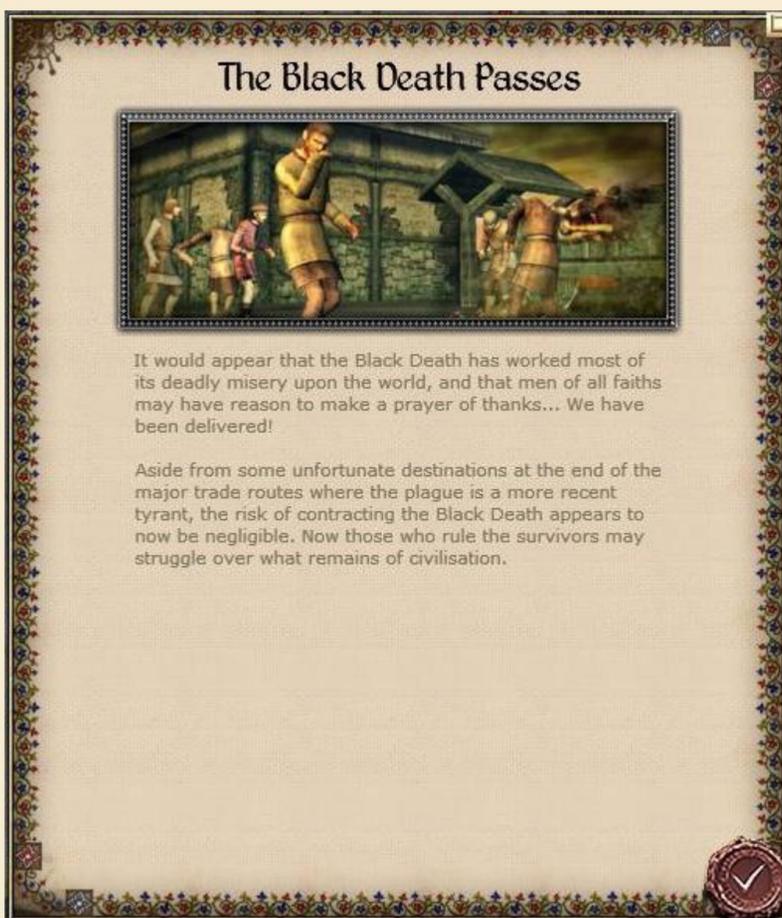


- Maicoim Makruichiane
- Duncan the Killer
- Algune the Broiss
- Cormac Feniss
- Allan of Nairnshire
- Aidan of Fife
- Cennédig of Ayrshire
- Hew Mar
- Roy of Orkney
- Rory the Chivalrous
- Domnall Campbell
- Eoin Makartane
- Aidan Wallace
- Nevin the Clever
- Fearghus Erskyn
- Gille Petair Makartane
- Captain Raibert
- Captain Cathal
- Captain Eoin
- Citizens killed: 62271
- Soldiers killed: 928

"Cities fell, the soldiers who were supposed to be defending them too weak even to lift a sword or strap on their armor. Nobles were dying in their droves, leaving those cities that remained in Scotland's control without Governance and ripe for revolt," Bunnok paused and closed his eyes, breathing in deeply with a look of deep, intense pleasure on his face, "And then Scotland was dealt two massive, crippling blows. Hew Mar died, a victim of the plague he had brought to Scotland, and then their highly vaunted "King of the Spies", the man who took MY rightful place as Spymaster of the Scottish Empire, he died too, and their information network collapsed with him."



"And then finally... mercifully after several miserable years, but far too late, the Black Death passed."



"By then it was too late for Scotland," Bunnok exulted, eyes feverish as he recounted the fall of those he believed had wronged him, "Their best General - Dougall Macdonchie - was an old man by this point, the new King - Aodh - had proved himself in the past as a grand manipulator but failed completely to deal with sudden, chaotic changes that could nae be predicted, their Spymaster was dead and the two men who could replace him..... hahahaha, it was enough to make me believe in God... or maybe the Devil."



"It is the work of Allah," grunted Timur, "The men of Scotland allowed pride to blind them to God, and they were punished for it."

"But the punishment is nae complete yet, is it?" chuckled Bunnok, rubbing his hands together with glee, "And for a pious man such as ye... ye must ken ye part in it."

"Indeed," nodded Timur, rolling up the map of the world and sliding it up one sleeve, "The Timurids shall be the final instrument of God's wrath on the men of Scotland... and then we shall take the "world" from the rest of these weak, indulgent nations."

Bunnok laughed happily, his voice echoing out over the cliff and against the rocky grey walls of the mountain, but then Timur grabbed his shoulders and looked deep into his eyes, and Bunnok's laughter faded.

"And now you will tell me, James Bunnok," the Timurid Warlord growled, "How a man who went into self-imposed exile knows so much about what has happened over this last decade in a land no longer his."

Bunnok stared with wide eyes back at Timur, and then suddenly his grin returned, and he threw back his head and laughed. Timur frowned, thinking - again, not for the first time - that as obviously brilliant as this man was, he was also clearly addled in the mind, and it was probably this mental defect that had seen him passed over for Spymaster no matter what his claims.

"Oh aye I could tell ye that," laughed Bunnok, "I could tell ye how I moved East, and learned to live in the desert. I could tell ye how I maintained contact with sources I had developed as a spy over the years to keep up to date with happenings in my former land. I could tell ye how I survived conditions that would have killed lesser men, and came to the lands of your namesake, Timur, though of course he would never call them that himself. I could tell ye how I was viewed as an outsider and heathen, but then came to the attention of Emir's and Imams and was used to make connections with criminals and infidels and bring them to justice. I could tell ye how I began to sell information, even as I continued to keep track of goings on in Scotland, and how I took advantage of the Black Death to begin infiltrating a small Spyring into those lands. How I soon became Spymaster of a Spyring in Scotland that was working AGAINST Scotland, gathering information for its enemies, and helping bring down Scottish cities. How Timur the lame

called me to his fine palace in Delhi, and tested me, and how I discovered a spy in his Court and exposed him, a man that Eoin Makartane had sent to infiltrate years earlier, but who had no idea of the goings on in the Scottish Empire. How I recognized and denounced Patrick Boyd, and how he was executed and Timur the Lame himself interrogated me, and discovered my spying. How he told of his dreams of revenge for the crushing of The Horde by Edward Canmore. I could tell ye how I discovered the exact point on the Scottish border where an army could march through unmolested into Scottish Lands, and of how I came to become Timur the Lame's favorite to play chess against."

Bunnok removed Timur's hands from his shoulders and pointed upwards to three different locations, each one where Timur's "hidden" guards were watching, and he grinned even wider, this madman who had turned his vast intellect against those who had trained and nurtured him and his skills, "I could tell ye all of those things, Timur the Pious, but the truth is.... it can all be summed up in four words."

"I'm just that good."

Character Details



James Bunnok Age: 43

Spy
Subterfuge 

Retinue

-  Spyglass
-  Beguiling Bard
-  Dancer

Traits

- Spying Talent
- Trained in Espionage
- Thieves' Guild Journeyman
- Spy

Espionage is an art to this man. He has succeeded on enough missions to justify his growing confidence.
+3 to agent's skill, +3 to line of sight (increases the range at which enemies are spotted)

The influence of the local Thieves' Guild house have made this man far more adept in the arts of subtlety and discretion.
+1 to agent's skill

Has an ability to discover things he shouldn't know. Be places he should not be.
+2 to agent's skill

The presence of a Thieves' Guild HQ within the kingdom has afforded this man significantly enhanced training.
+2 to agent's skill

Chapter 70

James Bunnok stepped out of his tent already immaculately dressed, stretching first with one arm and then the other, transferring what he was holding in his armpit from one to the other. He was enjoying the feel of the sun on his body despite the cool mountain air putting a bite into the weather. The Timurid camp was all ready up and moving, in fact with an army this size there were always at least a few hundred people moving about, eating or running training drills at any time, day or night. Despite the large size of the canyon where the Horde had settled, they were still in the mountains and cramped together far more than was comfortable. The Timurids were used to wide open plains, not sheer climbing mountain walls, and tempers were beginning to fray as they felt themselves getting closer to leaving the mountains and into the open desert. It took an accomplished General to instill confidence in the men, and the Timurids had several in Timur, Husayn, Miran, and Umar Shaykh. It did not hurt that each of their Warlords were terrifying in their own way, whether it was Husayn's constant rage, Umar's cruel (though inventive, Bunnok had to admit) punishments, Miran's bloodlust or Timur's terrifying combination of religious fervor and complete lack of even the concept of mercy.

The "Khan" and his Khanzada, however, were a different matter entirely.

As Bunnok watched, amused, he saw Horkhudagh step out of his tent and step directly into the path of a group of Timurid soldiers.

"Watch your step!" snapped Horkhudagh, exactly the wrong thing to do as the lead soldier grabbed him roughly and shook him bodily.

"ME!? You watch YOUR step, you pile of dung!" snapped the soldier angrily.

"Do you know who I a-" started Horkhudagh, again exactly the wrong thing to do.

"You're a pile of dung hiding behind an inherited title, worm!" snarled the Timurid, knocking Horkhudagh to the ground, the frightened "Khan" staring with wide eyes up at his attacker, "You may rule back home at Timur-i-Lenk's pleasure, but here in the field a man lives or dies on his own merits!"

Bunnok stood watching with delighted interest, marveling once more at the strange way that the Timurids ran their society. Timur-i-Lenk was technically speaking only an Emir, and should have been socially and power-wise beneath the Khans, but everyone knew who truly ruled the Persians. The Khans themselves served merely as figureheads, but privileged ones who enjoyed every luxury and benefit of rule with none of the concerns.

"I shoul... I should..." gaped Horkhudagh angrily, then his eyes widened as he looked behind the soldiers, "DO SOMETHING!"

"And what should I do?" grunted Timur the Pious, who had emerged from his own tent attracted by the noise, "Unman you by fighting your battles for you?"

The soldiers laughed as Timur approached and stared with disgust down at "his" Khan. Technically speaking again, Horkhudagh was supposed to be leading this invasion of the lands of the Scottish with Timur serving as his top General. Once more, the reality was that Horkhudagh was a figurehead, but here there were no privileges to be had.

"Stand up, do not cower like a pig in the dirt," grunted Timur contemptuously, and Bunnok hid a delighted grin. To a Muslim, a pig was a foul creature, Timur had just insulted Horkhudagh dearly, and the Khan obviously knew it, scrambling to his feet and retreating in fear back to his tent.



"Pathetic," grunted the soldier who had cowered Horkhudagh, "I should g-"

He was cut off by Timur's hand wrapping around his throat and squeezing, the soldier dropping to his knees as his wide eyes stared in terror up at the Warlord.

"There is no God but God, and only God is great," Timur whispered harshly, "Do not fall into sin and think you more than you are, understand?"

The soldier nodded, face red now as he struggled for breath, and finally Timur relented, dropping the man in a heap on the ground before turning his back to him and approaching Bunnok, who was no longer bothering to hide his grin.

"This amuses you?" grunted Timur, walking past Bunnok who immediately fell into step beside him, noting Timur's eyes darting down to the "package" tucked into Bunnok's armpit.

"I am in a good mood, we're nearly through the mountains," chuckled Bunnok, "I look forward to seeing the cities of Scotland again.... in flames."

"What do you intend to do with that bird?" Timur demanded, eying the pigeon Bunnok was holding, "Is it the same as the one that brought you the message from your Spyring two days ago?"

"It is and I intend to return a message," nodded Bunnok, stopping and kneeling down, placing the bird onto the ground but keeping it in his hands.

"I will see the message," grunted Timur, "Before you send it."

"The message is in a cypher," replied Bunnok smoothly, as if he had anticipated this demand, "And I will nae teach ye the cypher because then ye'll start thinking I'm expendable when the fact is ye need me."

Timur stared down at Bunnok with his dark, piercing eyes, eyes that had reduced strong men to blubbing messes. But Bunnok simply stared blankly back up at him, and finally Timur broke the stare, asking another question instead, "Why are you sending the reply now when you received the message two days ago?"

"So my Spying does nae ken how close we are," smiled Bunnok, "I would nae give away our position even to men I trust... and speaking of trust, Timur, given how far ye've committed yourself now, do ye nae think it is about time to decide if ye trust me or nae."

"I trust no one," grunted Timur back, "Let them prove themselves again and again, a man need only betray you once."

"That philosophy means ye'll have few friends," sighed Bunnok, releasing the pigeon into the air and watched it move instantly Southwest towards Tbilisi. He looked up at Timur and grinned, "But ye'll live a long time, smart lad."

It was early evening when Timur returned to camp, in a foul mood, demanding that Bunnok be brought to him immediately.

When they'd first camped down in this canyon, a series of men - each one a score strong - had been moved to strategic locations to watch over the camp and lookout for any sign of ambush or another marching army. In addition, scouts had been sent out in all directions (including back the path they had come) to watch for anything unexpected. Early in the afternoon, all the scouts had returned but one, Timur's personally chosen Scout who had been sent Southwest to the very edge of the mountains a day's ride away. Timur had demanded Bunnok explain what could have prevented an experienced and highly talented Scout from returning, and been displeased by Bunnok's suggestion that a small outlaw band might have taken the man.

Finally Timur had taken his personal bodyguard Southwest to see if they could find the man either alive and returning late or dead, and had found the latter. After several hours ride, they'd discovered the Scout lying dead at the bottom of a small ravine, his head broken open on a rock. Timur's Bodyguard - experienced Scouts and Trackers in their own right - had reviewed the ground and suggested that somehow the man had tripped and fallen.

Timur did not believe it.

All the way on his ride back he'd seethed over the death, angry because it meant they would either have to push on ahead without anything but Bunnok's word on what lay ahead, or wait another two days while another Scout was sent out.

Now back in the camp, Timur demanded to see Bunnok, wanting to take out his frustration on the man, and was infuriated when he discovered that the man was not in the camp at all!

"You let him leave the camp!?" growled Timur in disbelief.

"He was accompanied by our Warlords," the nervous Timurid currently facing Timur's wrath hastily explained, "Apparently there was something of great importance to show them, he seemed greatly excited by it."

"All of the Warlords?" growled Timur.

"All but Hor... all but the Khan," the soldier replied, "He was not asked, but they did take Khanzada Ambaghai."

"Is this some trap?" whispered Timur angrily to himself, "Has Bunnok played me for a fo-"

"THERE YOU ARE!" laughed the Scotsman's voice, and Timur twisted in his saddle grabbing at the hilt of his sword, furious that the Spy had managed to come up on all of them apparently unawares.

"Where have you been!?" demanded Timur angrily, "And where have you taken my Warlords?"

"I could ask **YE** much the same question," chuckled Bunnok, the laughter dying on his lips when Timur pulled his blade and pressed the tip against the Spy's throat, all in the blink of an eye.

"I asked you a question, Spy," hissed Timur, "You will answer me now."

"I have been preparing your Warlords to rain death down upon the men of Scotland," Bunnok said coldly, ice dripping from every word as he glared angrily up at Timur, "An urgent message reached me by pigeon after you went foolishly off after your missing Scout, it must have been sent a day after the previous I had only replied to this morning. We have a chance to strike an incredible blow to Scotland before the war even begins!"

Timur frowned, but his blade never left Bunnok's throat.

"Explain," he growled.

"We must go alone so I can show ye," insisted Bunnok, "We cannae risk alerting them too soon. I left ye Warlords watching, but we cannae make plans without ye."

"You would have me go alone with you into the night?" he growled, "I don't know how you convinced my Warlords to go with you, or let you leave them once you'd taken them wherever it was you went... but if you think I will just walk along into the night an-"

"Aodh Canmore," Bunnok interrupted, and Timur lowered the sword, surprised.

"The Scottish King is touring the outer edges of what is left of his Empire," Bunnok whispered, and Timur saw again the feverish look in his eyes, the desire for revenge, "Seeking to stabilize territory as he rebuilds his armies to launch a counter offensive against Hungary, then Poland.... and he and a small army of 1000 are marching around the mountain pass between Tbilisi and Yerevan, making a show of force for outlaw bands in the desert."

"We should march the men now," gasped a new voice, and Timur and Bunnok both turned to stare in irritation at Khan Horkhudagh, "Ride the men directly int-"

"Shut up, you oaf," growled Timur, "Ride my men where? All we know is that Canmore is somewhere near, I need to see his army for myself, to plan my strategy. Just because we outnumber him 9 to 1 does not mean we throw ourselves recklessly against them. Bunnok, you will take me to my Warlords, to what I assume is a vantage point from where I can see Canmore's army."

"If you insist," grinned Bunnok, "I live to serve."

