

HERALD OF STEEL

Chapter 3 A Modern Soul

Of the many mercenary teams on the front line, there was an unassuming 1,000-man team led by a Salarcian named Nestoras. But in this group, resided a very special person named Alexander.

Currently, the eighteen-year-old boy was drenched in perspiration, his muscles aching in pain, and he was heavily panting.

They had marched the whole day yesterday, even through the night to outflank the enemy and now after an hour of fighting, they had pushed the Adhanian phalanx two hundred meters back.

But such results came with a price. For particularly those in the first line, like Alexander, were dog-tired.

"Switch" barked Nestoras as a horn was blown and soon people from the back switched places with the first 5 rows.

Usually, phalanxes fought as a fixed unit, with the first 5 line soldiers fighting and the rest of the soldiers pushing them forward from behind.

But Alexander had devised a way so the back lines could be rotated with the front ones, so everyone could fight and fatigue could be evenly distributed. As such the last 5 rows usually rested and did not push.

It took a while to pull off the maneuver but finally, Alexander's line was able to replace the last row and get some much-needed rest.

"So you haven't gotten stabbed yet doc, eh?" A hand rested on his shoulder as a hoarse voice came from his side. This was Camius, a fellow mercenary

and a close friend of Alexander. Alexander met the man bleeding out on the streets and after he saved him, Camius nicknamed him "doc."

"Not yet. Looks like the gods favor me one more day." Alexander nonchalantly replied, smirking a little.

"With the knowledge you have shown, maybe the gods really do favor you!!" Surprisingly this reply was not from Camius but Nestoras himself.

He and Menes, a tall, black man, were dragging someone by the leg. Apparently, the unfortunate guy got stabbed in the guts and was being dragged to the back.

"You think he will live?" Menes pointed towards the man clutching his stomach, groaning in pain.

After passing a glance, Alexander replied in a flat tone "Get him to the medical camp before he bleeds out. Such wounds are usually treatable."

As the poor guy was put on a stretcher and carried off, Nestoras slapped Alexander on the back and praised him unreservedly, "I don't even know how anyone could come up with the idea of bringing a hospital to a battlefield! Baffles me to this day, boy."

"He has sure saved our asses time and time again, that's for sure. And your daughter's too." Menes added praise from the side, a wide grin plastered on his face.

Nestoras nodded in agreement, and then looked at the boy with a mischievous glint "Alexander you sure your mother didn't get it on with a god?" Nestoras asked with a vulgar grin.

The knowledge Alexander had shown at such a young age made him seriously half consider if such an occurrence could be true. And Nestoras's thinking wasn't too strange for this time period, where gods, myths, and

superstition ruled human society. Many in the team even gave Alexander the moniker of 'little godly sage'. In this age, anyone who could rise above others could be considered to be favored by the gods.

"Never met her" The orphan shook his head, answering the question about his mother with an unnatural amount of detachment. He then continued "And like I told you, one day a sage came to my orphanage and taught me about those things." Alexander gave Nestoras the standard answer he had given him every time.

"Bullshit." Nestoras spat out. "When did sages start going out to orphanages to teach little kids such things? If you wanna lie, at least think of better ones." Nestoras didn't buy the boy's story for a second.

"Maybe he is telling the truth." Came a rough rebuttal. That was Aristotle, the previous group leader and the most senior veteran in the camp. "Or do you seriously think the gods speak to him in his sleep?" He questioned in a deep voice.

This old man had weaned and trained Nestoras from his childhood. He was the closest thing Nestoras had to a father figure and Nestoras was quite scared of this 30 years battle-hardened warrior.

But this time he plucked up the courage, put his hands on his hips, and resolutely declared "I don't care what others think. I will not buy the boy's story even if you beat me to death."

Then he hastily diverted the topic, pointing his hand to the front, "I have a battle to command. Octavius is all alone and he could make a mistake." Saying that he rapidly made his way to the front, successfully running away from the old man.

"Such a wimp." Aristotle shook in his head, chuckling in amusement.

In reality, he was no different from any other soldier under Nestoras. He had handed over his authority as camp commander 5 years ago due to his ailing health.

In order not to undermine Nestoras's authority, he even refrained from advising Nestoras. But it seemed the shadow he left him as a child was still too great. Nestoras would lose all his composure in front of the old man.

Aristotle then turned his gaze towards the boy at the center of all this conversation and said " Remember to survive today. You'll be a free man tomorrow."

Yes!! The boy in question, the one who had been praised to the high heavens was not a free man but a mere slave. How absurd!

"I'll try my best." Alexander answered respectfully, slightly bowing his head.

He then silently surveyed his surroundings, fighting the urge to fall asleep as he took long, deep breaths to regain some stamina.

Many might find a soldier resting in the middle of a battlefield absurd, but the truth is ancient battles were not at all like how Hollywood portrayed them.

Armies did not just smash into each where each soldier fought against another in a melee with no formation or cohesion. If that happened battles would last minutes, not hours.

In practice, battles were somewhat boring. Those at the back simply stood in formation with shields held high as those in the front few rows tried to stab each other. Once those at the front got tired or injured or died, they would be switched out for those from the back.

Thus most soldiers usually spent hours just standing there, waiting for their time to come, sweating and cooking in their heavy armor.

As the carnage around Alexander unfolded. his mind drifted to the recent conversation.

"The big oaf isn't usually very bright, but he seems to have a good head when it comes to judging people," Alexander chuckled in amusement as he recalled Nestoras refusing to buy his story.

He was impressed by his commander's astute observation. Because he was right. No sage ever taught him anything. He had learned it all in his previous life.

Yes, he was a transmigrator. Someone originally not from this world but Earth. Someone who has taken over an orphan boy named Drako 10 years ago.

Ten years ago, Drako's city was attacked and sacked. The orphanage was burned down and Drako died from smoke inhalation. It was sometime later that the modern soul from earth took over. He woke up amidst a pile of rubble and as he made his way out he was promptly captured, shackled, and sold as a slave along with the rest of the city.

In the early days, he had not fully assimilated Drako's memories and as such when his new owner asked his name, he had trouble remembering and hence made up the name Alexander on the spot.

Yes, not the most imaginative name, but that's the name that came to his mind. The name of the greatest general of the ancient world.

The one who asked him his name was of course Nestoras, who had bought a whole batch of slaves as menial workers, to cook, wash, and clean.

Over the next 10 years, Alexander went from cleaning latrines to the camp's physician to Nestoras's exclusive slave. He used some of his modern knowledge to slowly climb up, prove himself over and over again and finally gain Nestoras's recognition. And all of it was for today because today he would be free... or die trying.

As he stood on the battlefield, Alexander clenched his fist tightly, his eyes filled with a zealous determination. Freedom or death, he would have one or the other soon.

But alas, as the saying goes, "Man proposes, God disposes." Events would soon occur that would not only make Alexander a free man but also change his trajectory from struggling to become a free man to establishing the most powerful dynasty the world had yet seen.

It would seem this time Nestoras was wrong. Because Alexander might truly be blessed by the gods.