

WARRIOR

SCOURGE OF THE
STEPPE

Tim Ellis

Published in 2009 by YouWriteOn.com

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First Edition

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Published by YouWriteOn.com

Tim Ellis was born in London and grew up in Manchester. He joined the Royal Army Medical Corps at eighteen and completed twenty-two years service, leaving in 1993 having achieved the rank of Warrant Officer Class One (Regimental Sergeant Major). Since then he has worked in secondary education as a senior manager, and higher education as an associate lecturer/tutor and consultant. He currently works as Head of Behavioural Sciences in a secondary school. He has a PhD and an MBA in Education Management and an MA in Education. He lives in Essex with his wife and five Shitzus.

He has previously published two other books, which are available from all online booksellers:

Warrior series
(*Adult historical fiction*):

Path of Destiny

The Knowledge of Time series
(*Teenage science fiction*):

Second Civilisation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the YouWriteOn.com team for a marvellous site for unpublished writers, the site members for their constructive and valuable reviews, which were a constant source of help and encouragement. Also, thanks go to Emily Ray for designing the sword and shield image.

Additionally, I would like to thank the Southend paramedics who came when I called; the nurses and doctors at Southend University Hospital who brought me back from the dead then kept me alive until the nurses and doctors at Basildon Cardiac Centre could carry out an angioplasty; and finally, all the staff at Southend Cardiac Rehabilitation Unit, who put me through the advanced program. Without these dedicated professionals, this book would not have been published.



To Pam, with love

And to Allan and Gladys Hewitt for their support.

UNIFICATION
(1190 – 1206)

All who surrender will be spared. Whoever does not surrender,
but opposes with struggle and dissension shall be annihilated.

Genghis Khan

1

August 1190

He slithered lightheaded through the sand towards the goats. His breathing came in short gasps. Goat's milk had been his only sustenance for many days. The early morning sun scorched his body through the tattered clothes. Sweat stung his eyes and ran down his back.

Concealed amongst the herd, he began pulling the teat of a doe. He aimed the milk into his open mouth, swallowing greedily.

A shadow suddenly blocked out the sun. He curled up nervously into a ball expecting to be beaten or killed.

'Why do you steal milk from my goats?' the herdsman asked. He stood over the emaciated old man. His staff gripped in both hands ready to beat the thief if he failed to provide a satisfactory answer.

The old man's face paled as he looked up. 'I have nothing else,' he said, his voice barely above a whisper. The evidence of the crime dribbled down his sparsely whiskered chin.

The goatherd slackened his hold on the staff, resting the end of it on the ground. 'Then why do you not ask for help?'

Sitting up, the old man began to cry. 'I am too ashamed.' He put his head in his hands.

'There is no shame in seeking help from strangers,' the goatherd said, kicking one of the goats up the backside as it strayed across his path.

'I was once a mighty chief. My brother usurped me and cast me out into the wilderness.'

'Weren't we all mighty chiefs in days gone by?' the goatherd said, smiling. 'I myself was once the chief of the Tartars, before I became a goatherd here on the edge of nowhere.'

'I see you don't believe me, my friend,' the old man said, wiping the tears from his eyes with his frayed sleeve. 'Put me to death now then, I have nothing else to live for.'

‘Nobody said anything about putting anyone to death,’ the goatherd said. ‘If you want milk, just help yourself, there’s enough for all of us. You’d be better off coming to my tent though. You can share a meal with me and my family. My name is Yul.’

‘That’s very kind of you, but I have nothing to pay you with, and I am hardly dressed for a family meal.’ His hand moved to touch the threadbare rags that barely covered his filthy body, and the grey matted hair hanging in clumps to his shoulders.

Curling his lip, the goatherd said, ‘We don’t dress for meals in my tent. You can come and share our food and repay us by telling your story. Rarely, do people pass this way. It will be good to hear news of our people.’

The goatherd bent over and helped the old man to rise. Together, they walked down a gently sloping hill, towards a lone tent in an otherwise desolate shimmering landscape of sand and tufts of yellowing grass. The goats scattered before them as they walked. Abutting the tent, were several pens. One held five skeletal camels that began snorting and spitting as they approached. Another contained five asses in a similar emaciated condition, the remaining pens stood empty. Three children, two boys and a girl stopped chasing each other to stare at the two men as they reached the bottom of the hill.

‘Into the tent for the morning meal, you three,’ the goatherd said to his children. ‘We have a guest with a story to tell.’ They scampered around him, the smallest of the three, the girl, slipped her hand in her father’s as they entered the dimly lit, but surprisingly cool, tent.

‘My name,’ the old man said, once they were all seated on threadbare cushions around the cooking pot balanced precariously on the hearth, ‘is Toghril. I was once chieftain of the Kereit.’

The three children stared at him. They had never seen the chief of a tribe before. Flies buzzed around their gaping mouths.

‘I know what you’re thinking,’ Toghril continued, close to tears again. ‘I don’t look like I could be the chieftain of a

band of robbers, never mind a great tribe, but I assure you I was.'

Pointing towards the steaming cooking pot, the goatherd's wife, a thin woman with grey plaited hair and whiskers sprouting from her chin said, 'Please eat.' Like all the family, she had dark leathery skin from the brutal sun that beat down on this part of the steppe.

'I've heard of them,' the goatherd said, as Toghriil greedily helped himself to slivers of meat from the pot. 'They were once a powerful tribe.'

Toghriil's brow creased. 'What do you mean, they once were?' Watched by three astonished faces, he scooped more of the goat's meat from the cooking pot with his bony fingers into his already stuffed mouth. 'Are they no longer powerful?'

The goatherd put his hand on Toghriil's arm. 'You don't need to eat so fast, my friend. We are in no hurry. Life here, between the steppe and the Gobi desert, is very slow. We have enough meat for us all.'

It had been so long since he had eaten proper food. Toghriil thought he would never be able to fill the emptiness in his gut. He was aware that they were all watching him, but he was just too hungry to care. He continued to shovel food into his mouth.

'I don't hear much about them now,' the goatherd eventually said, picking a piece of meat out of the pot and thrusting it in his mouth. He uncapped a skin of goat's milk, took a swig, and then offered it to his guest.

Toghriil took the skin of milk from the goatherd and poured half its contents into his mouth. Then he continued with his story. 'Erge Qara, my brother, sought help from the chief of the Naiman, Inanche Bilge, to depose me. I was cast out with nothing. They even took my horse from me. I went to some other tribes who I had once helped, but they would not give me aid. They were afraid that my brother would turn on them if they did. I wandered the steppe for many years scavenging, living off roots and berries and whatever else I could find, until I found myself here stealing goat's milk from you.'