At first they moved in silence alone down the mountain path, Timur stretching his ears out for signs of anyone who might be lying in ambush. Despite his agreement to come with Bunnok, he'd made sure to make a silent sign when the Spy wasn't looking, telling his guards to ghost along FAR back so that Bunnok wouldn't be aware of them. If this was an ambush, then Timur meant to turn it back on Bunnok.... but the man's eyes, a man's eyes didn't lie, and whenever Timur saw the feverish desire for revenge in Bunnok's eyes, his natural suspicion was allayed.

"There is a natural viewing point I discovered when I first went East," Bunnok said, breaking the silence, "I took ye Warlords there, and was delighted to find Aodh's army within viewing distance. From what I could see, they are mainly infantry with few horses and only a few units of archery... but ye Warlords insisted ye be there to settle on a plan of attack to bring back to the Army. They have likely been arguing over the best strategy to use all this time, it was what they were arguing about when I left."

Timur nodded, but his ears were straining further, wondering if Bunnok was talking to cover up an approaching ambush. When he did not speak, Bunnok fell back into silence, but finally he spoke again, surprising Timur with the subject.

"It will be a long trip," he said, "And there is a story I think ye need to hear, one that may hammer home something ye must ken about Scotland... would ye hear it?"

"I would always hear your tales," replied Timur, who saw no harm in hearing a story if Bunnok meant him no harm.... and if he did, then Bunnok telling a story might fool him into thinking that Timur was letting his guard down.

"Ahh good," smiled Bunnok, "Then it is time ye heard the tale of..."

The Siege Of Milan

Edinburgh had been Scotland's first Capital, then Cairo had taken its place under Edward Canmore. Now Rome held that distinction, but no matter what city held the status of Capital, Rory of Shetland had always believed that the true gem of the Scottish Empire was Milan.



Since King Domnall had removed Puccio's head and made the city his own, money had flowed into and out of Milan in greater numbers than in its entire history. The Great Chapel had been built in honor of God but also as a testament to the greatness of the City, and for quite some time the current King - then Prince Aodh Canmore - had divided his time between Milan and Genoa.

And now it was going to fall.





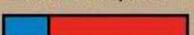
Rory of Shetland had married into the Royal Family shortly after the fall of the Sicilian Empire, to a woman of noble birth but crass, common habits. She made his life a misery, but she gave him two children, and his new position of authority allowed him a lifestyle beyond even his own privileged upbringing. He had courted Deredere not because she was a beauty or a wonderful personality, but because she was a Princess, and represented power. His proposals to the King had been either ignored or politely rebuffed until after the fall of the Sicilians when he'd been surprised to granted the privilege of taking Deredere's hand in marriage. From that point on, everything in his life EXCEPT for his wife had been a blessing, and he could not even bring himself to despise the woman, because for all her faults, she did bear him two children, sons who made him proud every day of his life - Edward and Algune. As the years had progressed he'd become aware that a man called Nevin who often shadowed Prince Aodh had taken an interest in his boys, and discovered that the man was some kind of agent operating for Aodh's interests, a man that Aodh called "Scotland's greatest friend". There had been something familiar about the man, but for whatever reason whenever it came into Rory's mind to ask him if they had met before, the man would disappear in the disconcerting way he had of doing.

Now, Rory stood on the walls of the city he'd come to view as his own, Milan, and looked out at the seiging army from the Holy Roman Empire that had come to take away everything he had, and thought to himself that marrying into the Royal Family meant you took not only the advantages of Royal Life, but the responsibilities as well. The Roman Captain - Ansehalm - had bought almost 1000 men against Rory's 200, Milan's garrison having been stripped down over the months to reinforce the cities falling victim to the plague, a fate that so far Milan had not yet been affected by.

Battle Deployment

Your forces are attacked by an army of the Holy Roman Empire



Your Forces		Enemy Forces
<p>Scotland</p> <p>★★★☆☆</p> <p>Rory the Chivalrous</p> <p>205 men</p> <p>Reinforcements: 0</p> <p>None</p>	 Balance of power 	<p>The Holy Roman Empire</p> <p>☆☆☆☆☆</p> <p>Captain Ansehalm</p> <p>989 men</p> <p>Reinforcements: 0</p> <p>None</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Attempt a night attack		
		

Bunnok pulled his horse to a stop near a thin, snaking path that looked more like a crack in the mountainside than a path. Timur's Warlords' horses were all tethered nearby, and Bunnok dismounted and tethered his own besides them, stroking their flanks and smiling before turning to look at Timur, "From here we walk."

Timur frowned, then stepped down from his horse and tethered it, eyes moving over the rockface and noting that his hidden guards would be able to follow from above, but might have some difficulty getting down to support him should this truly be an ambush.

"Fortune favors the bold, mighty Warlord," grinned Bunnok, and moved down the path leaving Timur behind. The Timurid frowned and muttered a light curse, then followed after Bunnok, who took up his tale once more.

Milan's Puccio had once believed that the defenses of the city would hold back an invading army, and even if one broke through the walls somehow they would find themselves trapped in a killing field between the inner and outer walls of the main gate. He'd been disabused of this notion by the Scottish, who had smashed down his towers from afar, battered through the gate, carved through the soldiers and then removed Puccio's head from his shoulders.

Ansehalm meant to do the same to Rory, and the Scottish General could only hope that the improvements made to Milan's walls and towers would prove more effective for the Scottish than they once had against them.

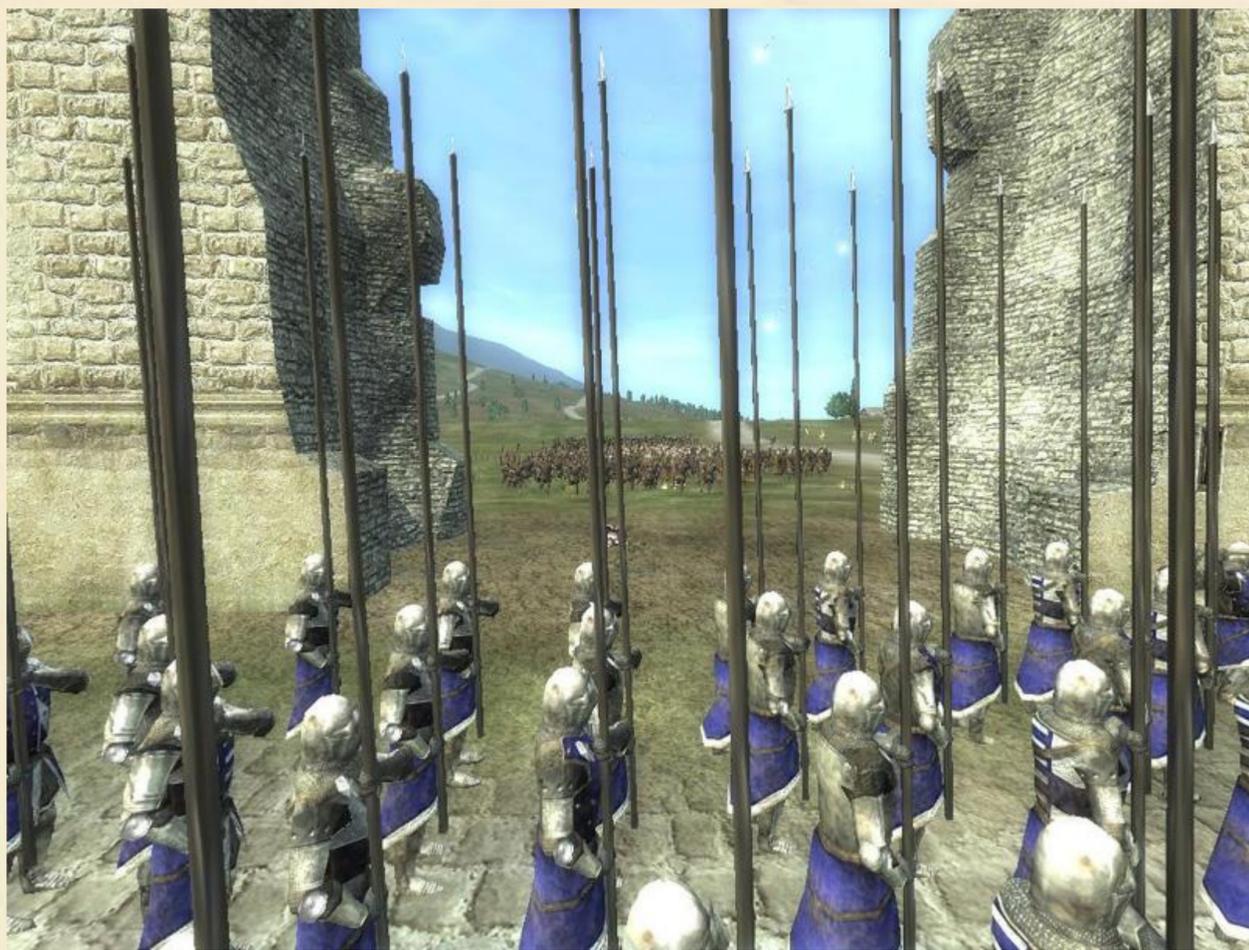




The Scottish had been cheered by the destruction of the Roman's catapults, trebuchets and battering rams, but the walls to either side of their ballista towers had been penetrated and brought crumbling down, leaving two massive breaches to either side of the gate. The Romans began to pull back from their shattered artillery, but Rory knew it was not in retreat, but to return to formation before 1000 Romans rushed the breaches of the wall guarded by only 200 men.

Milan was about to fall.





"HOLD THE LINE! DINNAE LET THEM THROUGH THE BREACH!" roared Rory angrily, cursing that the walls had fallen before the artillery had been destroyed. He watched as his Scottish soldiers held against the sudden onslaught against the breach, and felt a burst of pride that they did not turn and run. He stared up at the sealed gate that was useless now considering the breaches on either side... and then his eyes widened. He was a competent General but not a visionary or inspirational leader of men, but in that moment of deepest need, inspiration struck him and he let out a cry to his mounted Bodyguard that made their eyes widen.

Rory of Shetland was going to try and outflank an army five times his size.





Rory sat in his saddle, staring in shocked disbelief as he watched the Romans flee from the slaughter at the breach, his 200 men having killed a force of almost 500 men. His men let out massive cheers, embracing each other and jumping up and down, but Rory shook his head and called for silence.

"Our work is nae done yet, lads," he called, "We've killed their Captain, slaughtered their men by the hundreds.... but there are more, and they are coming."

The Scottish Infantry watched in horror as the massive siege tower - the wood coated to keep it from catching alight - was pushed forward by close to 200 more Romans, while a good 300 more held back out of range of the ballista towers, waiting for the walls of Milan to be taken and the men manning the towers to be killed so they could charge on the breaches once more.

"We have to get onto the walls!" cried one Scotsman, "Meet them as they step out of that monstrosity!"

"Nae, then they'll just abandon the tower and come through the breach we leave unguarded!" shouted another, "We have to stand here!"

"Then they'll take the walls!" cried the first, "We have t-"

"SILENCE!" roared Rory, shaking his head angrily as he thought about his two sons, close to manhood now, and resigned himself to the idea that he would never see them again.... but if he could take enough of the Romans with him, maybe his sons would live to become the fine men he knew they would be, "This city is my responsibility, and so is its defense! I will ride on these men, and kill as many of them as I can, and seek to drag them back to fight here at the breach.... but whether I live or die, they will ken that this city is Scotland's, and we will nae give it up, nae matter their numbers!"

And he rode into certain death.



"At least he died with honor," grunted Timur, sliding between a particularly thin part of the narrow, winding mountain path they had been on for a good two hours now. He wondered how Ambaghai had gotten his gut through the crack and allowed a smile, "He died a man."

"Ye are missing the point of this story," chuckled Bunnok, breathing heavily from the exertion of moving through the path. Timur was surprised at how easily the man tired, he obviously spent too much time on his horse, if this was an ambush, Timur had no doubt he could kill the man easily... but if it was an ambush, then so could have any of the other Warlords, even fat Ambaghai would have put up a fight. No, this was no ambush, just Bunnok showing off his knowledge, as he was now with his teasing about the "point" of the story, "Rory survived the charge, though many of his men died, and he rode the pursuing Romans back to the breach, they abandoned their Siege Tower in hopes of cutting down the Scottish General.... and though Rory's plan had been a success, they now faced a fresh problem, defending the breach with barely 100 men against 500."

"And did they?" asked Timur.

"They did," grinned Bunnok, "Because the Romans were stupid enough to fall for the same trick twice."





Rory of Shetland watched in disbelief as the Romans ran from the field, and shook his head in wonder.... they hadn't just lived through the battle, they'd won it! As the men cheered, he turned and began to ride his horse back into the city, his only two surviving Bodyguards moving with him, asking where he was going.

"I'm going to see my sons," said Rory, smiling, "I mean to watch them become men, and then I'm going to grow old and spoil my grandchildren."



"So they won a battle they should have lost," grunted Timur, "It happens, these Romans obviously believed they were going to have an easy victory."

"Ye're missing the point again," chuckled Bunnok.

"Which is?"

But instead of answered, Bunnok pushed through a final thin crack and turned to smile at Timur, "We're here."

The Timurid Warlord pushed through and found himself standing on a wide clifftop that was still far above the ground, surrounded on both sides by the sheer walls of the mountains. The clifftop was long as well as wide, and almost 100 yards ahead on a thin patch of tough mountain grass that amazingly enough included a sickly looking tree and a brown, thorny vine running along one side. Timur could see all of this thanks to the torches he and Bunnok were holding, but now they extinguished them so their position would not be given away as they approached the edge. Timur stood still in the moonlit darkness, allowing his eyes to adjust to the dark, taking in the other thing he had noted when they stepped through the crack onto the clifftop.

His fellow Warlords.

All thoughts of an ambush were gone now, his Warlords were close by and had obviously been waiting for his arrival to discuss the strategies they had probably been arguing over ever since Bunnok had left them. Even in the dark he recognized them, Husayn was tall and thin, leaning comfortably against the tree with one arm propped on his hip as he looked over the edge of the cliff; Miran stout and short and squatting on the ground near the bushes, while Umar Shaykh sat propped against the tree, back to Timur, elbow crooked indicating he was probably stroking his goatee as he often did when deep in thought. Ambaghai - of course - lay on his side, his favorite position (thought he was usually on a comfortable cushion, probably bored out of his mind waiting for Timur to arrive and tell him what to do.

"Quiet now," whispered Bunnok, "The army is nae in earshot of course, it's far distant, but there is nae reason to tempt fate.... go take a look over the edge of the cliff, their camp is well lit and ye should get a good idea of their numbers."

Timur moved forward carefully, stepping up beside Husayn and Umar Shaykh, about to turn his head to greet them when his eyes found the Scottish Camp and all thoughts of anything else disappeared.

"No," he whispered, eyes growing wide in horror, "Umar, Husayn, Miran... what is this?"

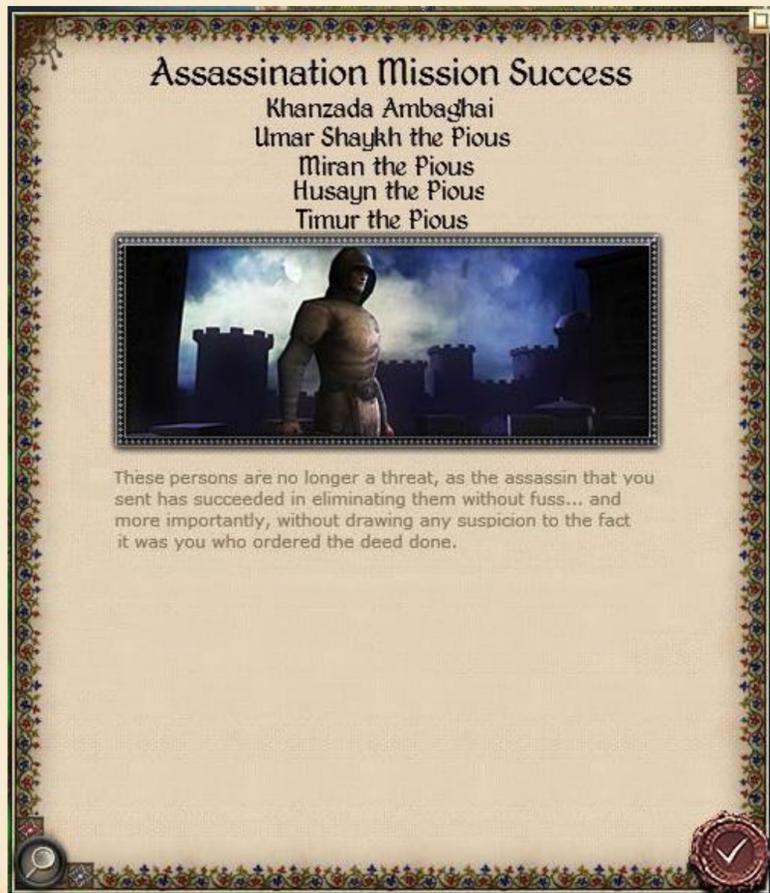
He reached out and touched Husayn's shoulder, and the man leaned forward, collapsing to the ground in a dead weight, causing Umar to topple over. Timur stood rooted in shock, staring down at the bodies of his two Warlords, and then he realized something he should have noted immediately.... Ambaghai was a heavy breather even when at rest, and yet he'd made no noise. He turned slowly to look down at the fat corpse, and then over at who was squatting only due to a branch that was propping him in place.

