

Alexander Fights the Persians

IN 334 B.C., WITH AN ARMY OF 45,000 AND HIS BOYHOOD FRIEND HEPHAESTION BY HIS SIDE, ALEXANDER EMBARKS ON A HISTORIC CRUSADE, THE CONQUEST OF A CONTINENT. TO ENSURE THE SUCCESS OF HIS HEROIC QUEST, ALEXANDER MAKES A PILGRIMAGE TO THE NEARBY RUINS OF THE FALLEN CITY OF TROY AND THE TOMB OF ACHILLES. TO THE GREEK HERO, HE OFFERS UP PRAYERS AND GIFTS, BUT HE TAKES SOMETHING TOO, ACHILLES' SHIELD FOR GOOD LUCK IN BATTLE. - [screams]

narrator: HIS FIRST CHANCE TO BRANDISH IT COMES UNEXPECTEDLY SOON. AT THE RIVER GRANICUS, HE SPIES THE ARMY OF A LOCAL GOVERNOR, 40,000 PERSIAN TROOPS. [horse neighs] [men screaming] FIGHTING SHOULDER-TO-SHOULDER WITH HIS MEN, ALEXANDER PLUNGES INTO THE THICK OF THE BATTLE. AN ENEMY AXE EVEN SPLITS HIS HELMET IN TWO, BUT THE PERSIANS SUFFER FAR WORSE. [men screaming]

STUNNED AND DISHEARTENED BY THE SURPRISE ATTACK, THEY LOSE 1/3 OF THEIR MEN BEFORE FLEEING THE FIELD. BUT 2,000 MILES AWAY IN PERSEPOLIS, THE CAPITAL OF PERSIA, THE EMPEROR DARIUS IS STINGING FROM THE DEFEAT. NOW IT'S UP TO HIM TO STOP THE AUDACIOUS, YOUNG KING. ANXIOUS TO DESTROY ALEXANDER, DARIUS ASSEMBLES AN ARMY OF UP TO 100,000 AND INVITES HIS COURT, INCLUDING HIS WIFE, CHILDREN, AND HIS MOTHER TO COME ALONG AND SAVOR HIS VICTORY. [crowd cheering]

WITH AN ARMY HALF THE SIZE OF THE PERSIANS, ALEXANDER CONTINUES HIS PUSH THROUGH ANATOLIA. THE TWO ARMIES CONVERGE AT ISSUS, AND THE BATTLE LINES ARE DRAWN. THE CENTERPIECE OF ALEXANDER'S FIGHTING MACHINE IS A FORMATION CALLED A PHALANX. IN TIGHTLY-KNIT BLOCKS, FOOT SOLDIERS WIELD 18-FOOT LANCES TIPPED IN BRONZE CALLED SARISSAS. AS EACH RANK LOWERS ITS LINE OF SARISSAS, IT CREATES A DEADLY WALL OF SPIKES. WITH THE MACEDONIAN CALVARY ENGAGED ON BOTH FLANKS, ALEXANDER SENDS HIS PHALANXES STRAIGHT INTO THE CENTER OF THE PERSIAN LINES. [men screaming]

TRAPPED FROM BEHIND BY THEIR OWN MEN, ROW AFTER ROW OF HAPLESS PERSIANS ARE IMPALED. THEIR LINES FALL IN BLOODY RIBBONS BEFORE THE MACEDONIAN ONSLAUGHT. SEEING THE DAY IS LOST, DARIUS COMMITS THE UNFORGIVABLE. HE DESERTS HIS POST AND FLEES. BUT THE FIELD IS NOT THE ONLY THING THE PERSIAN KING ABANDONS. HIS FAMILY HAS ALSO BEEN LEFT BEHIND. HIS WIFE AND MOTHER THROW THEMSELVES AT THE MERCY OF THEIR CONQUEROR, BUT THEY MISTAKE THE TALLER HEPHAESTION FOR THE KING.

ALEXANDER TAKES PITY ON THE MOTHER. HE OFFERS HER A PLACE IN HIS ENTOURAGE. IN THE DAYS AHEAD, SHE PERSONALLY TAKES CHARGE OF HIS FOOD AND COMFORT AND BECOMES ONE OF HIS MOST LOYAL SUBJECTS. ALEXANDER BELIEVES THAT A LEADER SHOULD BE ONE WITH HIS MEN, SHARING BOTH THEIR PAIN AND THE SPOILS OF WAR. IF HIS BRAVERY IN BATTLE WINS THEIR RESPECT, HIS COMPASSION AND GENEROSITY INSPIRES THEIR DEVOTION.