‘That’s an interesting story, my friend,’ the goatherd said. ‘I haven’t heard of any news of the Kereit. All the news coming out of the steppe, which I hear from the few traders and strangers that pass by, is about the Great Khan.’

Toghril’s head shot up and he stopped eating. ‘The Great Khan! What Great Khan?’

‘Temujin of the Borjigin,’ the goatherd said. ‘The rumors, if they are to be believed, say he is the one who will unite us. They say there is a prophecy. People have seen things. There is a story that the head shaman rode to Heaven on a white stallion and Tengri himself announced to him that Temujin will be a great leader of a new Mongol nation. Many tribes have joined him from all over the steppe.’

‘Really?’ Toghril said, scooping more meat into his mouth, even though the goatherd’s wife and children had not yet eaten anything. ‘Temujin’s father was my sworn brother. When Yesugei was murdered by the Merkit, I stood in his place. I helped Temujin recover his tribe after they had deserted him and joined the Tajut. I assisted him in the rescue of his wife, Borte after she was stolen by the Merkit.’

‘Those Merkit scum are lower than pig’s bellies.’ The goatherd spat on the floor of the tent. ‘So my friend, what do you propose to do now?’ he asked Toghril.

Toghril stared at the goatherd, whose face was like creased leather with eyes and a mouth. ‘I have no plans. I live hour by hour, and haven’t thought beyond my next meal for many months. I will repay your kindness if you give me work to do.’

‘Well, I’ll tell you, my friend,’ the goatherd said, scratching his lice-infested crotch. ‘If what you say is true, and I’m a bit sceptical to say the least. I’m wondering what you’re doing here grovelling in the sand, when you should be asking the Great Khan for help in getting *your* tribe back. After all the help you’ve given him, it’s the least he could do.’

Toghril lowered his eyes. ‘How could I reach him? I am weak. I have no horse, no weapons. It is too far to walk?’

The goatherd signalled for his wife and children to eat whilst Toghril’s mind was elsewhere. He turned to Toghril and said, ‘I feel sorry for you, so I’m going to give you one of my

asses. My wife will provide you with two bags of meat and four skins of milk to help you on your way.' The goatherd's wife nodded and smiled showing her black rotten teeth. 'If you are telling the truth, then one day you will repay me. If not, then think of it as a gift from an old fool.'

'That's very kind of you, Yul.' Tears sprang to Toghril's eyes again. 'But still, it is very far and I am very weak. I would never make it on my own.'

'You can stay here for awhile to build up your strength if you want, but if I were you, I'd go and ask the Great Khan for help. Your alternative is to die here in the desert.'

Toghril wiped the tears from his eyes with his sleeve. 'You're very kind, thank you.'

'It's the very least I can do for a chief of the Kereit,' the goatherd said smiling.



Bogorju watched as the withered old man rode into the camp on an ass. The beast struggled through the mud. Rags barely covered the old man's body and the cold Siberian winds made him shiver. The camp children followed him, calling him names and making fun of his filthy appearance. People stopped what they were doing to stare the skeletal man's slow progress on his emaciated beast.

The ass came to a stop in front of Bogorju. 'I am here to see the Great Khan,' the old man said in a whisper.

'Who are you?' Bogorju asked him. 'Why would the Khan want to see a beggar, such as you?'

A small crowd had gathered at a safe distance behind the old man. They held their noses and taunted him. A myriad of flies buzzed around the pair, and fleas danced on the ass's diseased hide.

'Yes, I am a beggar now, Bogorju,' the old man said, 'but once I was Toghril, chief of the Kereit. I stood in place of the Khan's father.'

Bogorju raised an eyebrow. It had been thirteen years since he had heard the name, Toghril. He was surprised that the

beggar knew his name, and searched the old man's face until he recognised Temujin's former ally.

He signalled slaves to attend him. 'Take the old man to my tent,' he said. 'Bathe him, ask my wives to provide him with new clothes, and then bring him to the Khan.'

The slaves helped the old man to get down from the ass and led him away.

Bogorju hurried to inform Temujin of this strange visitor. The crowd, denied any fun, drifted away.

Temujin's eyes opened wide. 'Toghri! Here?' So he's not dead then?

'No, my lord, but he is a shadow of the man he was.'

Temujin laughed. 'That won't be a bad thing. Where is he?'

'He is filthy, my lord. Slaves are cleaning him now. My wives will provide him with new clothes. I will then make sure he is brought to you.'

As Bogorju left, Borte stopped her preparation of the meal. Standing behind him, she put her hand on his shoulder. 'We still owe him a great debt, Temujin.'

The sneering face of Begter seared into his mind. I will never be rid of that bastard, he thought. When he looked at Jochi, his first-born, he was reminded continually of how his beautiful young wife had been tortured and raped by Begter. He put his hand on hers. 'And I will repay that debt threefold, my love. He pulled her down and kissed her, his other hand cupping her breast.

She pulled herself away. 'How can you find me attractive? I am swollen up like a rotting corpse in the sun.'

Temujin chuckled. 'Of course you are, my love, but a warrior has needs.'

Hitting him playfully on the arm, she said, 'You... you pig's... snout,' and went back to her chores.

He let out a howl of laughter, and then said, 'A pig's snout that loves you to distraction.'

From behind him he heard, 'Huh.'

Just then, a hand opened the embroidered hanging before the entrance. Bogorju and Jelme came in and sat on

cushions to Temujin's left. Toghrlil followed, and with difficulty prostrated himself on the carpeted ground before him.

Temujin sat on a couch strewn with silk-embroidered cushions obtained from Chinese traders. Attached to the wall of the tent, directly above his head, hung a felt image – the guardian of the dwelling. A guard stood to either side.

'My father,' Temujin said. 'When you did not come to me for help those many years ago, I thought you were dead.' He stood and helped Toghrlil to his feet, shocked at the lightness of the frail old man who had once been layered in fat. 'A father does not kneel before his son. Sit beside me and tell me how you come to be here.'

'It is true that Erge Qara deposed me and cast me out,' Toghrlil said averting his eyes. 'I went first to the Uigurs and then to the Idikut, but no one would give me aid. I wandered for many years on the steppe, scavenging for food, eating roots and berries. Eventually I ended up living near the desert and stealing goat's milk. The goatherd caught me, but took pity on me and saved my life. When I told him my tale, he helped me to reach to you.'

'Why did you not come to me sooner, my father?' Temujin asked him. 'We are father and son. We were allies. I would have helped you.'