"Have ye worked out the point of the tale I told ye yet, mighty Warlord?" asked "James Bunnok", his voice dead, completely lacking in any emotion, "Even when it seems impossible.... Scotland always overcomes."

Instead of turning to look at the Spy who had lead him after all into an ambush - and Timur was in no doubt that somehow his guards had been dealt with - Timur turned to look back out over the cliff's edge, at the far distant army camped out in the lands east of Tbilisi, an army of Scotsmen.... an army so large it dwarfed even the 9000 of the Timurid Horde.

The second to last thing to go through Timur's mind was that everything he knew was a lie, that everything "Bunnok" had told him - the plague, the riots, the rebellions, the Polish, the Hungarians - was likely a lie.

The last thing to go through his mind was the shot from Duncan Colison's handgun



James Bunnok had been a traitor, a genius and natural spy with delusions of grandeur who had falsely convinced himself that he would be Nevin of Shetland's natural successor. Nevin had indeed considered him, but told Aodh that there was something worrying dancing about behind the man's eyes, hidden so well that even Nevin couldn't be sure what it was, but he suspected lunacy. As such, he'd made Eoin Makartane his successor, and an enraged Bunnok had sword revenge. After incidents with Hungary and Poland had seen him unwelcome anywhere in the known world, he'd gone into the unknown, disappearing into the deserts to the East.

And Duncan Colison had gone after him.

Bunnok had taken the name of another spy - Patrick Boyd - in the lands of Timur, but that hadn't been enough to protect him. Playing Bunnok at his own game, Colison had "become" Bunnok and denounced "Boyd" as a spy to Timur-i-Lenk, the man's lunatic ravings doing him no favors before he was executed.

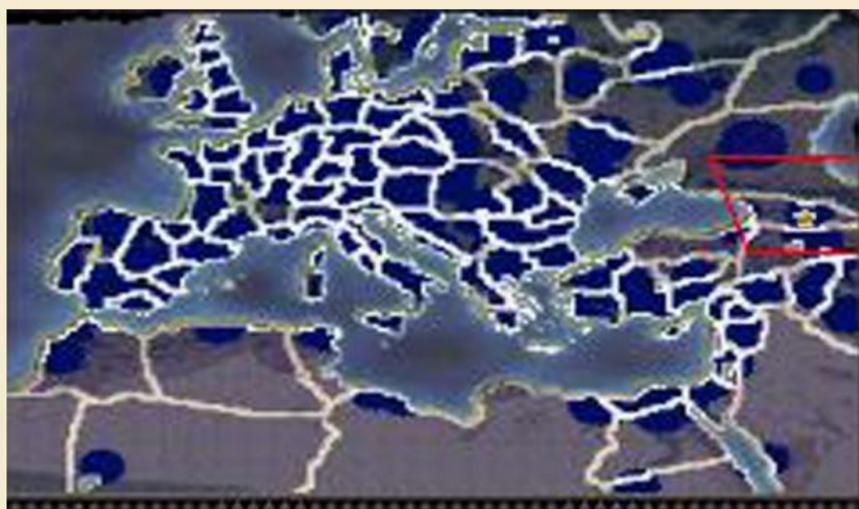
Colison had continued on as Bunnok, the pursuit of the actual man had only been a sideline to his true mission, one that lasted years and culminated in a moonlit night on a clifftop East of Tbilisi, as he blew out the brains of the only Warlord who could have possibly saved the Timurids from the trap Colison had lead them into. He quickly slid his handgun away, and turned as another man stepped onto the clifftop, another Scotsman who had moved silently in and out of the Timurid camp with none of them any the wiser, communicating only with Colison, the man who had dispatched the "secret" guards that Timur had set to follow him.... a man whom even Colison would dare to match skills with.

Eoin Makartane.

"It is done," Makartane said simply, staring at the dead bodies, "It's time to return to the King, the Horde will discover their Warlords dead within a day, by then it will be too late for them to flee."

"I'll be glad to put James Bunnok to rest finally," grinned Colison, then hunched down over Timur's corpse, patting what was left of his face familiarly, "Ye poor mad fool, ye wanted to conquer Scotland? And then the world? I should have told ye....."

The world **WAS** Scotland.



Within the Scottish Camp, inside a massive command tent, the Generals of Scotland sat around a heavy wooden table discussing what would be an incredibly dangerous battle even if Duncan Colison was successful in his mission.

And the King of Scotland sat at the head of the table, not speaking, listening silently to each man in turn.

"Even if they fail, we have far more men than them," grunted one General - a brutal man who seemed to live to fight, "We are sure to be victorious."

"They are used to numerical superiority," noted another General - noted for his study of history, particularly his own family's, "But they are also trained in mobile combat, far more than our own troops, even without their Generals we will need to contain their forces."

"I'm concerned about the elephants," added another General, "Our men have been **TOLD** about them, but being told and actually witnessing the brutes in action is likely to be another matter entirely."

"We need to be waiting at the mountains edge when they emerge," suggested another, "Crush them against the wall, remove their ability to spread out"

"And let them blast us with arrows from the safety of the mountain? BAH!" snapped another.

"We could attack the mountain itself with out bombards," suggested another.

"Or maybe we could learn to fly, " grunted another, rolling his eyes, "And drop rocks on them from above?"

The King of Scotland sat silently, listening to each man speak in turn.... and finally Aodh Canmore spoke.

"None of you seem to have considered," he said at last, "That with their Warlords dead and an inexperienced Khan left to lead them, that they might abandon their campaign and retreat back through the mountains into their desert.... and if they do, should we let them go?"

Chaos erupted in the tent as arguments broke out, the King watching it all.... and finally Aodh Canmore called for silence.

"without their Warlords, they will fall into squabbles for dominance," he spoke, his voice instructing, as if he was directing a lesson, "Some will run, others will want to fight, others will want to hole up in the mountains and wait us out... but eventually, a leader will be established amongst them and they will either ride against us or seek to escape... but we will nae see them for at least a week, unless we decide to go into the mountains after them."

The Generals absorbed this in silence, and then finally the brutal General spoke.

"With all due respect, Aodh, ye are a fine tactician and a brilliant man," the General said, "But I would hear from the King."

All eyes turned to the head of the table, including Aodh Canmore's, and now the King was expected to sit in silence no longer. He reached up and stroked his throat thoughtfully, fingers moving over where King Istok's hands had once been wrapped around, threatening to choke the life from him.

"They've come all this way for a fight," Domnall Canmore said with a grin, "They'll come out of the mountains for it, and I say it'd be impolite of us to nae give them one.... prepare the men, lads, we've got nine thousand Timurids to kill."

Army Details



King Domnall the Cunning

Age: 60

Faction Leader

Command



Dread



Authority



Piety



Retinue



Mercenary Captain



Pagan Magician



Notorious Berserker



Veteran Warrior



Shieldbearer



Master of Assassins



Military Engineer



Overseer

Traits

- Legacy of Chivalry
- Understands Logistics
- Night Fighter
- Totally Closed
- Courageous
- Shamelessly Lewd
- Natural Commander
- Speaks of Loyalty
- Lacks Justice
- Drunken Heathen
- Poor with Taxes
- Faction Leader
- Master of Espionage
- Great Commander
- Pillager
- Total Deceiver
- Confident Attacker
- Cruel and Cunning
- Merciless Conqueror
- Can Tell a Tale
- Master of Assassins
- Tyrannical Leader
- Political Promise
- Siege Expert
- Feels Respected
- Marks of War

Creates a myriad of half-truths and plausible tales to mislead others, and is exceptional at doing so.
-3 Loyalty, +3 Authority



Chapter 71

9000 Timurids was enough to strike terror into the hearts of any Nation, King, General or soldier.

Unless you had 15,000 Scotsmen waiting to meet them.



In the lifting darkness of dawn, King Domnall Canmore sat alongside his brother, Aodh, waiting for what he knew would be the last great battle of his generation. Sitting nervously to his other side was his son-in-law Patrick and grandson Edward of Shetland, a favorite of Aodh's. Edward was barely a man and all ready preparing to face a battle unlike any Scotland had seen in its history, and Domnall felt for the lad, remembering his own nervousness at what had been relatively the minor battles that had introduced him personally to warfare, under the tutelage of his Father and Uncle.

He stroked his throat, a familiar trait he had developed in the decade since Hungary's Istok had almost choked the life from him. Domnall often thought of that fight, remembering how the shouting and cheering of the men had been drowned out by the thumping of blood in his ears, and the world had shrunk to Istok's grimacing face as the two King's attempted to choke the life from each other. Domnall had felt the strength fleeing from his arms and struggled to maintain his grip around Istok's throat as the bleeding wound in his hand had made his hand slippery.... but then Istok's strength had faded and given Domnall new energy, and he'd redoubled his efforts, seeing the despair in Istok's eyes as the Hungarian realized at last that while Domnall was not Edward Canmore, he WAS a Canmore, and Istok was no match for him.

Angus and Hew, two men he considered the sons he'd never had, had lead the slaughter of the surviving Hungarians who had not run when they'd seen their King dead, and Domnall had been left to sit by Istok's cooling corpse, recovering his strength and thinking to himself that he would never, ever let an enemy get as close to him again as Istok had.

So when Aodh had arrived at Constantinople warning of a fresh threat from the East, between the two of them they had worked out a plan to bring out all the Timurids at once, and put an end to them before they could spread out into the desert and entrench themselves in Scottish lands. Aodh had dreamed of a swarm of locusts devouring a field of wheat and attributed the clarity of the dream to divine reasons, believing he had received a Vision from God. Domnall knew his brother better than to think his warnings were based only on a dream of course, and learnt of research from Aodh's Spy Network that had discovered the extent of Timur the Lame's reconstruction of The Horde. When Aodh also discovered that James Bunnok - a talented spy with delusions of grandeur - had gone over to the Hungarians to set up a trap for his former masters, they had decided to use him to accomplish their own goal - a unified world under Scotland ready to meet the Timurids, who would have no idea what they were walking into.

As if by divine mandate, the Great Mortality had struck in Poland, The Holy Roman Empire and Portugal, greatly weakening those nations and - perhaps more importantly - striking down their leaders with the illness. Though the King of Portugal and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire did not die, their convalescence put other less.... desirable.... family members in their place.

To put it bluntly, madmen.

Enemy Character Details

Prince Sigismund the Mad Age: 57

Governor
Command
Chivalry
Loyalty
Piety

Retinue

- Tutor
- Military Engineer
- Guard Dog
- Master Archer
- Siege Engineer
- Foodtaster
- Tax Farmer

Traits

- Vision of Prophecy
- Healthy
- Promising Defender
- Utterly Stoic
- Talent for Command
- Tax Farmer
- Feels Appreciated
- Religiously Active
- Morbidly Mortal
- Dangerously Mad
- Survivor
- Womaniser
- Utterly Insane
- Cruel Leader
- Heir Apparent

Spotted By: Captain Kirk
Subterfuge: [Progress Bar]

Barely knows when he is spoken to, nor what he says. There is no cause or reason left in this poor man's mind at all. He is beyond salvation.
-4 Authority, -3 Morale for all troops on the battlefield

No longer acting with any sense of rational or consequence. Literally a danger to others around him.
-3 Command, -3 Authority, -2 Morale for all troops on the battlefield, 10% penalty on all trade income, 5% penalty on tax income

Utterly unable to relax or trust anyone, this man is a total wreck, afraid of possibility itself.
-2 Command, -2 Authority, +4 to personal security (improves the chances of detecting and foiling assassination attempts)

Enemy Character Details

Prince Theodosio the Mad Age: 45

Faction Heir
Command
Dread
Loyalty
Piety

Retinue

- Judge
- Foodtaster
- Pagan Magician
- Adulteress
- Military Engineer
- Siege Engineer
- Alchemist
- Brilliant Scribe

Traits

- Wall Taker
- Dangerously Mad
- Expensive Tastes
- Promising Attacker
- Natural Commander
- Heir Apparent
- Steady Drinker
- Feels Respected
- Overly Suspicious
- Morbidly Mortal
- Totally Closed
- Poor Administrator
- Gambler
- Smart

Spotted By: Captain David
Subterfuge: [Progress Bar]

Though it was impossible to keep The Black Plague out of Scottish lands, Aodh's knowledge that the disease was coming allowed the peoples of Scotland to be as best prepared as possible. While thousands died, it was less than every other Nation on Earth apart from Hungary, which was somewhat protected by - oddly enough - the war with Scotland that had put an end to trading and movement by the Hungarians. Scotland's relatively low numbers of plague dead saw many claim that Scotland had some kind of divine protection, and the mad rulers of Portugal and the Holy Roman Empire attempted to gain that protection for themselves by declaring war on the most powerful Nation in the World.

The result was... predictable.

Faction Destroyed
Portugal



The long legacy of these people has at last come to an end by your hand! Celebrations held in honour of your glorious conquest of their dominion erupt throughout the kingdom, with everyone from prince to pauper toasting your righteous reign!

Faction Destroyed
The Holy Roman Empire



The long legacy of these people has at last come to an end by your hand! Celebrations held in honour of your glorious conquest of their dominion erupt throughout the kingdom, with everyone from prince to pauper toasting your righteous reign!

Hungary's apparent resistance to the plague was also put down to supernatural intervention, but not of the same kind credited to Scotland. The Pope decried Hungary as Devil Worshipers, claiming that Satan had granted them protection from the plague in return for their souls. While Alferius no longer held the power he once had over the secular world, Scotland was all too eager to heed his call for a Crusade against Hungary's new capital of Bucharest, and their new King, Vtalyus.

Faction Excommunicated
Hungary



King Vtalyus
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.

Crusade Called
Bucharest



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

Duncan Colison had told Timur the Pious the story of how Roy Macgoulchane had avenged the deaths of Domnall Canmore and Angus the Mauler by leading the Crusade against Istok at Constantinople. The truth was that Roy had led the Crusade against Vtalyus at Bucharest and killed the Hungarian King, breaking what was left of the fighting spirit of the Hungarians. It was less than a year later that Scotland crushed the last of the Hungarian armies, leaving only one Nation in the world to stand against Scotland.

Poland.

Clear Victory

Battle Results				
	Men Deployed	Men Lost	Men Remaining	Enemies Killed
 Roy Macgoulchane	1232	28	1204	316 (48)
 King Vtalyus	606	328	278	84 (0)

Faction Destroyed
Hungary



The long legacy of these people has at last come to an end by your hand! Celebrations held in honour of your glorious conquest of their dominion erupt throughout the kingdom, with everyone from prince to pauper toasting your righteous reign!

James Bunnok had spent time in Poland before the Plague truly devastated the Nation and he had returned to Hungary briefly before setting out into the desert to find the Timurids. As a result, King Zygmunt had believed he had inside knowledge of how Scotland would attack Poland, and prepared his defenses accordingly. Unfortunately for the horrifically scarred King, the information that Bunnok had been in possession of had been flawed, fed to him by Cormac Feniss to test the man's loyalty. Bunnok had also had a tendency to hold back vital information in order to protect his usefulness to his new Masters, and so Zygmunt had led his plague-ravaged armies completely out of place, leaving the cities of Poland open to attack by Angus the Mauler and Hew Mar. By the time he had force-marched his exhausted army to Bulgar on the far North-Eastern border, the Scottish had been prepared for them, and the Polish had fallen to the same fate as all the other Nations in the World.

Faction Destroyed

Poland



The long legacy of these people has at last come to an end by your hand! Celebrations held in honour of your glorious conquest of their dominion erupt throughout the kingdom, with everyone from prince to pauper toasting your righteous reign!

But before the freshly conquered world could be prepared for the coming of the Timurids, the plague needed to be eliminated. Scotland had been insulated, but now formerly Hungarian, Polish, Portugese and Roman Cities ravaged by the Great Mortality were under the control of the Scottish, and the plague spread anew as Aodh Canmore sought ways to contain and then eradicate the disease. Tens of thousands died, their bodies carted away and burnt or buried in deep, mass graves, and even the Canmore family was not safe from its power.

