

HERALD OF STEEL

Chapter 11 Encirclement

After sometime, the religious fervor calmed down and Amenheratf turned his focus to the battlefield. The rain had begun to subside and though lightning still ruled the sky, it started to slowly brighten, finally revealing the true extent of the carnage.

Corpses of men and horses lay strewn across the battlefield, their blood, guts and entrails decorating the muddy ground a dull red. The muddy ground clutched the wounded and screaming soldiers in its bosom, embracing them to return to where they once came from.

Amenheratf could clearly see that the retreating Cantagenan soldiers were having great difficulty escaping. The rain and the footsteps of fifty thousand troops had turned the battlefield into a swamp making the heavily armored soldiers sink into the mud like quicksand.

The ten-twelve kg bronze cuirass each of them wore, in addition to the helmet, arm and leg greaves and the ten kg bronze plated wooden shield they each carried made walking through the mud feel like parting the red sea. The constant barrage by the slingers and archers also made sure these soldiers were unable to discard their equipment, making them get bogged down in the mud even more.

"The slingers and archers are the heroes of this battle. " Amenheratf praised the soldiers with a light smile on his face. "But we can't let the Cantagenans escape and regroup. Beihrut, you lead the infantry to pursue." Amenheratf dictated his command to the Captain of his royal guards.

"Your Majesty, our soldiers will get stuck in the mud just as the Cantagenans. Also if we send our soldiers the slingers and archers will have to stop shooting." Beihrut disagreed.

Amenheratf frowned at his general's objection. The thought of letting these soldiers escape to fight another day did not sit well with him.

In addition, such strong men would make excellent slaves. Adhania had lost too much population in the last three years and these captured slaves would prove to be a tremendous boon for it.

"My king, perhaps I have a solution."

As he was contemplating his options, Manuk's mellifluous voice rang beside his ears.

The king turned his head with an expectant gaze towards his right-hand man, eager to listen.

"We can use the slingers to form a cauldron. They can outpace the soldiers to form the head of the cauldron while the infantry can follow from behind to form the mouth."

"What! Send these defenseless slingers to engage in melee combat? Manuk, has your brain been eaten by maggots?" Beihrut's screamed in retort even before Amenheratf could reply.

Manuk lightly smiled at his older brother's objection and replied in a knowing tone "Isn't that what we originally intended to do? To have the slingers melee attack the flanks of the phalanx. We even gave them swords instead of spears just to hide that."

"That was just a desperate move we came up with as a last-ditch effort," Beihrut revealed. "Why should we risk our precious slingers over such a risky plan now that we have won?" He questioned Manuk.

"Don't underestimate Agapios. The old lion still has a few teeth left in him."
Manuk chided his brother for being too complacent.

"Remember, we may have won the battle but not the war. If we let him regroup, he might still win this war. We are still outnumbered." Manuk reminded his brother, his gentle tone changing to a didactic one.

He further continued "And we still need our army to take back the capital and capture Ptolemy. Do you want us to fight a two-front war?"

By the end of his reply, Manuk seemed to have turned from a younger brother to an elder, pointing out the obvious things missed by a "junior."

In response. Beihrut simply turned his head, tacitly conceding to Manuk.

Amenheratf silently watched the verbal duel between the brothers with resumed amusement.

This wasn't the first time these two crossed words.

In fact they did it quite often.

But what was fascinating about it was that although Manuk always thrashed his brother, Beihrut never knew when to quit, always coming back for a second round soon afterward.

Having had his entertainment and unwilling to waste more time simply bickering, Amenheratf decided to intercede.

"I mostly agree with you, Manuk." He said. " But there are a few concerns I have with using the slingers."

"First", he raised his index finger and asked, "How will you stop the soldiers from running if the slingers stop shooting?"

"Second", raising his middle finger he continued "If these soldiers attack the slingers head on, what will you do?"

"And third" with his ring finger up he questioned, "What if the slingers are counter attacked by the soldiers from the camp?"

These were all very genuine questions and needed to be seriously addressed before any such offensive could be made.

But as if already knowing the answer, Manuk lightly smiled at the king and spoke, "The slingers can still attack as they maneuver. And besides, the enemy soldiers are scattered, stuck and out of formation. How can this mob be a threat to our soldiers? Our agile slingers can run circles around them all day long."

Then suddenly his eyes started emitted a cunning glow as he chuckled, "As for the soldiers at the back, I hope they attack. Hehe."

Amenheratf gazed softly at the pleased Manuk, a gentle smile lingering on his face.

This war's one pleasant surprise had been discovering Manuk's talent as a genius tactician.

Adhania never lacked first-class generals, and with it being one of the most prosperous and powerful countries in the world, its generals were never found lacking.

Until now.

When this apocalyptic crisis fell upon Adhania, the one to rise up wasn't Lamiz or Beihrut or Kefka or Namuzim, but a mere civil minister - Manuk.

Amenheratf would wholeheartedly agree that the one who won the battle for them was not him but Manuk.

Adhania had found itself a once-in-a-century grand strategist.

"Good, let's follow Manuk's plan." Amenheratf was convinced by Manuk and approved the attack.

And soon events folded just as Manuk predicted.

The slingers and archers launched missiles after missiles against the fleeing soldiers, who hindered by the mud were like fish in a barrel, barely able to move forward before being pelted by a hailstorm of stones and arrows.

And so soon a cauldron was formed and the noose slowly tightened, suffocating the allied army.

If something wasn't done soon, if they did not receive reinforcement as soon as possible, the fates of these men would not be pretty.

Amenheratf, who was witnessing the complete defeat of his enemies right in front of him, felt a deep change started taking place inside his heart."

"I am truly Ramuh's chosen divine." He muttered, now absolutely convinced of his divinity.