'I was ashamed, my son,' Toghrlil said, unable to stop tears filling his eyes and tumbling down his cheeks. 'I thought that you would despise me and also cast me out.'

Temujin put his hand on Toghrlil's arm. 'I would not have done that. What of your true son, Senggum? How could he have let this happen to his father?'

Toghrlil hawked and spat on the carpet. At a sign from Bogorju, a slave wiped the spittle up. 'You are my true son, Great Khan. Senggum is lower than a marmot's belly, a miserable excuse for a son.'

Temujin looked at Jelme and said, 'Tell Vangura and Kadan Daldur to prepare a feast for the commanders tonight, we must accord Toghrlil the honour he deserves.'

'I deserve no honour, my son,' Toghrlil mumbled, hanging his head. 'I am a beggar, Tengri has willed it.'

Temujin gripped ToghriI's shoulder. 'Tengri has now brought you to me, father. Your life of begging has ended.'



'When I came to you that first time,' Temujin reminded ToghriI, as they sat at the feast that night with all the commanders in attendance, 'you brought my people back to me. When I came to you a second time, you helped me to rescue my beautiful wife from the Merkit' He turned to Borte on his left, smiled and put his hand on top of hers.

Borte blushed and looked away. 'Stop embarrassing me, husband. You know I look like the back end of yak when I am heavy with child.' She rubbed the mound of her her fourth pregnancy.

Temujin roared with laughter and winked at his commanders. 'Don't tell my warriors that I am in love with a yak, they will desert me and join the Tartars.'

Everyone fell about laughing.

He turned back to ToghriI. 'Father, you should have come to me when Erge Qara deposed you, I would have helped you. I am grieved that you did not.'

'I look back now and I am sorry I did not come to you and ask for your help, my son,' ToghriI said, eating and drinking everything that was put in front of him with relish. 'It was my pride, which got the better of me.'

'Now that you are here, we must talk of how you can regain your position within the Kereit.'

ToghriI stopped mid-chew, meat dangling from his mouth. 'Is it still possible,' he asked, 'after all this time?'

'Anything is possible, father,' Temujin said, 'you showed me that.'

ToghriI's eyes glazed over. 'If only things could be the way they were.' He continued stuffing food into his mouth and taking large swigs of airag.

'Things will never be the way they were, my father,' Temujin said, 'but I am sure we can make you chief of the Kereit again.'

Tears welled in ToghriI's eyes. He turned and threw his arms around Temujin. 'You are my true son,' he said.

Temujin knew that he still needed ToghriI's support, the Kereit were much stronger than he was, even with the thousands that had joined him. 'We will make plans, but in the meantime you need to get your strength back. I will give you a tent with some cows, sheep and servants. When you are ready to be chief of the Kereit, come to me, father.'

'What spies do we have in the Kereit camp?' Temujin asked Bogorju the following day as they rode through the camp flanked by ten guards. He had instructed his second in command to secretly build a spy network across the steppe. Now Bogorju had at least one spy in each tribe's camp and Temujin was kept well-informed about his friends and enemies.

Bogorju was quick to answer. 'Just one, my lord, a man named Ulgar. He is a horse trainer for Senggum.'

'Have him provide a report of the Kereit camp, especially how Erge Qara, is guarded and how many men he has.'

'Yes, my lord.'



Two months after the feast, ToghriI came to Temujin early one morning. Snow lay thick on the ground. People only ventured from the warmth of their tents if they had to. The heat from the hearth caressed his face as he ducked in to Temujin's tent. 'I feel I am ready now, my son.' He looked considerably younger, more like his old self, but without the layers of fat.

Temujin smiled at him. 'I am pleased to hear it, my father. You look as though you have found the secret of eternal youth.'

'If only it were true, my son,' ToghriI said. 'But I do feel better than I have for many months. Thanks to you. I can at last see a future before me again.'

'Let us talk of this future,' Temujin said, indicating that ToghriI should sit next to him. Slaves brought qumys and delicacies, which ToghriI eagerly tried. 'We have managed to

find out that Erge Qara is not well liked by the Kereit clans. He must pay tribute to Inanche Bilge if he is to retain the support of the Naiman. He takes this tribute from the clan families. If we send an army against him, he will put the Kereit warriors in the front of the battle. They will be forced to fight.'

'No,' Toghril said, concern etched on his face. 'I don't want to become chief again over the bodies of my warriors. That would not be the action of a great leader. How do you propose to get the Kereit from him?'

'When I was living on the steppe with my family, I learnt a few tricks,' Temujin smiled at him. 'One of those was that there are many ways to win a battle, other than a frontal attack.'

Toghril turned slightly to look at Temujin. 'You have a plan then?'

Temujin nodded. 'We've learnt that your brother has only a hundred men with him.'

Toghril's eyes opened wide and he choked on his qumys. 'Then why haven't my warriors killed them and taken the tribe back?' he said, wiping the milk from his mouth with his sleeve.

'Simply because if they do, Inanche Bilge won't get his tribute and he'll attack them.'

'Won't that happen anyway, whatever you do?' Toghril said, stroking his new moustaches.

'What do you think would happen if your brother died?' Temujin asked.

'If he is murdered, Inanche Bilge will find out and seek revenge.'

'Not if he dies of natural causes.'

'He is still young, ten years younger than I am,' Toghril said.

'What if he has an accident?'

Toghril's eyes lit up. 'I see what you mean, but won't Inanche Bilge just replace him?'

'No,' Temujin said, 'I don't think so. It will soon be winter and it was your brother who wanted to depose you. Inanche Bilge merely provided the support. If Erge Qara is dead, his men will fear for their lives. They will return to the Naiman leaving an opening for chief.'

‘How do you propose to kill my brother and make it look like an accident?’

Temujin did not want Toghrlil to know that he had a spy in the Kereit camp. If he were to find out, then once he was chief again, he would find and kill Ulgar who could still be useful in the future. ‘I’m afraid I can’t tell you that, my father. But the accident will happen in the next month. You must wait and be patient.’

2

‘Who should we send?’ Temujin asked his two senior commanders. Ulgar had provided information that Erge Qara went riding most mornings. That this was the only time the chief of the Kereit was not surrounded by his warriors. Now all they needed was someone to kill him and make it look like an accident.

‘I have just the warrior,’ Jelme said. ‘My younger brother, Subadai, has just finished warrior training. The instructors have nothing but praise for him. He was head and shoulders above the other boys in more ways than one. He is now looking for ways to prove himself in your service.’

‘How old is he?’ Temujin asked.

‘He is sixteen.’ Jelme used his hands to indicate someone of immense stature. ‘But he is as big as Qasar already.’