Faction Announcements

The following events have taken place within your royal family:

A Noble Life Ends A victim of the plague



Adam the Cruel - Family member
Bordeaux

A Noble Life Ends A victim of the plague



Ada Canmore - Princess
Toulouse Region

Domnall was concerned that his nephew Kirk - whom he had taken a shine to during his time in Toulouse - had been left without a Father at such a vital age, only a few years away from manhood. He'd written to the boy's Mother suggesting that either Edward of Shetland move from Milan to Toulouse or Kirk from Toulouse to Milan, given that Edward's own Father - Rory - had recently died, several years after holding off an attack of the Holy Roman Empire at Milan. Domnall had been surprised when the boy himself had returned a letter.

Uncle,

I am grateful for your concern as to my wellbeing, and appreciate your offer of providing both a friend and an "older brother" in Edward of Shetland. However I must decline, it would be unkind to move Edward away from his brother Algune, and there is much for me to learn here in Toulouse, where my Father ruled for so many years.

My Father was always kind and loving towards me, but not to the people he ruled. It was meant to be kept from me that he was known as Adam the Cruel, but one would have to be death and blind to not know. Few people outside of our family will mourn his passing, those who knew him best were those closest to him, and to the rest of the world he affected disdain, looking down upon them as less than himself.

His death from the plague taught me something, however, that God does not distinguish between Royalty and the "common man". My Father did a great disservice to the people of Toulouse, and I mean to be the one to right it, so I shall remain here. Besides which, I am near the sea here, which pleases me, I would not feel right without the open waters near me.

Kirk Canmore.

Domnall had been surprised by the letter, and the surprising maturity of the boy, but his mind had obviously been fixed and Domnall had put thoughts of him to the background to concentrate on the now diminishing impact of the plague, and preparations for the Timurids as he and Eoin Makartane reviewed the intelligence reports being sent back to them by "James Bunnok". Aodh had been in mourning for his daughter Ada, which had stymied their progress in planning as the two men got to know each other, Domnall the General and Eoin the Spy, both eagerly waiting for Aodh - a man who could bridge the gap between both roles - to return.

And now, after all this time, it had come down to this early morning dawn at the foot of the mountains between what had once been the lands of the Turks and the Polish, 9000 Timurids finally emerging from the mountains two days after discovering the bodies of their Warlords and that 15,000 Scotsmen were waiting for them.

Domnall couldn't wait.

Battle Deployment

Your forces attack an army of Timurids



Your Forces

Enemy Forces

Scotland
★★★★★★★

King Domnall the Scarred
1775 men

Balance of power

Timurids
●●●●●●●●

Captain Daidukul
1631 men

Reinforcements: 14182

Reinforcements: 5434

Scotland
★★★★★★★

Hew Mar
1827 men

Attempt a night attack

Timurids
●●●●●●●●

Captain Chagurkhai
1631 men

Scotland
★★★★●●●●

Prince Aodh the Scarred
1389 men

Timurids
●●●●●●●●

Captain Shahrukh
1641 men

Scotland
★★★●●●●●

Edmund Besat
1922 men

Timurids
●●●●●●●●

Captain Belgutei
1641 men

Scotland
★★★★●●●●

Nevin Campbell
1483 men

Timurids
●●●●●●●●

Captain Onggiran
521 men

Scotland
★★★★★★★

Angus the Mauler
1427 men

Scotland
★★●●●●●●

Donnchadh of Nairnshire
927 men

Scotland
★★★★★★★

Dougall the Merciless
1119 men

Scotland
★★●●●●●●

Lulach Erskyn
2113 men

Scotland
★●●●●●●●

Steaphan Cullane
1975 men

Captain Belgutei led his men over the hill, grimacing at the darkening clouds above, then wincing as they moved into view of the distant waiting Scotsmen.

"We thought ourselves The Horde," grunted Belgutei, staring at the thousands upon thousands of men waiting for them, prepared and eager to fight, "We were wrong."



Belgutei had argued long and loud after the discovery of the dead Warlords and the waiting Scottish ambush that they ride out to meet the waiting Scottish. Others had suggested they wait in the mountains and try to draw the Scottish in for an ambush of their own, while Khan Horkhudagh had been aghast that no one was even considering turning and running away.

"It's better to be on hand with ten men, then absent with ten thousand," Belgutei had grunted back at Horkhudagh angrily when the Khan suggested they run, "Timur-i-Lenk said that, do you even know what it means, you piece of dung?"

"Brave words do not dissuade death," Horkhudagh sneered back, "The Skot-tish have played your precious Timur-i-Lenk, and led your mighty Warlords to death. There is no disgrace in returning to our own Empire, and returning another day when total defeat is not inevitable."

"There are barely half again as many as us," Captain Chagurkhai had snapped, "The Skot-tish are strong, yes, but I would pit any one of us against any two of them!"

"Besides which," noted Shakrukh, "The Mongols were defeated by ranged artillery, and now we have that... and the mountains, and high ground, we can win this battle!"

"Imagine the songs they will sing," Onggiran had whispered, eyes wide, "When they hear how we crushed 15,000 Skot-tish, turning their own ambush back on them!"

"And we have the elephants," finished Belgutei, "The Skot-tish have never faced their like... we will destroy the Skot-tish! We will destroy the Skot-tish!"

The other Timurids had taken up the chant as Horkhudagh looked on in horror, realizing that they truly intended to go through with this suicide, and what was worse... they actually thought they stood a chance.

And even now, as Belgutei sat on his horse with only 1600 men under his command staring down at the thousands of Scottish, he still believed it.



"They have emerged at last," Domnall grunted, "They look few, barely 2000 if that."

"There are others," Aodh replied smoothly, "Remember these are desert nomads used to moving fast and unnoticed. As ridiculous as it sounds, they will be trying to flank us."

"Let them try," nodded Domnall, then raised his voice, "Dougall, Angus! Our Timurid friends have finally come out of hiding to say hello, go and give them my greetings!"

Angus grinned in delight at the order and shouted to his men to follow him, and as they rode forward closely followed by Dougall, the dark clouds finally broke and it began to rain down upon what would soon be the battlefield.

"An ill omen," grunted Domnall.

"Aye," nodded Aodh, "But for who?"





"1600 looks like a lot more when you get up close," noted Dougall with a slight, worried grin.

"Ahhh Dougall, I thought ye were unstoppable!" laughed Angus, "1600 isn't enough, 16000 would nae be enough... I'll nae tire of killing these bastards, I missed the first Mongol Wars, and these bastards are supposed to be even tougher... this is the fight I've been waiting all my life for."

"Well ye're about to get ye wish," noted Dougall, "Feel free to kill any that get near me, too!"

And with that, after all the planning, the set-ups, the lies and deceptions... battle between Scotland and the Timurids was finally joined.





"THEY HOLD THE HIGHER GROUND, ANGUS!" screamed Dougall as he slashed away at the Timurids pouring downhill into his men, using their own weight to add the pressure of numbers to the Scottish's defensive concerns.

"THEN TAKE IT FROM THEM!" laughed Angus, roaring with delight as he laid into the swarming Timurids trying to overwhelm him, "PUSH THEM BACK LADS! PUSH THEM BACK!"

"He's mad," muttered Dougall, shaking his head in disbelief before dodging the blade of one of hundreds of Timurid archers who had fired on them from range then drawn swords to attack once the Scottish drew near.

"Only just figured that out, sir?" chuckled a grey-haired veteran as he slammed a fist into a Timurid's face and then plunged his sword into his belly, "It's why we love him, God favors madmen!"



"RALLY! RALLY!" screamed Belgutei, "PRESS THEM BACK DOWN THE HILL! HOLD THE HIGH GROUND AND WE WILL WIN TH-

"Oh shut up," grunted Angus, slashing Belgutei's arm off below the elbow and then swiftly bringing the sword back up and decapitating the man, "Why do people insist on talking so much in a fight?"





"RUN! RUN!" screamed a Timurid Commander, seeing his leader slain, "BACK INTO THE MOUNTAINS! RUN!"

"They're running lads!" cried Dougall, seeing the Timurids beginning to turn to run, "DINNAE LET THEM ESCAPE! CATCH WHO YOU CAN AN-"

"KILL ALL THE BASTARDS!" roared Angus, throwing his head back and howling in delight, "KILL THEM!"

"That too, I guess," sighed Dougall under his breath, and then followed his baying, delighted soldiers after the fleeing Timurids.







To the south, Domnall nodded in satisfaction as a scout reported back that Angus and Dougall had wiped out the small force of Timurids. As if on cue, the rain ceased and the clouds began to roll back, the sun shining through and lighting up the sky, burning through the mists that had come down from the mountain.

"Is that truly it, is it over?" asked Edward of Shetland, "I was expecting so much more.... I guess the other Timurids ran?"

"Over?" asked Domnall, and barked with laughter. Edward stared at him in confusion, and Aodh smiled warmly, as their brother Nectan had once smiled at him so many decades ago as he showed him war for the first time.

"It's nae over, lad, it's barely begun," Aodh explained, "The Timurids are brave, suicidally so, and that little force was merely designed to grab our attention so they could move their other men into position."

"What position?" asked Edward, confused.

In answer, Aodh turned his horse and pointed first to the Northwest between themselves and Angus and Dougall's forces, then to the East. The mist had rolled back and the sun had illuminated areas of the mountains previously shrouded in darkness, as dawn had passed into early morning and now approached noon.

Revealing two forces of Timurids approaching on either side of the great Scottish Horde.

And with them came the elephants.





The battle was about to truly begin.

Chapter 72

A wise man once said that war never changed.

That man had never seen an elephant with a cannon strapped to its back.

The sun had come out from behind the clouds and burned through the mist surrounding the foot of the mountains where the King of Scotland waited with his men, revealing two forces of Timurids approaching from the Northwest and the East. They numbered in the thousands, but so did Domnall Canmore's men.... but the Timurids had brought their greatest weapon, an equalizer like none other in history.

The elephants.

"Now, Uncle?" Edward of Shetland asked Prince Aodh Canmore.

"Nae yet, lad," replied Aodh with a strained smile, "We dinnae show our hand till the time is right.... Domnall?"

The King frowned at the Timurids approaching from the East, then nodded and barked out his orders, "Hew! Edmund! March your men and intercept the Timurids to the Northwest, hold them long enough and Angus and Dougall can return and crush them between you. Patrick, give the order on my mark to fire arrows concentrated on those elephants! Forget the men, concentrate on the elephants!"

Patrick the Chivalrous saluted his Father-in-Law and King and wheeled to give out his orders, while every other eye remained fixed not on the approaching Timurids, but the Elephants marching amongst them. As had been warned, it was one thing to be told about the elephants, and quite another to see them in person and have to face them in battle.

"NOW!" roared Domnall, and Patrick gave the order to open fire.

The battle had begun.





The influx of arrows had the desired effect, as the burning projectiles served to give the mighty beasts pause. As they stumbled to a stop and begin milling about against each other as their drivers sitting on their backs shouted and beat at them to get them moving again, Domnall prepared to take advantage.

"Send in the infantry!" he roared, "By the time those elephants are ready, I want them to have to march through their own men to get at ours!"

Aodh, Patrick and the other Generals roared out commands to their Infantry, and the armored Scottish swordsmen and pikemen eagerly charged forward in formation. The Timurid Captains snapped angrily at their own men to move forward to engage.

"We must hold them in place!" Chagurkhai grunted angrily, "Get those elephants back into formation!"

"If we put our own men in-between the Skot-tish and the Elephants, we'll have to run through our own men to get the elephants at their Khan!" warned Daidukul.

Chagurkhai turned to stare at his fellow Captain, his eyes black and unreadable.

"I fail to see what the problem is," he grunted, and returned to shouting at the elephant riders to regain control of their beasts.





To the Northwest, Hew Mar and Edmund Besat were emulating the tactics of their King, raining down flaming arrows on the Timurids' elephants to try and give the massive beasts pause.





"Let them concentrate on the beasts," sneered Onggiran to Shakrukh, "Send the cavalry onto their right flank, crush their unmounted men, let them see their own men run before our might even before we make use of the elephants."





"Damn it, this is nae working," growled Hew as he saw his Infantry being overrun by the mobile Timurids, "There's too much space for them to move, but we cannae move in and risk being run down by those blasted eleph-"

Hew's complaint was cut off as a horn suddenly sounded, and he stared in wonder as from the North rode a small force of horsemen in Scottish colors, flying under the banner of...

"Angus?" gasped Hew, "What the hell is the madman doing!?!"

Angus the Mauler rode at the head of his men, their horses exhausted from the hard ride to join the main battle, leaving behind the bulk of his unmounted forces. The brutal Scottish General grinned fiercely as he saw the Timurids had moved forward and left their elephants "unprotected" behind them.

"ELEPHANTS!" Angus screamed, letting out a howl of excitement, "ELEPHAAAAAANTS!"



The elephants bellowed in surprise as the Scottish horses filed between them, their riders slashed at the thick grey skin with their

blades. Angus slammed his sword into the rump of one of the animals where its blanket of armor did not cover, and it roared angrily and lifted up onto its hind legs, sending the Timurid manning the cannon on its back flying through the air arms flailing before crashing into the ground.

"Is he mad?" gasped Edmund Besat, watching from Hew's side.

"Oh aye, quite mad, the magnificent bastard..." grinned Hew, then frowned as he saw the front line of his infantry begin to buckle, "RALLY YE DOGS! HOLD THAT LINE AND KILL THE BASTARDS!"

As the soldiers struggled to retain their footing and present a unified front before the Timurids, one elephant's panic had become contagious and spread throughout the rest of the beasts, and they ignored their drivers' plaintive cries and angry demands, running amok anywhere they could to escape the strange shiny men on the small four legged brown things rushing about between their feet.



"AYE! RUN! RUN!" howled Angus in delight, his eyes manic as he chased after the monstrosities, "I THOUGHT THESE BASTARDS WERE SUPPOSED TO BE TOU-"

And then a terrified elephant stampeded over the laughing Scottish General, trampling horse and rider beneath it.



"Angus, nae!" gasped Hew in horror as the elephant charged on past the now prone form of the Scottish General. He made to spur his horse to rush to Angus' side, but Edmund Besat's arm on his shoulder prevented him.

"We have bigger problems, Hew," warned Besat, "The Timurids have gotten their elephants back under control."

Hew turned and looked back across the field where the Scottish and Timurid forces had begun to splinter and spread out in a series of small, pitched, separate battles as part of the greater whole, and saw Besat had it right. The elephants were once more under their drivers' control, and they were being directed towards the backs of the unsuspecting Scots.



"God help us, we can only hope things are going better on the King's front," whispered Hew, and rode into the fray alongside Edmund.



On the Eastern Front, things were getting worse.

The Scottish Infantry had been carving their way through Chagurkhai and Daidukul's men while the archers maintained a steady, alternating volley of arrows on the Timurid Cavalry and their spooked elephants respectively. But familiarity bred contempt, and the training of the elephants - raised to maintain calm in battle situations - had begun to override their panic and fear, and they were moving back into formation.

"Finally!" hissed Chagurkhai angrily, "Straight through the heart of the Skot-tish to their King! I WANT THEIR KING TO BE BURIED BENEATH THE FEET OF OUR ELEPHANTS! NOW CHARGE!"

The great beasts bellowed and began to charge forward with terrifying speed, and Chagurkhai and Daidukul spurred their horses to follow along in their wake.





The elephants plowed through men and horses as if they weren't there, their massive tusks and trunks casting men bodily through the air with a quick twitch of their heads. The Scottish found their lines breached and the force of the progress of the elephants had a ripple effect back through the lines. The Timurid Cavalry rode through the same breach unmolested as the Infantry tried to recover, and Edward of Shetland turned with concern to his Great Uncle as the massive beasts were turned in the direction of the King.

"Now, Uncle?" he asked.

"Nae lad, patience," replied Aodh, showing remarkable calm, "Wait here and command the Infantry, I must ride to my Brother's aid."

Aodh spurred his horse and led his men towards the side of the column of charging elephants, spotted by Chagurkhai who laughed in delight and peeling off his own bodyguard to ride and meet Aodh head on. The two forces of horsemen smashed into each other and man and horse alike were sent reeling from the initial shock before the battle was joined in earnest, blades swinging, blows being thrown and horses biting and kicking at each other.

And while that fight went on, the elephants continued their relentless charge directly towards King Domnall, who sat his horse alongside his son-in-law Patrick with his face seemingly fixed in iron, betraying no fear.

"So be it," Domnall grunted as the elephants approached, "Let us see the worth of these beasts then."

And with a roar, Domnall rose his sword high and led his men directly at the charging elephants, in what would surely be a desperate, suicide charge.

The men of Scotland outnumbered the Timurids by thousands, but the elephants had proved everything they were claimed to be, the great equalizer. As Edward of Shetland sat shouting orders to the recovering infantry, he cast his eye worriedly between Aodh fighting Chagurkhai's men and King Domnall charging the elephants. If Domnall fell and died... and Aodh as well... the morale of the men would be broken, and the Timurids would have their elephants to crush and splinter any resistance that was left.

