

# HERALD OF STEEL

## Chapter 2 The Battle

"Keep those spears steady and march!" Alexander heard his commander Nestoras order as the 240-man phalanx slowly advanced on the open field to meet the opposing wall of spears.

Yes, this was a battlefield. A place where the coalition army of Cantagena was determined to defeat the Kingdom of Adhania once and for all.

"Shields up, protect your sides and ...thrust!" Nestoras led from the front as the two formations closed on each other.

Dust clouds were whipped up like a hurricane as and soon screams and howls drowned the battlefield as men driven by bloodlust tried to skewer one another.

Atop a hill, Agapios, a grizzled 60-year-old veteran and the leader of the Cantagena coalition hawkishly surveyed the kilometer open battlefield fenced with wooded trees. The coalition army outnumbered Adhania almost 3 to 1 and in such an open-pitched battle, victory seemed sealed to him.

"Look, even the king has decided to grace us with his presence." Agapois mockingly pointed to a man at the rear.

Atop a white horse, clad in golden armor with a large red feather sticking out from his helmet, was Amenheratf, the current ruler of Adhania.

"That mouse dares to call him the son of Ramuh with a puny army like that! We will soon parade his head throughout the streets of Cartagena." From his

side, Adapios's adjutant Samaras replied waving his sturdy hand, his voice filled with bloodlust and mockery.

He wasn't simply underestimating Adhania. But compared to Agapois's force of 50,000, the Adhanians numbered only about 20,000. And even those were mostly composed of the weak, old and infirm- local peasants forcefully conscripted, given a pointy stick and a wooden shield, and told to go and fight.

Not even a contest against the battle-hardened 30,000 Cantagenans and the 20,000 mercenaries.

While Agapios had arranged his troops in three echelons, Adhania struggled to make even one. The fact that the ruler of the most powerful nation on this side of the world was leading such a paltry force seemed comical to many.

"Don't disrespect the gods, Samaras." the deeply religious Agapios lightly chided him.

"And remember, had the 100,000-strong Adhanian army not been lured away by Tibias, we could not have so easily marched to the capital." Agapios reminded his younger subordinate.

"Yes, gotta give credits to the Tibiasians. They got balls to hold off Adhania with only 70,000 men." Samaras nodded his head, sincerely praising Tibiasian's courage. Not many would dare to face Adhania's elites outnumbered!

"That's why we must win today's battle! We must stop the king from reaching the capital and slay him here. Today, and now. He cannot be allowed to escape." Agapios announced his ultimatum with iron determination.

It took Agapios quite some cunning tactical maneuvering to get between the king and his capital, effectively trapping him. And now the prey would be finally slain.

"Sir, rest assured, with our forces and the enemy lured to our trap, victory is guaranteed. Even the son of Ramuh can't create soldiers out of thin air."

Samaras comforted the old man.

"Yes, you are right. Finally, Cantagena can get rid of this thorn once and for all." Agapios breathed a sigh of relief. Adhania had been the source of his nightmare for all forty years of his military service. It had cost him countless brothers and even his own wife and son.

"That's right sir. Today, Adhania will be puppeted and with its fall, the Exalos alliance will lose its biggest backer. Then, Cantagena can once again regain its throne as the hegemon of Thesos." Samaras answered with a wide smile, his voice overflowing with enthusiasm.

Agapios ignored his colleague's grand ambitions and then turned his gaze towards the bear-like man to his right.

"I paid good money for those 20,000 mercenaries, Damious. I hope your men know how to earn their keep." He icily reminded the tall, bearded, middle-aged man about his duties.

"Rest assured, sire. Fighting is the only way we know how to earn a living. We will fight come heaven or hell." Damious soothed his temperamental client. The tall, armored giant was chosen as the representative by the various mercenary groups and he spent the last few days constantly reassuring this grumpy general.

"For two and a half thousand tustas a month I expect it!!" Agapios sternly replied, making a point to remind Damious about the pay.

It had to be said that a regular mercenary was paid twelve to fifteen hundred tustas a month normally, two thousand tustas if the fighting was far away. Paying 20,000 mercenaries double the regular amount - two and a half

thousand tustas a month each meant that Cantagena and her allies were willing to empty their coffers for this war.

And in return, they wanted results. Agapios himself was under a lot of pressure from the senate to perform well, hence his ill-temper the last few days.

Today, however, Agapios's mood improved as he observed the battlefield. He believed with such a clear sky and open battlefield, and with the numerical superiority he held, he could counter any tactics the son of Ramuh could come up with.

"Damious, your soldiers will lead the front. My army will bring the rear and protect your flank. Your job is to keep the opposing phalanx in place as my cavalry outflanks them." Agapios laid out the basic battle plan.

"Yes, commander" Damious nodded in agreement. Although he didn't like Agapois exclusively using the mercenaries for the frontal attack, such was the life of a sellsword.

"I hope sir can cover my army from any archers" Damious requested earnestly.

"Don't worry. My archers will suppress theirs." Agapios tapped on Dameous shoulder reassuringly.

As Agapios observed the army get in formation and engage the enemy, he recalled the last 10 days of the campaign. It had gone pretty well for him. Despite fighting in an unknown land 1000 km from their homeland, he had penetrated deep into the heartland of the enemy and won a series of battles. He had pulled off a masterful stratagem to position his army between the king and capital and a win here would ensure the final coup de grâce of the 2000-year-old country.

"Please let everything go smoothly today." Agapios clasped his hand together and made an earnest prayer.

Soon an hour passed.

Most of the outnumbered Adhanian infantry had been pushed back about two hundred meters and Agapios's army seemed to be closing in on Amenheratf's camp.

Despite being outnumbered almost 3 to 1, the Adhanians strangely had decided to march to face the Cartagena alliance, instead of holding their ground. Although Agapios found this weird, he chalked it up to Amenheratf being too green of a commander.

"Good, keep up the pressure and in an hour or two we can breach the main camp," Agapios ordered with satisfaction, being pretty happy with the battle so far.

The 15,000 Adhanian infantry was overwhelmingly outnumbered and its 5,000 archers were suppressed by Agapios's own. In fact, it could be said to be that the Adhanian army simply not dissolving was a miracle itself. Only Amenheratf's presence on the front line held the army for the time being.

"Let's see how long your belief lasts, Adhanians!" Agapios muttered with a chilly light in his eyes.