‘Bring him to me. I will talk to him and judge for myself whether he can do what we want of him.’

Jelme sent a slave to tell his brother to attend the Khan. No sooner had word been sent than Subadai appeared as if he had been standing outside waiting for the summons. He came into the tent and threw himself on the floor in a show of obedience.

‘My lord,’ Subadai’s voice boomed, ‘I am your servant.’

‘Rise Subadai, brother of Jelme,’ Temujin said. Subadai rose to his feet. He towered above everyone, blocking out the light from the door and the smoke hole.

‘You’d better sit down before we all go blind,’ Jelme said to his brother. Temujin and Bogorju both laughed at the speed with which Subadai nervously sat down cross-legged.

‘Your brother thinks that you can carry out a mission for me. What do you say?’

‘I am your man, my lord,’ Subadai replied. ‘I will be like an old mouse in thieving, a jackdaw in speed, a saddlecloth to hide things. I will ward off every enemy. As felt I will shield you from the wind. That is what I will be for you.’

‘I am impressed with what you say, Subadai,’ Temujin said to him. ‘Let us now see whether your actions match your words. Your brother will tell you what is expected. You will go alone on this mission. No one is to know either before or after what you are about to do. If you succeed, you will show me you can be trusted and you will rise fast in my service. Remember though, that with failure comes punishment.’



Subadai pressed the side of his face against the cool bark of the thick tree. He closed his eyes. He knew that Erge Qara would come today. His heart began to race. He had spent all of last week in the forest watching. Working out how he would kill Toghriil's brother. How he would make it look like an accident. Identifying the right place to attack him, making sure there were no loose ends. There had been no sign of the Kereit chief for two days, but Subadai knew he would come today.

The early morning light filtered through the forest canopy, piercing the gloom with slivers of bright sunshine. Moss, lichen, and a fusion of red and brown leaves covered the hard winter ground. Traces of snow lay in small mounds where it had punctured the forest roof.

He heard the sound of a horse galloping along the track. He was ready. The feel of the rope in his hands was comforting to the touch.

Erge Qara came into line with the tree. Leaves and dirt flew into the air as Subadai pulled the rope taut. The frightened horse slid to a stop. The Kereit chieftain shot over the beast's neck and landed heavily on the track.

Subadai released the rope, ran onto the track and stood over the dazed warrior. Kneeling on his back, he took the man's head in his huge hands and twisted it sideways until he felt a crack.

Whinnying, the horse stamped its hooves and prepared to bolt. Subadai left Erge Qara on the track and quickly moved to calm the beast. Untying the rope from the tree, he left it coiled on the ground. He hauled the corpse onto his shoulder

and threw it over the horse then led it further down the track. Reaching the spot he had chosen with the low over-hanging branch, he stopped, and jumped on the horse. Pulling Erge Qara up by his hair, he slammed the front of his neck against the branch with such force he heard a crunching sound. He then dumped the body on the track as if he had been dragged backwards off his horse and broken his neck in the fall. Slapping the horse on the rump, it galloped off.

Re-tracing his steps he destroyed any tracks or telltale signs besides those of the horse. He threw the rope into the hole he had made under a bush and slightly back from the track, but level with the body, and then climbed in after it. He took a large swallow of qumys from a skin, and then slipped a handful of beef cuts from the pouch on his belt, into his mouth. He covered himself with the pile of moss and leaves he had prepared and waited for the riderless horse to raise the alarm.

After about an hour, a group of warriors galloped down the track, and came to a halt near where the body lay.

Jumping off his horse, one of the warriors leaned over the corpse and put his cheek close to Erge Qara's mouth. 'He's dead,' he said to others, after a while.

'How is it possible?' another said. 'He has been riding along this track most mornings for years. He has never had an accident before?'

'Look around for signs that someone else has been here,' the first warrior, who appeared to be the leader, ordered the others.

Subadai thought, this is going as I expected. He could see the warriors walking along the track in both directions. They inspected the ground for evidence that their chief's death was anything other than an accident. Eventually, they all returned to the body sprawled on the track.

'There's no evidence that anyone else has been here,' one of them reported. The others nodded in agreement.

'Look at his neck,' another said. 'There's a bruise and bits of green and bark where he's hit that branch.' He looked up at the bough of the tree and pointed for the benefit of the others. 'You can see the mark on the branch where he must

have hit it. Stupid bastard can't have been looking where he was going.'

'He's left us in a right mess,' the leader said. 'The Kereit hate us and will kill us without his protection. None of us can be chief, we're nothing without him.'

'Won't Inanche Bilge send someone to be the new chief?' one of the warriors asked.

'No, he won't be bothered with this tribe,' their leader answered. 'They're too far away and not worth the trouble. He was only involved because Erge Qara wanted his brother's tribe for himself and promised Inanche Bilge a good tribute.'

'So, what are we going to do now?' Another warrior asked concern evident in his voice.

There was a long pause and then the leader said, 'I think all we can do is gather up the rest of our men, pack up and leave.'

'What are we going to tell the Kereit?'

'We don't tell them anything. We'll just leave and let them figure it out on their own. If they know we're leaving they might try and stop us. Then they'll kill us.'

'Inanche Bilge won't be happy about losing his tribute.'

'Well it's hardly our fault is it? We'll just tell him what happened. He won't blame us.'

'I hope not.'

They climbed on their horses and rode off, leaving the body where it lay.

Subadai remained in the hole for two days to make sure. On the second day a group of Kereit warriors came and removed the body. They buried it by the side of the track. On the morning of the third day, Subadai climbed out of his hiding place, walked through the forest to the place he had hobbled his horse and rode back to the Borjigin camp.



'Tell Ulgar, to spread the word that Toghril is alive and living here in our camp,' Temujin said to Bogorju. 'I expect Senggum or Jabango to visit us soon.'

Within the week Senggum, followed by a hundred Kereit warriors, rode into the Borjigin camp with the icy winds. Temujin sat outside his tent with Bogorju and Jelme, discussing plans for the spring. A circle of snow had been cleared for a fire that crackled and hissed as a slave slowly turned a goat on a spit. Noises from the market could be heard accompanied by the metallic echoes of the blacksmith hard at work. Traders from across the steppe peddled their wares, hunters bartered skins and meat, and horses and livestock were traded for slaves. Temujin never tired of the sounds and smells of camp life. When it is taken away, you value it the more, he thought.

‘I believe you have my father here?’ Senggum directed at Temujin. He remained on his horse and ignored the customary greeting.

‘Still lacking in respect, Senggum,’ Temujin said to him, ‘and as arrogant as ever I see. Someone should teach you some manners.’