"Have we gambled too greatly?" Edward asked himself in growing horror, "Is this to be the end of Scotland?"



As battles waged on the Eastern front and Northwestern front, a lone Scottish soldier rode his horse past the bodies of dead Scotsmen, Timurids, horses and even the odd elephant here and there. He halted his horse beside the body of his General, a man he had followed since his youth in the desert city of Yerevan. Stepping down, the Scotsman took the shoulder of his General and turned him around, wanting to say his goodbye to the often brutal man who had nonetheless inspired such great loyalty.

"Goodbye, Ang-" he started, and then the dead man sat bolt upright.

"ELEPHANTS!" screamed Angus the Mauler, then smashed his fist into his soldier's face, knocking him senseless. Angus staggered up and instantly slumped against the other man's horse, fighting off dizziness then turning to glare at the dead bodies around him, and the fighting going on in the distance.

"Elephaaaaants," hissed Angus, fire in his eyes as he grabbed the saddle of the horse by his side and hauled himself up. He took another moment to fight the fresh wave of dizziness that threatened to overtake him, then spurred his horse and rode full tilt towards the nearest elephant he could see, screaming the same word over and over again.

"ELEPHAAAAAANTS!"

Chapter 73

Things were looking grim for Scotland.



"PROTECT THE KING!" screamed the Commanders, as men rallied towards the King as his bodyguard was flooded by the Timurids' Elephants.

"KILL THEIR KHAN!" screamed Chagurkhai, "KILL HIM!"

The Timurid Captain's cries were cut short as Aodh Canmore rode his men against Chagurkhai's, and the two forces crashed against each other. Chagurkhai roared with laughter, spurring his horse forward to crash headfirst into the Scottish.

"YOU FACE REAL HORSEMEN NOW, SKOT-TISH!" howled Chagurkhai in laughter, "LET US SEE HOW YOU FARE AGAIN US!"

Unfortunately for Chagurkhai... they fared very well indeed.



"TO THE KING!" roared Aodh as Chagurkhai's bodyguard was destroyed, while more men flooded past him hoping to take advantage of the shellshocked Timurids, who hadn't expected to see their Captain brought down so quickly, "GET ME HORSES! GET ME PIKEMEN! SWORDSMEN! ANYTHING! KILL THOSE ELEPHANTS!"

As the Timurid cavalry broke and ran, Aodh's personal bodyguard and a unit of Knights moved into formation and then charged into the backs and sides of the elephants crushed together around the rapidly diminishing circle of men trying to protect the King. They cut and slashed at the great beasts, finding gaps in the armor only to discover their own skin was an armor unto itself.... but weight of numbers took their toll, and the monstrosities began to fall, first one, then another, then more, causing the survivors to panic and lose direction, smashing against each other, against the Scottish, into the King's defenders, running amok as they tried to flee the pain and death coming for them.





"TIMURID INFANTRY INCOMING!" cried a Scotsman as the Elephants began to clear away, pointing East to where Timurid Infantry clutching halberds were rushing in, hoping to take advantage of the exhaustion and depleted numbers of the Scottish who had dealt to the elephants.

"SECURE THE LINE AND HOLD THEM IN PLACE!" demanded Aodh, then dismounted and rushed through the pile of dead and dying Scottish and their horses to find his brother the King.... if he lived.



Hew Mar was at a loss, as for the first time in his life, he didn't have advice from his father to fall back on.

"HOW THE HELL DO YOU FIGHT ELEPHANTS!?" he screamed in frustration as he twisted his horse aside from the swing of one of the great beast's tusks, "YE NAE TOLD ME THAT, FATHER!"

The Timurids on the Northwestern Front had regained control of their elephants and charged the Scottish lines, and now those formations were in disarray as discipline; training and skill were outweighed by the massive bulk and swinging tusks and trunks of the elephants, not to mention the cannons mounted to their backs. Hew Mar and Edmund Besat chased the surprisingly fast beasts on their horses, while pikemen tried desperately to hold themselves in place and brace for the impact when the monsters snapped through their pikes like twigs.



A horn sounded and Hew looked up in surprise, a burst of relief washing through him as he saw that Dougall the Unstoppable had finally returned from the Northern Front, coming over the hill above the elephants. If they charged down they could finally catch the beasts between them and hold them in place.... once the monsters were no longer mobile, they could be killed.

"It's just a question of how many of us die in the meantime," sighed Hew to himself, and then ordered his men to prepare to charge in conjunction with Dougall's men.



"Where is Angus!?" cried Dougall as the fighting brought him side by side with Hew, the Scottish surrounding the elephants and attempting to bring them down as the Timurid Captains sent in men to break the Scottish ring.

"Dead!" growled Hew, scarcely able to believe it himself, "Run down by one of these abominations!"

"These bastards won't die!" snarled Edmund, hacking uselessly at the side of one of the elephants, then twisting away to cut down a screaming Timurid as he tried to attack the Scottish General, "No man can stand before these monsters!"

"I'LL NAE HAVE THAT TALK!" snapped Hew, "THEY'RE BIG AND UGLY BUT THEY CAN DIE! AND IF IT CAN DIE, THE SCOTTISH WILL KILL IT!"

With the preternatural speed that had surprised the Scottish so far, the elephant Hew was attacking shoved to its right and twisted about, massive tusks slamming against Hew's horse and lifting his mount off of its feet. Hew was sent flying and crashed into the ground, and then the other elephants - following the lead of the alpha male which was ignoring its driver's commands as its pain drove it made with rage - tore through the lines of the Scottish, sending men sprawling and breaking their formations once more.

"Perfect!" sneered Ongirran as the elephants crashed through the Scottish, "Send up the archers, open fire on the Skot-tish!"

"Our elephants will suffer under the onslaught," warned Shakrukh.

"Let them run amok," grinned Onggiran, "They do more damage running wild than moving under command... as long as they are clear of the bulk of our own men, driving them crazier works only to our advantage."



"RETURN FIRE DAMN IT!" snapped Dougall as he helped Hew back to his feet, the other Scottish General dizzy and battered, "ARCHERS! FORGET THE ELEPHANTS! HOLD THOSE TIMURIDS BACK!"



"We need to take those elephants out of the equation," grunted Hew, clutching at his ribs, which he suspected to be broken, "That Bull-Elephant leading them has to be put do-"

"..aannnNNTTTSSSS!" cried a distant voice from the west.

"What?" grunted Dougall, looking up in surprise.

"..phaANNNTTSSSSS!" came the voice again, louder now.

And then Dougall and Hew stared in wonder as a dead man rode over the crest of the hill aimed directly at the Bull Elephant leading the other monsters in their stampede, charging directly for it while screaming, "ELEPHAAANNNTSSSSS!"

Angus The Mauler had returned from the dead.



The Elephants were crashing about, running amok and driving through Scottish and Timurid lines alike, but Aodh ignored them as he rushed from one pile of bodies to another, searching for his Brother and King. He clambered over the massive corpse of an elephant cut in hundreds of places by Domnall and his defenders, and found dozens of bodies - human and horse - lying on its other side, their bodies crushed by the stampeding of elephants, those that had lived through the stampede screaming in pain with shattered limbs or ruined bodies. Aodh's eyes widened as he saw Domnall's banner lying tattered and trampled in the ground, alongside a pile of Scottish bodies surrounding a familiar armored figure.

"DOMNALL! he cried, and rushed to his Brother's side, kneeling down and opening his helm to check for signs of life. For one moment he felt his heart sink, and then Domnall's eyelids fluttered and opened, and he grinned up at Aodh.

"The me... the men surrounded.... surrounded me and protected me," he coughed, "I wanted.. wanted to fight but would nae ha... have any of it..."

"Then bless them," grinned Aodh, staring around at the devastation around him, Domnall's bodyguard lying stretched around all about him. They were the finest soldiers in the world, but even they had been powerless to stand up against a concentrated stampede of 30 elephants, "They saved ye life."

"Help me up, Aodh," grunted Domnall, "The men must see I live, and that I fight with them.... a Canmore"

"A Canmore fights on the front line with his men, aye," smiled Aodh, hauling Domnall up out of the corpses of the bodyguard that had protected him in death as well as life, "There is much fighting yet to do."

The Bull Elephant lowered its head and crashed its skull full force into Angus' horse, but the brutal General had been expecting it. As he came thundering directly towards the monster, he stepped up in his saddle, flinging himself forward the moment before impact and slamming against the upper portion of the elephant's trunk.

"AHH! GET AWAY! GET AWAY!" squealed the Timurid Driver sitting in the basket atop the elephant's neck, "CRAZY MAN GET AWAY!"

"Hello gorgeous," hissed Angus, staring directly into the surprised eye of the elephant only an inch from his own, "Did ye miss me?"

"YOU GO AWAY!" cried the driver, and jabbed his spear down at Angus, who sneered angrily and grabbed the spear around the shaft, glaring up at the driver.

"Fuck off!" he hissed, hauling back and pulling the squawking driver out of his basket and flinging him through the air, "This is between me and the elephant!"

The Elephant had halted in place and begun shaking its head about in an attempt to get the man off of its trunk, but Angus clutched on tenaciously, throwing his arm back then driving the spear deep into the eye of the beast.

"By God," whispered Hew Mar, still struggling to stand in place after being knocked aside by the same elephant only a few minutes earlier, wincing as he heard the bellow of rage, confusion and pain come thundering out of the beat, "He never met a man he didnae want to fight.... I guess we can throw animals into the mix as well."

Screaming in pain, the elephant flung its trunk up with enormous force and sent Angus flying into the air, coming crashing down into the basket on it's back, smashing into the cannoneer who had been watching the whole thing with wide eyes and a gaping mouth.

"YOU CANNOT BE HERE!" screamed the Timurid, sounding almost offended.

"A gah-lah bala to ye too, laddie," grunted Angus, who hadn't understood a word of the Timurid's language. He slammed his fist into the man's face, then pulled himself to his feet and grabbed the cannoneer's feet, pitching him over the side of the basket to crash into the ground and be stomped on by the bull elephant, which was stumbling around in confusion, raking its face along the ground trying to remove the spear from its eye.

"ANGUS! ANGUS!" screamed Hew, mounted up again and riding up as close to the elephant as he dared, "YE HAVE TO KILL IT!"

"What do ye think I'm trying to do!?!?" snapped Angus back.

"NAE ANGUS! IT'S LEADING THE OTHERS! KILL IT! IT'S LEADING THE OTHERS!" Hew shouted in explanation, "KILL IT AND THE REST WILL SCATTER!"

Angus turned about and looked behind him, spotting the surviving Elephants that were still causing destruction amongst the Scottish and Timurids who were struggling just to fight each other.

"CANNON!" shouted Angus as inspiration struck, spotting the mounted cannon at the head of the basket. He grabbed it with a huge grin on his face... which faded when he realized he had no idea how to make it fire. Cursing, he shoved it down as far as it could go, only to discover that it didn't move low enough to be able to fire into the elephant's head (or into the driver who was supposed to be there), and he cursed angrily, "WHO THE MADE THE TIMURIDS SMART?!?"

"ANGUS! KILL IT!" screamed Hew.

"I'll kill ye," muttered Angus angrily to himself, then looked down and saw the oil lying alongside the shots used as ammunition for the cannons, and inspiration struck again. Reaching down, he grabbed the flasks of oil in a heap, lifting them up and then began tossing them one by one at the elephant, onto its head, its back, its sides and all around the basket. It bellowed in surprise as flasks broke against its body and oil began to run all the way down it, twisting about in circles looking for its attacker. It slammed into the midst of the herd that had been following it seeking guidance, sending the Timurid riders flying from their necks and backs, its tusks goring into their sides.

"ANGUS!?! WHAT ARE YE DOING!?!!" cried Hew.

"KILLING IT, YE STUPID BASTARD!" laughed Angus, lighting the torch that the Timurid cannoneer had used to fire his cannon. He lifted the torch high and grinned happily, "I'll see you in hell, elephant! NOW BURN! BURN YE BASTARD!"

He dropped the torch and oil ignited, the elephant screaming in terror as it was engulfed, flames shooting up all around Angus, casting a demonic light on his face as he stood at the centre of the inferno roaring with laughter, and shouting the same two words over and over again, "I WIN! I WIN! I WIN!"

"HOLD! HOLD!" screamed Daidukul, trying desperately to maintain the formation of his men. Their elephants were dead, the Scottish were slowly gaining the upper hand on the Timurid Infantry, and now Daidukul could see the dreaded Scottish Cavalry - led by their King and Prince - moving back into formation and preparing to ride against them, "ONGIRAN AND SHAKRUKH WILL REINFORCE US SOON! JUST HOLD!"

The Timurids would have if they could, but the Scottish gave them no choice in the matter.



"DRIVE THEM BACK! DRIVE THEM BACK!" roared Domnall, riding at the head of the army with Aodh by his side, Patrick and Edward following close behind, "DRIVE THEM BACK TO THEIR BROTHERS, AND THEN DRIVE THEM ALL BACK TO THE MOUNTAINS! WE WILL CAST THESE HEATHENS OUT OF SCOTLAND AND TEACH THEM WHAT IT MEANS TO GO TO WAR WITH THE SCOTTISH! DRIVE THEM BACK!"

And at the behest of their King, the Scottish did just that.



Domnall and Aodh pushed the Timurids back, driving them before them until Daidukul was reunited with Ongirran and Shakrukh, whose own forces were being driven back by Hew Mar, Dougall and Edmund Besat. The two Timurid forces combined and pushed north back towards the mountains, hoping to block at least one point of access for the Scottish.

"Angus?" Domnall asked Hew as they merged their armies together and began marching towards the Timurids.

"Killed a bloody elephant singlehandedly," Hew said, shaking his head, "It went down and the rest went berserk, broke in all different directions. We killed the ones that got near us, the Timurids mostly just ran from the ones that broke through their ranks.... he set fire to it while he was on it, my King, he died to break the Timurids' advantage."

"He was a true soldier," grunted Domnall, closing his eyes for a moment, "And nae the only good man to fall this day."







So many had fallen, and despite it all, there were still thousands of Timurids to kill.



"Now what?" Edward of Shetland asked, "Is it time, Aodh?"

"Nae yet, lad," smiled Aodh, "They hold the higher ground, and they dinnae want to surrender it... but they ken they cannae stay there forever. They'll try to pretend they can negotiate from a position of strength, but we all ken how desperate their situation is. Their only hope is that we cannae bear to lose any more of our men."

"And can we?" Edward asked.

Aodh simply smiled, and said nothing.

"SKOT-TISH!" cried Ongirran, after a heated argument with his two fellow surviving Captains, his voice carrying clearly over the expanse between his forces and the Scottish, "WE OFFER YOU WHAT WE HAVE NEVER OFFERED BEFORE! OUR MERCY!"

"Mercy," muttered Domnall, sitting too tall in his saddle, his face set too grimly, though only Aodh noticed. To the rest of the Scottish, their King simply sat tall and resolute on his horse.

"MANY OF OUR BROTHERS HAVE FALLEN TODAY! AND MANY OF YOURS HAVE DONE THE SAME!" continued Ongirran, who had been chosen to speak because he had the best use of English, "WE HAVE TESTED OURSELVES AND FOUND EQUALS TODAY HERE, I THINK! LET THAT BE AN END TO IT! WE WILL ALLOW YOU TO LEAVE THE FIELD OF BATTLE WITH YOUR LIVES INTACT! YOU WILL NOT ATTEMPT TO FOLLOW US THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS! LET THERE BE PEACE BETWEEN SCOTLAND AND THE EMPIRE OF TIMUR!"

The Scottish bayed and shouted out insults in reply, but Domnall and Aodh sat quietly, the one grim-faced and the other smiling, and Edward of Shetland looked at both wondering what the answer would be. Ongirran was obviously wondering as well, and did not have the patience to wait long.

"YOUR NUMBERS ARE GREAT, BUT NOT GREAT ENOUGH TO GUARANTEE YOUR VICTORY! CHOOSE PEACE! CHOOSE AN END TO A WAR NEITHER SIDE CAN WIN WITHOUT GREAT LOSS!"

The Scottish broke out in angry insults, denials and derogatory claims about Ongirran's mother, but when their King spoke, they silenced.

"AYE! PEACE!" cried Domnall, and his voice to Aodh was the clear, strong voice of Domnall as a young man, hearty and strong, and his heart broke, knowing that what he had suspected since pulling Domnall out of the pile of corpses was true. He closed his eyes for a moment and lowered his head, and then raised it and watched with pride as Domnall continued, "I WILL GIVE YE PEACE! I WILL GIVE YE THE PEACE MY FATHER AND UNCLE GAVE EGYPT! I WILL GIVE YE THE PEACE THAT THEY AND I GAVE THE MONGOLS! I WILL GIVE YE THE PEACE I GAVE PUCCIO! THE PEACE MY BROTHER GAVE THE SICILIANS! THE PEACE WE GAVE THE SPANISH! THE PEACE I GAVE THE DANISH, THE VENETIANS, THE HUNGARIANS, THE PORTUGUESE, THE ROMANS AND THE POLISH! I WILL GIVE YE THE PEACE OF THE GRAVE, AND THE WORLD WILL BE A BETTER PLACE FOR IT!"

The assembled Scottish let loose a mighty roar of approval, and Ongirran spat on the ground in disgust. The great tumult died down and the Scottish Infantry began to stomp their feet in time, shaking the ground even more than the elephants had before them, chanting the name, "CANMORE! CANMORE! CANMORE!"

"They are mad," hissed Ongirran, "They may kill us, but we will cripple their armies in the process.... do they think we will fall like wheat before a scythe?"

As if in answer, Domnall Canmore lifted his great horn from his side and pressed his lips against it, blowing a great blast that rose over the chanting Scotsmen, silencing them momentarily. And in the silence that followed, a distant blast sounded in response, and then another, and then another.

"NO!" gasped Ongirran in horror, "NO!"

Domnall had sounded his horn, and Scotland's reserve armies had come in response to the call.





All thoughts of honor, dignity or self-esteem fled from the Timurids at the sight of thousands upon thousands of fresh Scottish soldiers marched on them from the East and the West. They turned and ran, together only because there was only one way to run - north into the mountains.

And at Domnall's command, the Scottish gave chase.







"RIDE! RIDE!" screamed Ongirran as he saw his men slaughtered, "INTO THE MOUNTAINS!"

"HEW! GIVE CHASE!" roared Domnall, sitting still in his horse watching the end of the Timurids, sweat beginning to run freely down his face and his knuckles turning white as he clutched more firmly to the saddle, "DINNAE LET THEIR CAPTAINS ESCAPE!"

Hew nodded and spurred his horse, his men following as they rode past the slaughter of the unmounted Timurids and up the steep slopes of the mountain after Ongirran, Shakrukh and Daidukul.





"I should be there on the frontline with the-" Domnall started, but Aodh quieted him with a hand placed gently on his wrist.

"Domnall," Aodh said, sadly looking his brother directly in the eyes, "Ye've done enough, let the men finish this."

Domnall hesitated for a moment, and then let down his guard for a brief second, and in that moment he seemed to age by decades and become the old man that by right the years should have made him by now, "Aye Aodh, ye have the right of it."

The two brothers sat on their horses, side by side, and watched the mighty Timurid army brought low.





As the battle waged on the lower slopes of the mountains, to the south, amongst the thousands of dead a single Scotsman stood over his fallen foe, his helm removed to reveal a face not even a mother could love, twisted by scars, burns and a brutal mind. His foe dwarfed him even in death, its great bulk lying on its side, even more burnt and scarred than the Scotsman, who by all rights should have been dead himself. He'd been tossed clear of the monster when it had fallen into its burning, screaming death throes, knocked unconscious and laying as if dead for the last hour as the battle had moved on without him. He meant to rejoin the battle soon enough, but first he meant to mark the passing of his foe, even if it wasn't human.

"Ye were nae bad," the Scotsman told the elephant's corpse before hauling himself up into the saddle of the horse he'd found wondering aimlessly amongst the dead, "But ye'd nae met a Scotsman before."

And Angus the Mauler rode away from the beast, to rejoin his King in ending it's former masters.



The battle had waged from dawn to dusk, and in total over 10,000 men had died, thousands of horses and several hundred elephants. The Timurids efforts to break up the Scottish army had succeeded only for a few hours, and for the bulk of the day the Scottish had been united and kept the Timurids on the run. Now, as the sun set and darkness began to spread, the last of the Timurids under the command of Ongirran were making their final desperate effort to escape back into the mountains.

But the Scottish did not stop coming.





Ongirran was dragged by the Scottish to their King and Prince, his eyes widened as he looked over the field of battle their position afforded them, showing to the last few score Timurids being shepherded into place by the Scottish for a final stand against the mountainside.

"Grant me an honorable death!" spat Ongirran angrily at who he took to be the Khan, suspecting the bearded man sitting sweating and seemingly swooning in place on his horse to be some weakling noble along for the ride, "There is no gain to keeping me prisoner."

"Nae, there is nae," grunted the sweating man, and Ongirran looked into his eyes and realized his mistake, seeing the true power in this man.

"You are the Kanmor Khan?" he asked.

"We will let you go," Domnall said by way of reply, "You will take a message to Tamerlane for us."

"What message?" demanded Ongirran, the revelation he would live returning some of his confidence.

"Watch," the man beside Domnall - Aodh - said, "Ye'll soon understand."

Aodh rode forward a few feet, looking out over the battlefield where the Timurid Infantry was packed tightly together now, just as he'd wanted.

"HEAR ME!" he cried, his voice carrying to the Timurids, the Scottish hearing his words and falling back to put distance between them and their foe, "THIS BATTLE IS OVER! THE TIMURIDS HAVE LOST! SCOTLAND IS VICTORIOUS! THERE IS NAE TO BE GAINED BY US KILLING YOU NOW! I WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND THAT!"

"Edward," Aodh said, turning to his Great Nephew.

"Aye, Uncle?" asked Edward of Shetland, whose Father's Brother had been Aodh's greatest friend, and whom Aodh meant to turn into a great man.

"Now."

Edward smiled with relief, and turned and gave the order he'd been waiting all battle for. He'd thought it would come against the elephants, or when the battle was at its most pitched... and then he'd thought the order would never come.... The order to bring forward the Mongols.

And their rocket launchers.



"The message for your Emir," Aodh sneered down at Ongirran, who had watched agape as all that was left of the Timurids were wiped out by rockets fired by men likely distantly related to them by blood, wiped out to a man in the most inhumane, brutal way possible, "Is that there are nae survivors, nae second place when it comes to war with Scotland. Ye message is that we ken ye exist now, and we ken where ye live, and Scotland brings peace to our enemies."

"The peace of the grave," finished Domnall Canmore coldly, "Now be gone from my sight, dung, return to ye master and give him our message - the Timurids are dead, they just dinnae ken it yet."

Faction Destroyed

Timurids



The long legacy of these people has at last come to an end by your hand! Celebrations held in honour of your glorious conquest of their dominion erupt throughout the kingdom, with everyone from prince to pauper toasting your righteous reign!



Mounted men hauled Ongirran away, preparing to take him to the mountains and set him on his way back to his Master. Whether he survived the journey or not did not bother the Canmores, the message would be clear to Timur-i-Lenk regardless of whether it was delivered or not.... and Aodh Canmore had weightier things on his mind.

Domnall.

"Gather around me, ye Generals!" Domnall ordered as all around them, as far as the eye could see, Scotsmen let loose gusty roars and cheers and danced about as they realized that finally the great battle was over, "I have words for ye!"

They gathered to join him, men trusted to lead soldiers even if Domnall no longer knew them all personally, as he once had. There were his kin - Aodh joined by their cousin Aed, who had been one of those held in reserve. Those as close or closer than kin - Hew Mar, Dougall the Unstoppable, even battered and scarred Angus the Mauler who had surprised them all by riding back into battle having survived the burning death throes of an elephant. Those directly related to him through marriage - Patrick the Chivalrous, Edward of Shetland. Those whose names he had known only by letter and report before meeting for this battle - Lulach Erskyn, Edmund Besat, Nevin Campbell and so many more.

They followed his lead and dismounted, and finally it was too much for him and his body gave way, and he would have crumpled to the ground if Aodh had not been there to catch him, and lower him to the ground as his Generals cried out in alarm and the cheering soldiers surrounding them fell into a shocked silence.

"...my body is broken," Domnall managed, nodding with gratitude to Aodh, "My men sacrificed themselves for me, and earned me a few more hours, and my will held me together so their sacrifice would nae be in vain.... but I will nae see another sunrise."

"My King, dinnae say su-" started Hew, but Aodh shook his head and silenced the General, and Domnall smiled, wincing and betraying the pain he'd been fighting through since Aodh had pulled him from the corpses of his bodyguard.

"I. I never had sons," Domnall grunted, feeling his broken body grinding together, almost as if the will that had held him together had been doing the same to his body, "I have nae male heir, and I will nae let my death fracture a Kingdom I spent my life stitching together. I was made for war, but all I ever wanted was peace.... and so I used war to bring the peace of the grave to our enemies, and created a world that I could nae rule.... but others could.... Aodh, Aodh is my heir, Aodh will be ye King, and he will groom a man - be he Canmore or not - to be his heir, and maintain peace for the Empire my Father and Uncle began and I finished."

"Domnall, ye've done more for Scotland than.... I'll have ye Sainted, I'll demand it.... ye..." started Aodh, crying openly now. But Domnall shook his head and silenced him, coughing harshly and bringing up blood.

"Edward survived his final battle," sighed Domnall after Aodh wiped the blood from his mouth, and then amazingly the King began to laugh, which turned into a hacking cough as he lay in Aodh's arms, "I'm so proud of the man ye became Aodh, and Father would be too.. and Uncle... but the story of my death is the story of my life.... I was nae Edward Canmore."

"Aye," smiled Aodh, tears streaming down his cheeks, holding his dying brother close, "Ye were better."

Faction Leader Killed

King Domnall the Saint



Our noble ruler has been slain by our most wretched enemy! Those who have felled our great leader should suffer our retribution, which should be nothing but swift and decisive!



New Faction Leader

King Aodh the Scarred



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.



Chapter 74

What had once been Timurids ran in terror across the snow, untouched by the cold in their fear, pushing their exhausted bodies beyond their limits in their desperate, futile effort to escape.

And the Scottish followed.



Khan Horkhudagh had thought he'd escaped the wrath of the Scottish and the slaughter of the greatest army the Persians had ever raised. He had convinced 1000 men to flee in dishonor rather than face sure destruction at the hands of King Domnall. As Ongirran and the others had ridden to face the Scottish, Horkhudagh had pushed the men back up through the mountains into the snow-covered lands of what had once been Polish lands, and Russian before that.

And they'd found the Scottish waiting for them.

The new Scottish King - Aodh - had taken 1400 of his men from the 10,000 left from the great battle with the Timurids and ridden around the mountains to where Eoin Makartane had told him Horkhudagh would likely emerge, and the Master Spy had been proven right once again. The Scottish had descended on the Timurids as they emerged from the mountains and devastated them, and less than 300 had managed to escape the carnage. The Scottish hadn't let up, hounding them across the snowy fields, pushing them relentlessly, cutting them down in 1's and 2's, breaking their spirits till they were barely men anymore, reduced to near mindless animals.

Until finally they could run no more, and those who had survived the culling fell to their knees to beg for mercy.



"Mercy?" growled Aodh, his voice dripping with contempt, "Where is ye Khan? Where is the man ye worms call ye leader?"

Desperate to curry favor with the man they thought of as "Kanmor Khan", scores of men pointed at the Khan, who had tried to disguise himself in simple Timurid clothing like the other men... as if the softness of his body would not give his identity away. Aodh pointed at the terrified Horkhudagh, and he was dragged before the King, who stepped down from his mount and removed his helm, grey hair the only sign of age in his face. At 56 years old, Aodh felt in his prime, and the rage and contempt he felt for the Timurid before him overshadowed any fatigue the long chase had brought to his body.

"Stand up," Aodh commanded, and when the terrified Khan remained on his knees, he repeated the order with a roar, causing the Timurid to scramble to his feet.

"Draw ye blade," Aodh ordered, and the Timurid stood blinking in confusion.

"DRAW YE BLADE, SWINE!" screamed Aodh, stepping forward menacingly, and Horkhudagh backed away in fright, "DRAW YE BLADE OR I WILL GUT YE WHERE YE STAND!"

Visibly weeping, Horkhudagh draw his blade from his side with a shaking arm, and held it out before him, eyes twisted shut and head turned away. All eyes were on he and Aodh now, Scottish and Timurid alike, and Aodh twisted his lips in a sneer.

"Attack me," he hissed.

"I...I can't!" moaned Horkhudagh, and moaned in humiliation as his bladder released, "You'll kill me!"

"ATTACK ME!" roared Aodh, and Horkhudagh let out a scream, a mixture of humiliation, terror and rage and charged at the Scottish King. Aodh slapped the blade from his hand contemptuously, and drove his palm into Horkhudagh's throat, lifting him up off of the ground and crashing into the snow. The Scottish King instantly dropped to his knees beside the Khan, grabbing his arm and twisting it up behind his back, forcing Horkhudagh's face into the snow.

"Pathetic," he hissed, "That ye should live when my Brother is dead. That ye should run from the men ye were supposed to lead, and allow them to die defending a nation that YE are supposed to lead. A King, a Khan, a General, a Nobleman.... whatever their place, a commander of men should fight on the frontline with those men, and ye ran.... ye are nae a man, ye are swine, a pig nae worthy of the honor of a blade."

He twisted the Khan around, the man coughing and spitting the snow that had clogged his mouth and throat clear. Grabbing the Khan's arm by the wrist, he pulled it high and tight and wrenched it, dislocating his shoulder. Horkhudagh screamed, then Aodh slammed his palm against the elbow and shattered the joint, and the Khan's scream shattered with it, becoming a hissing exhale of air as the effort of screaming was countermanded by his mind trying to comprehend the pain he was feeling.

"Ye are nae a man," Aodh hissed, and his voice was flat and dead, his face blank and emotionless, sending a chill through even his own men, "Ye dinnae deserve anything but the most humiliating death."

Slowly, methodically, and with the same fixed expression on his face, the new King of Scotland proceeded to shatter Horkhudagh's limbs. The Khan's spine arched and his shattered limbs weakly twitched as much they could, a high pitched keening emanating from his mouth now, and Aodh shoved him back down. The King grabbed a handful of snow from the ground and jammed it into Horkhudagh's mouth, then another and another, filling his mouth, throat and nose with snow, holding his head down. Horkhudagh tried desperately to writhe his head about and spit the snow out, but with Aodh weighting him down and his limbs shattered, he was as weak and helpless as a newborn babe. Aodh jammed more and more snow in, until finally Horkhudagh's pathetic struggles weakened, slowed and finally stopped.

The Khan was dead.

Aodh stood slowly, viewing his handiwork, and then spat onto the corpse before staring around at the horrified Timurid prisoners.

"Kill them," he grunted, and turned and walked away as they wailed in despair and made final lunges for freedom, only to be cut down within moments by their captors. The Scottish King returned to his horse and pulled himself into his saddle, turning to stare at the Generals he had brought with him.

"Well?" he asked, challenging them to question his actions.

"He bought it on himself," said Edward of Shetland, looking sick to his stomach and meeting his Great-Uncle's eyes.

"It was cruel, but a necessary lesson," Hew Mar noted, "My Father always said making an example of a troublesome bastard was a necessity in battle."

"It was needless," Patrick Makfulchiane - Domnall's son-in-law and well known for his chivalry - grunted, shaking his head, "But ye are the King, it was ye decision to make."

"Aodh Canmore," said Angus the Mauler, eyes sparkling with admiration, "Ye are my King.... and it is YE who are the Mauler."

Army Details

King Aodh the Mauler Age: 56
Faction Leader

Command: ★★★☆☆
Dread: ★★★☆☆
Authority: ★★★★☆
Piety: ★★☆☆☆

Retinue

- Mentor
- Military Engineer
- Pagan Magician
- Intrepid Explorer
- Swordbearer
- Veteran Warrior
- Siege Engineer
- Tax Farmer

Traits

- Legacy of Chivalry
- Vision of Prophecy
- Generally Loyal
- Night Fighter
- Promising Tactician
- Holier than Thou
- Conforming
- Feels Honoured
- Brutally Scarred
- Disrespects Prisoners
- Courageous
- Merciless Mauler
- Wall Taker
- Poor with Taxes
- Mean Leader
- Promising Commander
- Faction Leader

My dearest Joan,

I thank you for your kind letter regarding the death of your Uncle Domnall, I only wish you could have traveled to Cairo with me for the funeral, if only to see our burial chamber within the Great Pyramid. The seal there (which I have described many times to you) remains a mystery to me, but as my time on this Earth draws closer to its inevitable end, I have come to realize that not every mystery can be solved. Indeed some mysteries like the appearance of our family crest inside a sealed chamber from 1000 years in the past I have happily put down to further proof of the divine. Such proofs are everywhere to be seen, but accepted by so few who cry out for God to appear before them.

Domnall's body was placed on the great stone under the niche where I once placed Nectan's ashes so long ago. I placed one brother's remains there even as I met a man who would become as close to me as a brother, and now I have returned years later to place another brother's remains, and all are gone now, I have no brothers left whether by blood or by friendship. But I have my daughters, my grandchildren, I have Eoin who is - if not the brother Nevin was - a respected confidant. And I have you, my beloved daughter, who has proved herself so many times better than any son.... would that you could be my heir! A Canmore Queen of Scotland would be a wonder to behold indeed, and it is to my great regret that the world is not ready for such a thing as of yet.