‘Well it won’t be you, *brother*.’ He moved his hand to the hilt of his sword.

Temujin chose to ignore Senggum’s hand movement. ‘No, not today,’ he said, his voice cold enough to freeze the Kerulen. ‘But one day you could find yourself skewered on the end of my sword. What is it you want?’

Senggum hawked and spat. The gobbit landed close to Temujin’s feet. He sneered. ‘Erge Qara has died in an accident. His warriors have left. We had given up all hope of my father being alive, but I have recently heard that he is here. I’ve come to take him back.’

‘Why have you not taken your father’s place as chief?’ Temujin taunted him, with a glint in his eyes.

‘My father, if he is still alive, is the rightful chief. It is not my place to usurp him while he still lives. Also, the clan chiefs want him back.’

That’s more like it, Temujin thought. The clan chiefs don’t want this idiot as chief, but said, ‘Your father has been living here and is well.’ He indicated Senggum should follow him.

Senggum jumped from his horse, passed the reins to one of his warriors, and followed Temujin to a tent not far away,

with pens housing goats and sheep. ToghriI was about to leave the tent as they entered.

‘Father,’ Senggum said, embracing ToghriI. ‘We thought you were dead.’

‘You didn’t bother to find out for sure though did you, you ungrateful wretch? As you can see, I am very much alive thanks to Temujin, a son who cares about his father.’

Senggum glowered at Temujin. ‘It’s not my fault, father,’ Senggum whined. ‘Erge Qara said you had died, what were we to do?’

‘Yes, well he would wouldn’t he, and you were only too ready to believe him, you ungrateful yak turd?’

‘Erge Qara is dead, father. His warriors have left. You are needed as chief again.’

‘I’m enjoying life here thank you. It’s nice and peaceful, no worries, and I can live out my old age without people bothering me. I have cows, sheep and goats, what more do I need?’

Temujin smiled to himself. He knew that ToghriI was making his son beg. A life of tranquillity was far from ToghriI’s mind.

‘Please father, the clan chiefs want you back, I want you back. We’ve had a hard time under your brother.’

‘Have you? And you think you’re going to get it easy if I come back? You think I have had an easy time, you ungrateful camel dung?’

‘Please, father,’ Senggum mumbled. ‘Unegen is still there.’

ToghriI’s ears pricked up at the mention of Unegen, the young boy he had been so taken with, before his brother had deposed him. ‘I am no longer interested in boys. I will give your request some serious thought, and let you know in a week,’ ToghriI said, waving his hand in dismissal and turning away.

‘A week!’ Senggum said. ‘What are we supposed to do until then?’

‘Go home and wait. I might come, but then again, I might not. In the meantime, to demonstrate your obedience to me, you are to send a jagan of warriors to find a goatherd named Yul. He lives on the edge of the Gobi desert to the south. Once

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he is found, you are to escort him and his family back to our camp. He is to be treated with honour, given land, a tent, a hundred goats, a hundred sheep, and a hundred horses.'

'But what if we can't find this goatherd?'

Toghril's eyes narrowed. 'As usual, Senggum, you're always full of optimism. You will find him. I have a debt to repay. If you fail I will cut your head off myself. Do you understand?'

'Yes, father, but where will the livestock and horses come from?'

'Where are my herds?'

'Your brother used them to pay Inanche Bilge's tribute.'

'Then take them from your herds.'

Senggum's eyes opened wide. 'Mine, father?'

'Do you deny me, your own father?'

Senggum hung his head. His shoulders slumped. 'No, father.'

Toghril waved his hand in dismissal. Senggum stormed out without another word. They heard him ride away with his warriors.

'I enjoyed that,' Toghril said to Temujin.

'It looked as though you did, my father,' Temujin replied.

'It was as you predicted. You have made me a happy man today.'

'If the plan is sound, the outcome should be predictable.'

'Well the plan must have been sound then?'

Temujin changed the subject before Toghril started asking how he had accomplished the death of Erge Qara. 'When you decide to become chief again and return to the Black Forest, I will send Qasar with a tuman of warriors to accompany you.'

'Whatever for?' Toghril asked.

'So that everyone will know that you have my support, should they think otherwise, or have ideas that someone else could be chief.'

'You are a true son. I know I've said that before, but I remember thinking at that feast you gave in honour of your mother's marriage, before all of this happened, that I would be the next one you attacked. Yet here you are, helping me to

become chief again. You could easily have killed me and attacked the Kereit whilst they have no chief and are weak.'

Temujin gave Toghriq a wry smile and said, 'My life has taught me that the only thing worth anything on the steppe is loyalty. Without loyalty, a warrior is nothing and has nothing.'



'My lord,' Subadai said, as he entered the Khan's tent and threw himself on the floor.

'Your mission was very successful,' Temujin said to him. 'I have given orders for you to be made a commander of one hundred.'

'Mission, my lord, I recall no mission.'

3

‘My father once told me that the Tartars captured my grandfather, Bartan,’ Temujin said to his four brothers, Bogorju and Jelme, as they sat around the fire outside Temujin’s tent one March evening. The sun dripped rivulets of blood over the Hentey Mountains as it disappeared, and the insects began their nocturnal conversations.

Each of them had their own skin of airag. They helped themselves to slices of dripping meat from the deer sizzling and spitting over the fire.

‘To please the Jin emperor, they gave Bartan to him because he had been crossing the frontier and raiding small towns. The Jin tortured and executed him, then cut him up into pieces. His last message to us, was to avenge his death. An opportunity has now arisen to do just that.’

‘What opportunity?’ Qasar grunted through a mouthful of meat. As usual, he had consumed two skins to everyone else’s one without much effort, and was half-way through devouring the deer.

‘I have heard that the Jin Emperor has sent an army under his first minister, Wang Kin, to attack the Lake Buyur Tartars. Apparently, they refuse to do as he wants. Nor do they pay the tribute required of them as the Emperor’s vassals.’

‘Shouldn’t we be attacking the Jin, rather than the Tartars?’ Belgutei asked, always the first to see the obvious. ‘They were the ones that tortured and killed our grandfather.’ As Begter’s younger brother and Temujin’s half-brother, Bartan was also Belgutei’s grandfather.

‘The time will come to deal with the Jin, Belgutei,’ Temujin answered him. ‘That time is not now. First we must scourge our enemies from the steppe. We can use the Jin army as an ally, much in the same way that we use the Kereit.’

‘How will we do that?’ Qachi’un, Temujin’s youngest brother asked.