I have, as you have likely heard by now, set about the governance and security of the far-flung corners of our Empire (indeed, our world now). Domnall destroyed the great Timurid army, but their "Emir" Tamerlane remains alive in his own army, and we can ill afford to launch a campaign into the unknown lands to the East just yet. The world is apparently larger than we ever knew, but Domnall left me an Empire finally at peace, and I would secure that peace before setting out on a new war. I strongly feel whoever leads our Nation to war once more, it will not be me.

I have given Angus control of the wintry Northeastern lands, and he has taken the city of Moscow as his base of operations to execute the command I gave him. He will forge handpicked soldiers into steel, a mixture of the frozen climate and Angus' training will create a first line of defense against any further invaders from the East, should Tamerlane ever raise another army to threaten our lands.

To Hew Mar I have gifted command of the United Kingdom, our ancestral homeland. He is returning to Edinburgh which had been sorely neglected in terms of Governance since Adam took control of Toulouse. Hew tells me he is done with war, and means to settle in, take a wife, have children and grow fat and boring and learn to become fascinated with finance and taxation rather than maneuvers and flanking. I wish him nothing but the best.

My cousin Aed continues his rule of the desert lands conquered by my Father and Uncle, along with his much loved wife (oddly enough another of my cousins). He too has no desire for War, and told me he hopes that the Timurids was the last he will see of combat. It is my desire as well as his that he shall die an old man, peacefully. Aed is a good and kind man, the Canmore that everyone forgets as he continues his quiet, peaceful rule. Long may he live.

I shall return soon to Rome to take up once again the reins of Governance, and continue the silent work that was meant to be Nectan's. You shall continue in your role of Governance at my side, my most trusted and worthy daughter, and we shall ensure that the peace Domnall bought our Empire at the cost of his life is strengthened. From Rome the world can be ruled, but it pleases me that Hew Mar, Angus and Aed are there to rule in the North, East and South. That, of course, leaves the lands to the West, those areas once known as France and Spain. It is my hope that one day Edward of Shetland or young Kirk Canmore will take up that role. Edward has some experience now, but the people would be more accepting of a Canmore, even if his Father was a cruel Governor. Kirk will become a man soon, and I shall be interested to see what kind of man he becomes.

Yours with love,

Aodh Canmore.

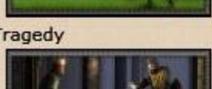
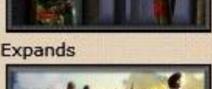
Faction Announcements

The following events have taken place within your royal family:

- 

Kirk Canmore
- 

Algune of Shetland
- 

Kyle the Balleol
- 

Raghnait Canmore
- 

Edward of Shetland
Pagan Magician: -2 Piety

Uncle,

I am concerned about your recent letter outlining proposed methods of dealing with those disaffected souls who have been protesting on the streets of Toulouse. When I came to my manhood and became Governor of this great City, I did so with the determination that I would rule differently to the way my Father did. His use of fear even more taints my own rule, as the people fear I will reinstate the punishments Father used to maintain order. It is my belief that undertaking a series of civil projects will bring the peoples of Toulouse together, and using inclusion to give them a stake in their own city will breed gratitude - more importantly, it will be gratitude earned. Let the disaffected protest my rule, they will only look the more crazed and foolish when my civic projects show the peoples of Toulouse that I will be a just ruler, and that it is the rule of law that governs this city, not the rule of privilege or birthright.

I have been looking through the city's finances and discovered several untapped sources of income that can be used to finance the project, so it will engender no additional cost or request for monies from Rome.

More to the point, the methods you proposed indicate to me that the infamous Spy Network credited with aiding Scotland's past victories remains in effect, and that agents now spy on Scottish citizens. I am deeply troubled by the connotations of this surveillance going on without either my consent or knowledge, and would appreciate some reassurance from you regarding this.

With respect,

Kirk Canmore.



Kirk Canmore
Family member

Age: 16

Command ★☆☆☆☆

Chivalry ☆☆☆☆☆

Loyalty ☆☆☆☆☆

Piety ☆☆☆☆☆

Retinue

None

Traits

Refined Tastes

Dreaded Father

Deep Pockets

Mean with Money

A Sense of Justice

Natural Commander

Has made a habit of finding ways to acquire money that other people will not realise should be theirs.

10% penalty on tax income

3	3	3	3	3	1
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This man's sense of justice is evident when he speaks on matters both legal and moral.

+1 Chivalry, +1 to law (improves public order)

A natural leader of men, well suited to military command.

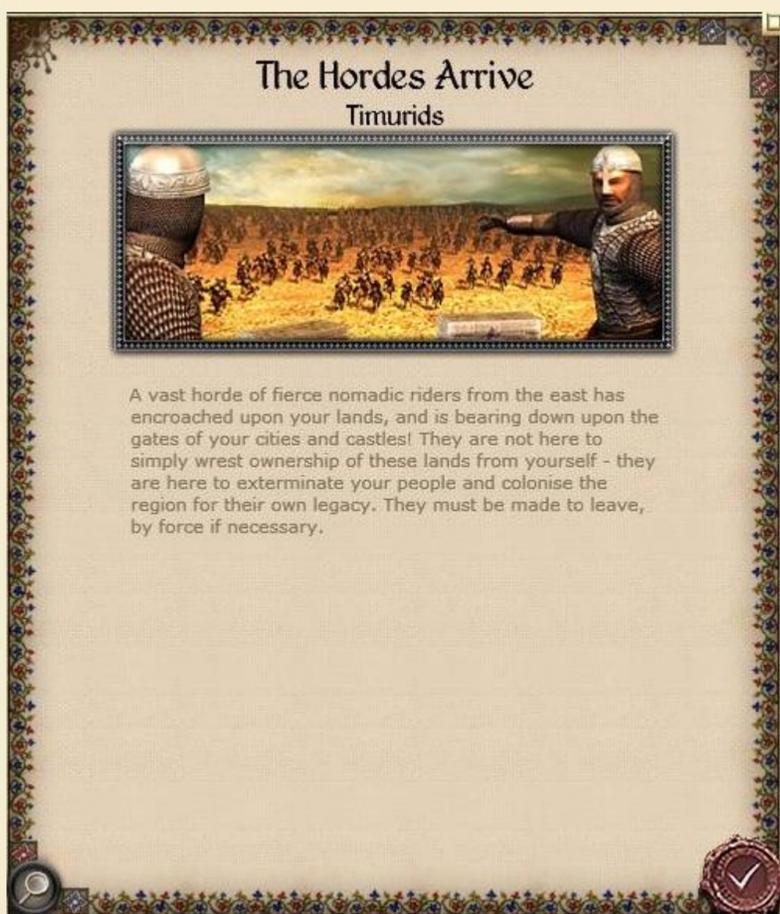
+2 Command

3	3	3	3	3
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Dere King Aodh

traineng go well it is gud to haev men wanna fight they maek me prideproud soem are gren but i whip them into shaep gettin news they say Timurids comming bak we got my best scouts look into it i coud yous moar offices Besat not bad Shetland kwite goud but they dont haev the knack to enspire menand I need a secon wish you coud return t fight but you King you haev to rule I dont envy you this I right in person because this between you and me I need a canmore hear command secund army the men hav been led by Canmores for every grate battel but you are King and Aed is not the rite man I dont know Kirk is he moar liek Domnall and Edward or Adam and David you tell me King I jus a soldier.

Your Servant Angus



Dearest Mother,

I have heard you had taken ill, I hope this letter finds you well.

The former lands of Russia and Poland are infamous for their frozen climates, but knowing and experiencing are two different things. I found it almost impossible to move the first few days of my posting here, but if The Mauler is anything, he is a motivator. After explaining to me quite casually of the horrible things that he intended to do to me if I did not get "my arse into motion" I learned that the secret of this horrible place is to start moving and never stop. Once the blood is pumping, keep it pumping, and you can - if not entirely ignore it - remove the worst bites of the cold.

My experience in leading men in small sorties against pathetic rebel bands too stupid to enter into the diplomacy I offered them was a joke, I see now. Angus instructs not only in the traditional forms of war, but in the realities of warfare. The use of inspiration to drive men to superhuman feats, the way to sap the morale of the enemy so they half-defeat themselves. It is fascinating from a theoretical standpoint, but I wonder how I will fare when it comes to the practical applications.

It is my hope it will not come to this, The Mauler has singled out myself and several other nobleborn he seems to believe have potential as leaders. His way of inspiring us to become better soldiers, commanders and eventually Generals appears to be by running us raggard, screaming insults at us and making us fight each other in brutal hand to hand combat because "if you lose your bloody sword, don't expect the enemy to give you another one... unless it's in the belly." He does take us drinking though, and it is fascinating to hear the man hold forth on his primitive beliefs regarding the way the world works, and I must admit to beginning to feel a connection and empathy with my fellow "Generals". Angus is a primitive, crass and brutal man, but what he does works.

More news filters through of a possible fresh invasion force of the Timurids. Only rumor and speculation reaches us here, my Uncle's highly touted Spy Network operates in secret from us "little people", but one such rumor is that Tamerlane is on his deathbed, and has sent a hastily gathered force in the hopes of gaining some small victory against Scotland to avenge his bitter humiliation of several years ago, when Domnall and Aodh destroyed his men. Angus still talks fondly of that battle when in his cups, and claims to long to eat elephant steaks once more before he dies.

Again, I hope this letter finds you in better health, I send you these words along with my love.

Kirk.



My King,

As you have no doubt heard by now, our intelligence proved correct regarding the fresh invasion force of Timurids. Hastily placed together and barely half the number of the original invasion force led by Timur the Pious, they are nevertheless all proven men devoted to the cause of gaining some kind of victory - no matter the size - against the Scottish. Tamerlane is indeed on his deathbed, and his humiliation at the hands of Domnall (and yourself) all those years ago burns him deeply. He has allowed the Empire he crafted together to fall apart as he focused on rebuilding a force to return to Scottish lands, proving that your own conviction to focus on maintaining the peace than preparing again for war was the correct one.

The Khan leading this invasion force was far better suited than Horkhudagh, a monster by the name of Shahrukh. They attempted to lay siege to the walls of Sarkel and use their artillery to smash through the walls, but were completely unprepared for the armies we had waiting in ambush. Angus crushed them against the walls and Steaphan Cullane led the forces inside Sarkel outside to create a fresh wall of death, and Shahrukh's men were obliterated. The Khan himself has wisely held back a small force and attempted to retreat into the wilderness, and young Kirk proved his worth by blocking his escape. It seems Angus' training has had the desired effect and honed Kirk's natural talent for command, he correctly predicted Shahrukh's plans and - against Angus' specific orders - led the men under his command into position to ambush the Khan. The fighting was pitched, and Kirk fought on the frontline with his men, displaying a worrying but familiar lack of concern for his own safety. Indeed, it is my understanding that Kirk would have been killed if not for the intervention of the Swiss Arnold von Winkelreid (please see my attached notes), who threw himself into harm's way to save Kirk.

I was greatly impressed with Kirk's post-battle speech, where he lauded the men for their bravery and insisted that they all be honored along with him when Angus tried to compliment the lad for the killing of Shahrukh. The men were all ready impressed enough by the fact he was a Canmore, now they are growing to love him. If he survives the upcoming battles against the rest of the Timurids, I see no reason why he should not grow into a tremendous leader of men.

I remain, as ever, Scotland's greatest friend and servant,

Eoin.

Retinue Expands

Kirk Canmore



An addition has been made to this person's entourage of followers. It is the nature of man to follow more remarkable people.

Arnold von Winkelried

A great Swiss war hero known for valiantly using his body to cast aside a wall of enemy pikes!
+2 Morale for all troops on the battlefield, +2 Command when attacking, +4 to your general's hitpoints (how many hits your general can take before dying)

Trait Increase

Kirk the Chivalrous
Proven Commander



This man has gained another Command star thanks to his battle prowess.
+3 Command



Aodh,

It is with a glad heart that I report the destruction of the Timurids. We drove their remaining men back as far as the mountainous border between Bulgar and the vast deserts from which they came, then killed them to a man.

As you know, since being promoted to Commanding General of the Scottish Forces here a year ago, I had attempted to engage in diplomacy with the scattered forces of Timurids. My predecessor and current Second - Angus "The Mauler" - claimed I was wasting my time and I must admit that he appeared correct. The Timurids threw every attempt at diplomacy back in my face, but I persevered in the hope of saving the lives of men dying at the whim of a dying madman living a life of luxury in the far Eastern reaches of the eternal desert. They would have none of it, and now they are dead. Justice has been served, death had been brought to men who refused the chance at life, and I sleep easy at night despite being personally responsible for the deaths of thousands. I made every effort to come to this outcome by less bloody means, but in the end I achieved the inevitable - Scotland's borders are once again safe.

The Spy you sent me - Makartane - tells me that Tamerlane is dead himself, and that his Empire has fractured into warring factions who are likely to spend decades or even centuries infighting, proving no threat to us. He also tells me that it has long been in your mind that once Scotland was secured from the Timurids, and your work in stabilizing the peace of the Empire Domnall left you was done, you intended to begin preparing armies to march East. I pray that day will not be soon, the wars that built our Empire were a necessary evil to protect our people, but now we are at no risk. If we are to explore, let us do so for the purpose of discovery. I spent much of my youth fascinated by the sea, and it is an obsession that has never truly left me. I want to know what is out there in the Eternal Western sea - we once thought the Eastern deserts were empty, and now we know better. The Shipbuilders in Caernarvon often talked of building a great fleet of vessels and sailing them into the unknown, but were always held back by their inability to find a crew willing to undertake the journey. Perhaps now in this time of peace, the spirit of discovery will be rekindled in the peoples of Scotland? Even if the sea is endless, there is still much to learn.... I have longed since I was a boy to understand why sails appear on the horizon before the rest of the ship? Once I thought it meant the Earth was curved, but then why do the oceans not recede?

The Empire has been at peace for years now, but I have known only War. I would like to think there will be more to my life than this.

Kirk.

Faction Destroyed

Timurids



The long legacy of these people has at last come to an end by your hand! Celebrations held in honour of your glorious conquest of their dominion erupt throughout the kingdom, with everyone from prince to pauper toasting your righteous reign!



Kirk,

As you have so often expounded to me in your letters, there is no true difference between a Noble and a Commoner outside of the opportunities afforded by birth. I have long believed that a man is born to a particular station because God wills it so, a concept alien to my own Father and perhaps to you as well.

Nevertheless, let me make this perfectly clear to you. I am your King, and though you are my nephew and the General of my greatest armies, you are still servant to the King. I have tolerated - even encouraged - your eccentricities and sometimes blasphemous beliefs because they have worked to enhance your work as a General, a soldier, a Governor and a man. But now you have gone too far, and forced me to abandon pretense and establish a clear delineation of our roles.

I am your King, and I have given you a command, and you will follow it. You defeated the Timurids, and secured the borders of the Scottish Empire. Now you - and Angus, Edward of Shetland, Edmund Besat and Steaphan Cullane beside you - will continue to train the armies you have and the fresh recruits I send you. When I give the command, you will march those armies over the mountains into then great Eastern deserts, and you will conquer the fractured remnants of the Timurid Empire. Then, if I allow it, you can return to more scholarly pursuits, and eventually when I die, perhaps it will be you who replaces me as King, and you can indulge in these flights of fancy about ships and sails and horizons.

Your **King**,

Aodh Canmore.

Kirk Canmore sat in Angus' spartan quarters, high in the palace of Moscow that the brutal "Mauler" had long since made his own. Edward of Shetland was with them, as was Edmund Besat, the three young men having bonded as friends during the violent and bloody days of their officer training under the fourth man in the room - Angus the Mauler.

Despite the supposed celebratory nature of this drinking session, the mood in the room was dark. The Timurids had been destroyed, something that Angus could say he had seen twice now, but their bravado and triumph had turned melancholy, as they discussed the frank letter the King had sent Kirk.

"Thi... thish ish it," slurred Kirk, "Thish will be my life, serving at war under the command of a bitter old man, a glorified errand boy."

"Who ar... who the heh you calling bitter!?" demanded Angus, and Kirk shook his head with a sigh.

"Not ye, ye useless drunk," he snapped, and Angus grinned sloppily before falling back into his chair, "Aodh... my Uncle.... he'sh... gonna send us East to kill the Timuridsh!"

"ELEPHAAAANTS!" roared Angus, throwing his arms wide but remaining in his cheer, laughing happily, "Besht time of my life, that bloody elephant."