‘The Jin army is moving towards the Tartars from the south east. The Tartars have moved from Lake Buyur, further

towards us, to the Ulcha River. If we attack the Tartars from the west, they will have nowhere to run.'

'The Tartars far outnumber us,' Bogorju pointed out. 'Do we wait for the Jin army to arrive before we attack?'

'No,' Temujin said, having thought it through when he'd heard the news from Bogorju, who had received the information from his spy within the Tartar camp. 'I will ask Toghrlil to send four tumans. He also seeks revenge on the Tartars because they did the same thing to his grandfather. He will not refuse his favorite son. After Erge Qara squandered his wealth and left him destitute, he will welcome the opportunity to replace it. I will also tell Sachai Baiki of the Churkis, to send a tuman of warriors. He promised to serve in the front line of every battle against my enemies, it is now time he fulfilled his promise. We will then attack the Tartars and share the plunder between us before the Jin arrives. The threat of them in the southeast will be as if we had another army.'

The following morning, he sent the messengers to Toghrlil and Sachai Baiki to arrive in two weeks time. To Chimbai he said, 'You are to ride with all haste to Wang Kin, who travels with his army from the southeast. Give him this message: *Toghrlil of the Kereit, and Temujin of the Borjigin, send greetings. They will help you to destroy the Lake Bayur Tartars. Whilst you attack from the southeast, we will attack from the west.* I also want you to estimate how long it will take the Jin army to reach the Tartars. You should return in good time for this information to be useful.' To his four brothers, he said, 'Prepare your tumans to leave in two weeks.'



Toghrlil met Temujin, at the appointed time and place. They waited for the arrival of Sachai Baiki. Defecating horses stretched as far as the eye could see – three-hundred-and-twenty-thousand in all. Each warrior had three spare horses that chewed the grass to the roots leaving a patch of the steppe a barren wasteland. The stench of putrifying turds was overpowering and the millions of flies drove them to despair.

Temujin waited impatiently for a further day, but Sachai Baiki failed to arrive with his tuman. He had sent no word to explain his disobedience. With no time to wait, he would have to deal with Sachai Baiki's inability to fulfil a promise upon his return from the battle.

Temujin held a war council to which all the senior counsellors and the tuman commanders were required to attend. 'Welcome, my father,' he said to Toghriil. 'It is good to see you here.'

'We both avenge our grandfathers, my son,' Toghriil said. 'The Tartars are like leeches that feed off the blood of others. We will do to them, what we did to the Merkit.'

'I have already sent Subadai, with a hundred men to carry out a reconnaissance of the road to the Tartar camp, and to find out their exact location and their strength. It will take us three weeks to arrive at the Tartar camp, if we eat and rest on our horses. Wang Kin and his army are at least four weeks to the southeast, but I am awaiting confirmation of this from a messenger, which means that we will have very little time to overcome the Tartars and share the plunder before Wang Kin arrives.'

The two armies took up positions on the banks of the Kerulen, with Temujin on the north bank and Toghriil on the south bank. They began their long march towards the Ulchar River, which joined the Kerulen many miles to the east. The steppe stretched out endlessly ahead of them, shimmering in the sweltering heat.

The journey seemed never-ending. Warriors rotated their mounts every six hours. They rode on relentlessly, drinking and eating in the saddle. Perching precariously over the side of the horse, they urinated and defecated. Sleep was hard. There was always the danger of falling off, so they tied themselves on whilst they slept, by looping a rope around their waist and tying it tight to the horn of the saddle.

The only respite from this monotony was a turn on advance guard, which changed every six hours. It allowed them to ride free up and down the line on the steppe, but not everyone was lucky enough to get called upon.

Soon, the banter, jokes and laughter ran dry. Day and night melded into each other, days became weeks, and throughout, the heat tortured them unremittingly. There were no trees, no shade, and no wind. There had been no rain in weeks. Escape from the high humidity, which sapped their strength and the will to go on, was impossible.

The cool inviting sight of the Kerulen River flowing slowly past taunted them persistently, but to foul the running water, was to dishonour the spirits inhabiting the river, and against everything they believed in.

Subadai, returned after nine days. The armies halted for an hour so that Temujin could hold a war council. The men used the the time to stretch their legs, to wash, to care for their horses. Toghril crossed the river to attend the meeting with his tuman commanders, one of which was his son, Senggum.

'My lords,' Subadai commenced his report. 'The Tartars are camped with the Ulchar River to their backs. They are dispersed either side of the Kerulen, but both these rivers are low because of the lack of rain, and can easily be crossed. They appear to know we are coming, because they have built wood and dirt fortifications, but a horse can easily jump these insignificant barriers. The camps themselves are small, but hold everything they have, which makes them very crowded.'

'The Tartars have no honour,' Bogorju said, 'hiding behind walls to fight. They should come out of their hiding place and meet us in battle on the steppe, like true warriors.'

'They are numerically superior to us,' Subadai continued. 'I estimate they have one hundred thousand warriors.'

'If Sachai Baiki had brought his tuman we would be closer to their number,' Belgutei, pointed out.

Temujin gritted his teeth, and with narrowed eyes looked at Belgutei. 'I will deal with Sachai Baiki upon our return.' Indicating it should not be mentioned again. 'Numerically, the Tartars have made themselves equal to us by fighting behind barricades. They will be at a disadvantage. We will quickly overrun their defences and be inside their camp to wreak havoc. If they are then on foot, it will be easy for us. Is there anything else of importance Subadai?'

‘There are no problems with the paths on either side of the river approaching the Tartar camp. Other than that, there is nothing else, my lord,’ Subadai concluded.

‘I want you now to split your hundred into two halves’ he told Subadai. ‘One half under your second-in-command, is to find a location for the armies to halt, that is out of sight of the Tartars, but close enough so that we can attack them quickly. This group should await our arrival. The second half, under your command, should keep the Tartars under surveillance and make sure they don’t have any surprises for us. Try and get a man in their camp if you can, and see what damage you can do. I will send Chila’un to let you know when we are in position and prepared to attack.’

Subadai hit his chest with his right hand in a salute, and left the meeting to carry out his new orders.

Temujin leant over and whispered something to Bogorju, who stood and followed Subadai.

‘You’re as organised as ever, Temujin,’ Toghril said. ‘I feel as though I’ve just come to watch the slaughter.’

Temujin raised his head to look at, Toghril. ‘We are equal partners in this venture, my father. I could not do this without your help, but as I have said before, information is the key to winning battles.’

Senggum made a clucking noise, which Temujin chose to ignore, but Jelme went for his sword. Temujin put his hand on Jelme’s hand to prevent him drawing the weapon from its sheath.