The three young men stared wide-eyed at Angus, then burst into laughter. Angus grunted at them and hauled himself to his feet, staggering to the blazing fire and pulling open the crotch of his pants to piss into the flames, his urine sizzling and steaming, filling the room with an acrid stench that made the others gag and shout at him. Angus simply waved his arm dismissively back at them, ignoring them.

"We're... we're men," grunted Kirk finally, "Aodh finksh hesh sho sma... sho smart, playsh all the anglsh, buh wha he don.... wha he dinnae geh.... wha it ish...."

"we're nae toy soldiersh," muttered Edward of Shetland.

"ECSHACTLY!" cried Kirk, standing up from his seat and weaving before regaining his balance, "WE'RE NAE TOY SOLDIERSH!"

"We... We shoul be in control of our own livesh," muttered Edmund Besat, head lowered, hands clutching the mug near his ankles.

"I dinnae wantsh the desert, I wantsh the sea!" Kirk proclaimed, lifting his mug high, "I wantsh the unknown!"

"Let's hear it then, lad," Angus said, and as Kirk turned, he saw that the Mauler was nowhere near as drunk as he'd been making out.... just like Kirk himself. The young Prince of Scotland turned and looked back at his two drunken friends, and then back at Angus, whose permanently snarling face still conveyed a kindly, tolerant smile, "I'm interested in hearing it."

Kirk smiled at his unexpected ally, and began to outline his plan, one which would finally answer the question that had plagued him since childhood.

Why did the sails of ships appear on the horizon first?

The World is Round



Over the centuries several scholars have suggested that the world could be round, but most of them were burned at the stake as heretics, so the theory hasn't been particularly popular. However, with new advances in the fields of Astronomy, enough of the learned men of the world have accepted that the theory is well worth testing... Perhaps if someone were to establish a trade route to the far east by sailing west, they would both bring the debate to a close, as well as establish a trade lane that is most lucrative.

Aodh,

Likely you gave me up as dead long ago, perhaps this letter comes to you as a pleasant shock, or perhaps you curse that I yet live.

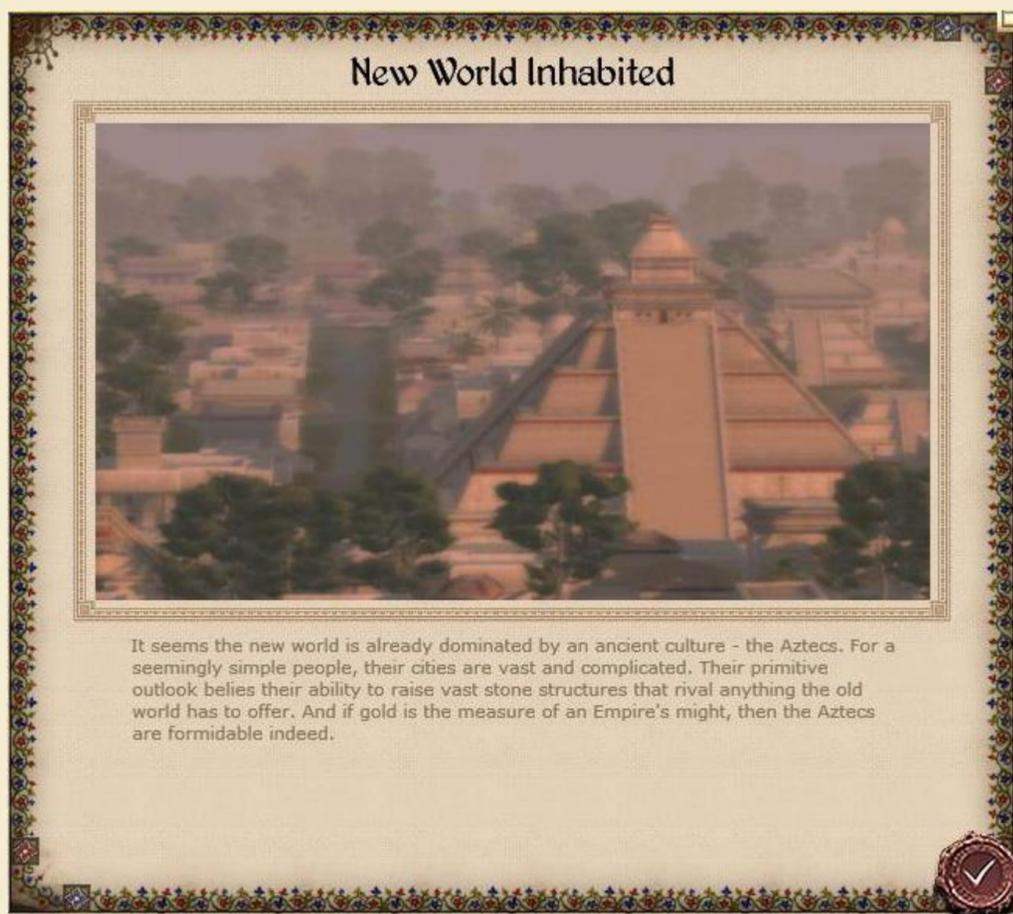
But live I do, on land in a sea once thought to be run unbroken to the great void at which our world sits in the centre, circled by a sun, the sum of all "God's" Creation. The great Carrack the shipbuilders at Caernarvon constructed took the army I commandeered west, west, ever onwards west till we despaired of discovering anything.... and then we found paradise.

The peoples of this place - they call it "Caribbean" - fell down and worshiped us as Gods when we first arrived. Angus, Edward and Edmund were all keen to exploit this, but I would not allow such a blasphemy (or a blatant exploitation) to continue. Even when we established that we were human, they were eager to fall under our rule, they consider us to be far in advance of themselves - in which they are correct - and so for the first time in years, Scotland has gained new land, which is remarkable considering we had conquered the "world" well over a decade ago.

They have told us of a large landmass to the South, and the strange peoples who live there. They claim they are men who can take the form of animals, and perform great and terrible magics. I am interested in seeing how their primitive beliefs will translate into reality. I have initiated diplomacy with the mainland, sending scouts who have reported back and made contact with the peoples of the land. I am hopeful we can establish proper diplomatic ties and an exchange of cultural ideas and concepts, for once Scotland will establish new trade routes and contact with another Nation without resorting to war.

Uncle, I know that your heart was set on expansion to the East, but I have discovered something that may finally convince you that this action I took was the correct one.

There are pyramids here, Aodh.



Eoin Makartane stepped off the boat onto the glorious, golden beach and felt the heat sink into his bones. He allowed a brief smile as he looked out over the crystal clear waters, then the beautiful vegetation running along the beach. Natives mixed casually with Scottish soldiers who had traveled here with Kirk Canmore with no knowledge that they were acting without consent of the King, but seemed completely at ease now despite surely being aware of that fact by now.

"Makartane," grunted a familiar voice, and Eoin nodded at Kirk as he stepped up to greet the spy, "Did ye enjoy the trip?"

"It was long and the view was constant, sea and sky, sky and sea," replied Eoin, "The King sends his greetings and also his relief to ken ye live.... and also this letter."

Kirk took the sealed letter from the spy and eyed it critically, before breaking the seal and reading the contents, his expression changing to a frown as he slowly shook his head.

"He believes that the pyramids are a sign from God as surely as that damnable crest in the Great Pyramid of Giza," spat Kirk in disgust, "He wants me to take control of the cities by force, and believes God will delay my diplomatic contacts long enough for me to receive this order."

"Have ye made diplomatic contact?" Eoin asked, a smile playing across his lips, indicating that despite being on a boat for so long, he knew the answer.

"Some strange disease riddled our men," grunted Kirk, "I did not deem it practical to meet with a foreign diplomat and have his first introduction to Scotland's fighting men be with invalids.... but that does nae mean God brought some disease down on us so we would be delayed long enough to be ordered to slaughter an alien nation! I have arranged to meet with a representative of Emperor Montezuma - Xolotl - within the day, and I **will** make a success of diplomacy! We will have trade and peace with these people! I am sick of Scotland being a plague of death and destruction! That was the old world, and this is the new!"

The natives and Scottish soldiers moving about the Prince and the Spy on the beach had stopped to stare, and Kirk cursed angrily and stormed away, crumpling the letter in his hand as he did.

Aodh may have been King, but Kirk had no intention of following what would be his final order to the Scottish Prince.

Aodh Canmore lay on his deathbed.

The Scottish King had lived to the age of 63, a year longer than his own Father, but now his body was failing, even as his mind remained as keen as ever. He lay in the huge, luxurious bed within his massive room within the Palace of Rome, alone now after ordering out his Physicians and servants, left with the one person in the world he truly loved and trusted.

His daughter, Joan.

"Would that I could have ye as my heir," he said, not for the first time, "Would that ye could be Queen of Scotland."

"And give up my delightful life of dinners, diplomats and fending off the advances of young men who think their good looks will drive me into a passion and marry them into the Royal Family?" smiled Joan, but it was tinged with sadness, as she held her Father's hand and felt the weakness of him, knowing he was not long for this world, "And besides, what happened to ye faith? Ye told me that God granted ye a final vision, that Kirk will prove his worthiness as ye heir."

"Aye, he will, I am positive of it," smiled Aodh, "But even so, ye would be a better ruler than he.... ye would have been a better ruler than me or Domnall, I'd wager."

"And Edmund?" she asked, smiling.

"Well there ye might have met ye match," Aodh chuckled, then coughed harshly and had to rest for several minutes to regather his strength.

"Ye think I underestimate Kirk's convictions, his concept of natural justice and the equality of all men," he said at last, surprising Joan, "Aye, I'm nae so old that I've turned blind, I ken ye concerns, but for all ye intelligence, my darling, ye never truly understood the one constant of my life. My faith has always sustained me, and my faith sustains me now. Through Father's death and Nectan's, being stricken by the plague, the loss of my ability to empathize and the way Domnall helped me regain it.... through it all, I have always had my faith, and I have it now."

The door to the lavish quarters opened, and Joan frowned in irritation as a messenger entered carrying a sealed envelope marked with the Canmore crest. She took it from him and he left with a shocked glance at his King, who lay breathing heavily, rasping for each breath.

"Open it, read it," he smiled, "It would nae have been brought here were it nae of vital importance, read me the contents - I know their message but nae the words."

She broke the seal, and extracted the letter, not surprised to see Kirk's signature at the base, but extremely surprised by the contents.

My King,

These people are savages!

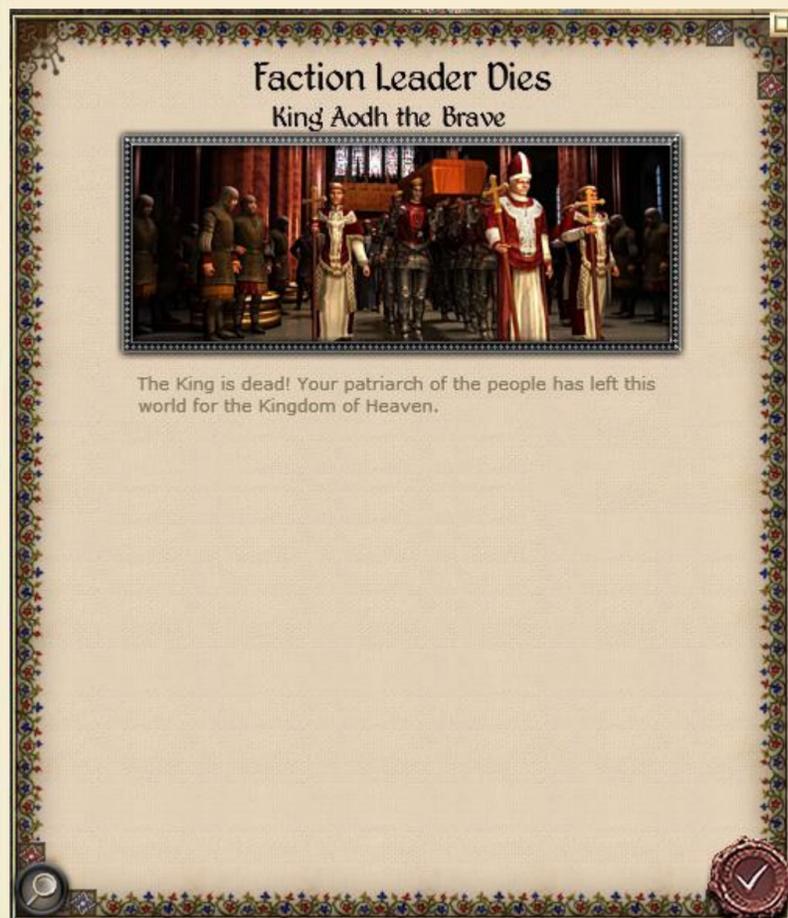
They worship animal spirits and demons, they build their great structures upon the broken backs of a servile slave class, and perform hideous pagan blood rites. They sacrifice humans taken from their own population! They hunt their own people for game and call it customary right! The streets of their cities run red with blood, their pagan rites are brutish abominations!

I cannot allow this travesty and injustice to continue, and I realize now my true purpose in life. I must bring civilization to these savages, and they respect only strength and power, like the Timurids they mistake death for honor.... well I shall bring them honor! I will claim these lands in the name of Scotland, and any other lands I find. The civilization I was raised in made me long to bring peace to the world, little realizing that our civilization was brought about in the Old World through war and sacrifice.... and so it shall be in the New World.

Yours,

Prince Kirk Canmore of Scotland.

"Faith," Aodh said, smiling blissfully as Joan finished reading the letter, and then his eyes went blank and his body completely settled, and Aodh Canmore passed on from the physical world, secure in the faith that had sustained him throughout his entire life.



New Faction Leader

King Kirk the Scarred



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.

The man who was unaware that he was now King of what was effectively the entire world sat on his horse of the great mainland, and stared at the army of the strange, savage people he had once hoped to make his allies, and now sought only to destroy.

Battle Deployment

Your forces attack an army of Aztecs



Your Forces

Scotland
★★★★★★★★★


King Kirk the Scarred
1907 men

Reinforcements: 0

None

Enemy Forces

The Aztecs
★☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

Xolotl
2651 men


Reinforcements: 0

None



Attempt a night attack



Trait Increase

King Kirk the Fearless

Has no Fear



This man is now lauded as a hero by all - an inspiration to those he leads into battle!

+2 Authority, +2 Morale for all troops on the battlefield

"Then let us kill them," grinned Angus, who had no idea that once Kirk discovered he was the new King of Scotland, would name the brutal, half-mad General as his heir, "Look at the crazy bastards, spiked bats and catsuits.... I could nae tolerate to let them live on general principles!"

And Kirk raised his sword, and started the destruction of the Aztec Empire.







Xolotl was on his knees, begging in his alien tongue not to be killed as his men were hunted down through the trees and Kirk Canmore slowly rode towards him, recognizing the Aztec from the disastrous negotiations in the Caribbean where the rough translations had first revealed to Kirk the extent of the dark, bloody rituals of the Aztecs. He stared into the eyes of the Scottish King, and in his face Xolotl saw the death of his people.

Army Details



King Kirk the Fearless
Faction Leader

Age: 23

<p>Command: 10 stars</p> <p>Chivalry: 10 stars</p> <p>Authority: 10 stars</p> <p>Piety: 10 stars</p>	<p>Retinue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Veteran Warrior  Arnold von Winkelried  Swordbearer
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Command
So bold and confident in command, this man could lead an angry mob to conquer an empire

Authority
Capable of making men willingly follow a cause to their demise

Spoken off throughout the known world as a walking embodiment of knightly virtues that all warriors should aspire to emulate.
+5 Chivalry, +2 Authority

Somewhere there is a line between bravery and foolishness... This man has crossed that line plenty of times.
+2 Authority, +2 Morale for all troops on the battlefield

Traits

- Expensive Tastes
- Dreaded Father
- Deep Pockets
- Hoarder of Wealth
- A Sense of Justice
- Natural Commander
- Great Commander
- Has no Fear
- Saint of Battle
- Confident Attacker
- Sanguinary
- Brutally Scarred
- Feels Honoured
- Night Fighter
- Quite Merciless
- Great Speaker
- Conforming
- Faction Leader

Authority: 10 stars

Spoken off throughout the known world as a walking embodiment of knightly virtues that all warriors should aspire to emulate.
+5 Chivalry, +2 Authority

Somewhere there is a line between bravery and foolishness... This man has crossed that line plenty of times.
+2 Authority, +2 Morale for all troops on the battlefield

"Please don't kill me! I can help you! Montezuma has gold! SO MUCH GOLD!" Xolotl squealed in his own language, "I CAN SHOW YOU WHE-"

"A gah-lah bala to ye too, laddie," grunted Kirk, and split open the man's head with his blade, before pulling it clear. He no longer had any interest in Xolotl, his thoughts were all ready on Huitzilihuitl, on Tlaxcala, Cholula, Nopaltzin, Tenochtitlan and Montezuma. On the new world.

Much like the Old, The New World.... would be Scotland's.



THE

END