Toghril, to calm the situation, said to his son, ‘Senggum you idiot, if you listened you might learn something. You’re not chief yet. Show respect to Temujin, or I’ll take your head myself.’

Senggum turned and mounted his horse, then made a show of galloping off back across the river.

‘Mount up. We continue on,’ Temujin said, ending the council.

After everyone had gone, Jelme said to Temujin, ‘You should have let me take his head, my lord.’

‘Don’t be so impatient, Jelme,’ Temujin replied. ‘If you had, there would have been war with Toghril. For the moment,

we need him. There will be time enough in the future to separate Senggum's arrogant head from his body.'

Bogorju leaned across to Temujin. 'I informed Subadai of the name of the spy in the Tartar camp. Whoever he sends to infiltrate their defences, will seek him out for assistance.'

Temujin nodded.

After nineteen days, Chimbai returned and fell in beside Temujin. 'My lord, Wang Kin was very gracious and hospitable. He said he happily accepts your offer of help and looks forward to meeting ToghriL, and his vassal Temujin.'

Temujin raised his eyebrows. 'He is obviously unaware of recent events and sees me as a minion to ToghriL. So be it, he underestimates me, as so many do. How far are they away?'

'They stop at the end of everyday and set up camp. They like their comfort. Wang Kin's tent is like a palace. He has servants and many women to cater to his every need and those of his advisors. They are slowed down by the baggage they bring with them in hundreds of carts. The first minister rides, not on a horse, but in an elaborately decorated covered cart drawn by six oxen. He lies down all day in the back of the cart talking and playing games with his advisors and his many wives, which they call concubines.'

'This is all very interesting Chimbai, but how far away are they?' Temujin asked again.

'I'm sorry, my lord, I was overcome by the way they travel to war. Even the soldiers live in...'

'Chimbai!' Temujin said, clearly exasperated.

'They are at least two weeks away, my lord, possibly longer,' Chimbai, at last answered the question.

'Thank you, Chimbai,' Temujin said. That gives us an extra week to dispose of the Tartars and share out the plunder, he thought. 'How many soldiers does Wang Kin bring with him?'

'A hundred thousand, my lord, some ride, but most walk. They wear metal armour and helmets. Their weapons are the lance and the sword.'

'I have heard of this metal armour, Chimbai,' Temujin said. Tell me what is like. Surely they cannot fight in a coat made of metal?'

‘The armour is not sheets of metal, but tiny squares sewn over a leather coat. It is flexible, light and easy to fight in. Arrows and sword blows merely glance off it.’

‘What of the helmet?’

‘It is shaped to fit the head and can stop a sword blow and an arrow.’

When we meet with Wang Kin, Temujin thought, I will ask him for a coat of armour and a helmet, they might prove to be useful in the future.

The two armies reached the place, where half of Subadai’s one hundred warriors were waiting for them. It was early afternoon, and Temujin gave orders for the warriors to rest before the attack at first light the following day. He sent the fifty warriors under Subadai’s commander to Lake Halil, which was close by, to prepare a place for warriors to rest during the battle and for the wounded to be taken. He then sent Chila’un to tell Subadai to attend him, and asked Bogorju to convene a council of war to discuss the attack the next morning.

‘My plan is to attack in two waves,’ Temujin told those gathered. ‘Toghril, you are to send two tumans to attack the Tartars at first light on your side of the Kerulen. I will send two of mine to attack them on this side. Keep the second wave out of sight until midday. As the second wave attack, the first will withdraw to Lake Halil, and be held in reserve. The Tartars will be surprised that we are not sending our full force at the start, but it will mean that our fresh warriors will be fighting Tartars, who will be exhausted by the afternoon, which will affect their morale.’

‘Surely it would be better to commit all our forces at once?’ Senggum asked with a sneer.

‘With so many warriors,’ Temujin replied, ‘it will not be so effective. If we were fighting on the steppe, then yes, but fighting in a confined space, they would get in each other’s way.’

‘You’re giving the Tartars the advantage,’ Senggum persisted. ‘By cutting our army in half, there will be two of them to every one of us.’

Temujin sighed. He didn’t mind explaining his tactics, but Senggum didn’t have the brains to understand. He’s just trying to get me angry, he thought. He has no idea about tactics

or how to win battles. He relies on numerical superiority because the Kereit have always had large numbers of warriors. He said to Senggum, 'The Tartars will suffer from the confined space also. Because they have built fortifications, they have defined their boundaries and once twenty thousand horses are also inside their camp, there will be no room for movement. We will have a clear advantage being on horseback.'

Senggum rolled his eyes, but said no more.

Temujin noticed the look on Senggum's face. It was the smug look of someone, who thought it would all go wrong, and when it did, he could say, I told you so. Stupid bastard has the brains of a yak.

'What of Subadai?' Qasar asked. 'Has he found out any more?'

'I have sent for him and expect him soon.' Temujin answered.

Just then, Chila'un returned with one of Subadai's warriors. 'My lord,' the warrior said. 'Subadai is inside the Tartar camp. He said that if you called for him to apologise, but that he would come to you an hour before first light to give his report.'

'Good,' Temujin said. 'If there are no more questions, I suggest we meet back here at that time to hear what Subadai has to say.'

At that, they all went to get some rest, before Subadai returned to give his report and they began the attack.

As promised, Subadai rode into the camp an hour before daybreak. Smiling, he entered the light being cast by the fire, where the commanders were already sat waiting for him.

'A man of your word Subadai,' Toghril observed.

'Why are you smiling, little brother?' Jelme asked him, although Subadai was far from little, towering above everyone except Qasar.

'My lord,' Subadai addressed, Temujin. 'You asked me to see what damage I could do.'

'Yes, and what damage have you done?'

'Before I get to that, my lord, permit me explain what the inside of the Tartar camp is like and what they have been doing to prepare for our attack. First, although the fortifications they've built are small, it is a trap, that is why they are so small.

Behind these walls, they have dug ditches with metal and wooden spikes in them. As the horses jump over a wall, they will break their legs and spear themselves when they land. The warriors will be thrown and the Tartars will kill them on the ground, but worse than this, the horses will lie there unable to move with their broken legs, and the next horses will land on them causing absolute chaos.'

'That's horrifying,' Qachi'un said appalled, echoing everyone's sentiments. 'Nobody injures horses on purpose, they are our life blood. Now I'm angry.'

'Save your anger for the Tartars, brother,' Temujin said. 'We need cool heads for what is to come.'

'So what now?' Senggum asked, with a self-satisfied grin.

'My lord,' Subadai continued, 'there is another way.'

'Go on,' Temujin urged him.

'The Tartars are expecting a frontal attack. All their efforts have been directed towards this. The rivers running on the two sides of their camps have been neglected. They haven't built any defences there because they think that they will not be attacked from the river.' He knelt down next to the fire and started to draw in the dirt with his knife. They all craned their necks to see what he was drawing. 'These two squares represent the two camps, the lines between them, the Kerulen, and the line at the back, the Ulchar. We can move our armies up the Kerulen, then into the Ulchar behind them and attack them from the rear. The waters in both rivers are the lowest they have been in many years. Unlike the Kerulen, which has steep banks that could not be scaled by horses the Ulchar has sloping banks that are dry and hard. The horses will have no problem scaling these.' He stood up and everyone sat back down again. 'The Tartars have kindly put all of their horses, women, children, and livestock at the rear of the camp. Another possibility is that we drive their horses and livestock before us to create panic and confusion.'

'Subadai,' Temujin exclaimed, throwing his hands in the air, 'you have done well. We cannot attack now. We must wait and use the darkness tonight to move into position. We will attack tomorrow morning. Bogorju, tell the men to stand down and get more rest. Let us now discuss this new plan,' Temujin

addressed them all. 'We will not use their horses, it would cause us as many problems as it would them.'

'My concern,' Toghriil said, 'is that they may hear us moving into position. We would be easy targets, especially in the Kerulen because they would be above us, and we would also be bunched up.'

'If I may answer that, my lord?' Subadai interjected.

'Please do,' Temujin said. 'You've obviously thought the plan through.'

'Although the rivers are low, they are still flowing and noisy,' Subadai explained. 'What they will hear is clanking of metal against metal. I suggest that every commander instructs his men to muffle any sound. There should be no talking and the horses obviously should be made to walk.'

'Let's say that we do make so much noise that they hear us, what then?' Temuge asked.

'Yes,' Qachi'un agreed with his brother. 'If they hear us whilst we're in the Kerulen, we'll be sitting targets, all lined up ready to be killed.'

'Not if they haven't got any bows and arrows,' Subadai said, a big grin on his face. 'You will make a dash to the Ulchar, because silence will no longer be a useful tool, and fall on them from behind as planned,' Subadai suggested.

'What do you mean no bows and arrows? Surely they are armed to the teeth?' Temujin asked him.

'You asked me to see what damage I could do, my lord. The Tartars have filled the positions behind their fortifications, with bows and thousands of arrows ready to defend a frontal assault. I will occupy myself during the night killing the guards, cutting the gut on their bows and removing all the arrows. When you attack, there will be no guards to raise the alarm and very few bows and arrows, which should reduce our casualties considerably.'

'Are we still using two waves?' Senggum asked, more seriously this time.

Temujin took over. 'Yes, but a little bit differently than I originally planned. The first wave, which I will command, will attack from the Ulchar at first light. This will catch them unaware and instead of facing west, they will now have to face

east to fight us. This will mean that the western fortifications will be left undefended. Two hours after first light, the second wave under Toghril should scale the walls, but carefully so that the horses are not injured. Once beyond the ditches, you will attack the Tatars from the rear. Are there any more questions?’

‘My lord,’ Subadai said. ‘I will meet you at the Ulchar, when you are in position.’

‘Well done, Subadai,’ Temujin said to him. ‘If this comes off, you’ll be in line for another promotion.’

During the night, they walked their horses into the Kerulen River and moved ponderously towards the Tartar camps. It was slow and laborious and took Temujin three hours to draw level with the two camps, and then another hour to move up the Ulchar into position. At first light Subadai, sitting on a stolen Tartar horse, greeted them.

‘There are no problems, my lord,’ Subadai said. ‘They sleep like babies. The guards are dead, and the bows and arrows destroyed.’

As the sun appeared reluctantly behind them, forty thousand warriors began banging their swords and lances on their shields and shouting at the tops of their voices. The noise became deafening as they moved slowly into the Tartar camp.

The Tartars burst from their tents into the open camp. They were cut down with arrows, swords and axes, it was like target practice for the Borjigin. The ground soon became cluttered with writhing human debris, decapitated bodies, heads and limbs. Riverlets of blood began to form and widen as Tartars died in their thousands. Many of the enemy ran from their tents to their assigned defensive positions, only to find their bows useless and their arrows gone, and the enemy behind them. The confused look was etched on their faces as their heads flew from their shoulders with the swipe of a sword. There were many who tried to defend themselves by using their swords or axes, but it was futile, they were no match for mounted warriors.

The killing went on for two hours and then the second wave, under Toghril’s command, came at them from behind. Panic quickly spread, as the Tartars were trapped between the two forces, which began to encircle them and cut off any escape.

They were slowly being crushed between the two armies and picked off by well-aimed arrows. Only the first line of Tartars, were able to wield their weapons, the rest were trapped in the middle of their own men, and easy targets for the archers on their horses.

Suddenly, it was clear to everyone that the battle was over, and both the opposing forces lowered their weapons. The Tartars sat or knelt down in submission, knowing that they were defeated. It was a disaster for the Tartars, but a comprehensive victory for Temujin and ToghriI. It had only taken them four hours to overcome the Tartar resistance.

Bogorju started organizing the captives and, Jelme dealt with the women, children, horses, livestock and other plunder.

Subadai brought the Tartar leader before Temujin and ToghriI. 'I caught him hiding amongst his men.'

'Why do you attack us, Temujin of the Borjigin?' their leader asked. 'We have done nothing to you.'

'Both ToghriI's grandfather and mine were captured by the Tartar and given to the Jin, who tortured them horribly. Your life will partly avenge their deaths and the great insult to our tribes.' With that he swung his sword and decapitated him.

Bogorju reported to Temujin, 'We have captured just over half of the Tartars, the rest are dead. I have split the captives into two groups. We lost a hundred and fifty-five men. Fifty-three were injured and are being tended.'

Jelme came some time later, and said, 'The plunder is great, my lord. It has taken me many hours to organise and separate it into two. Also, we found a silver cradle covered by a cloth of gold, which is very valuable.'

'Temujin,' ToghriI said, 'this has been the easiest battle I have ever fought. You could have done it easily without me. Give the silver cradle and the cloth of gold to Subadai. Without him we might well be where the Tartars are.'

'A fine suggestion, ToghriI,' Temujin said smiling. 'I agree, Subadai has shown himself to be a man of great vision and resourcefulness,' He called Subadai before him. 'You are promoted to commander of one thousand. The silver cradle and cloth of gold Jelme has found are yours.'

‘My lord,’ Subadai said, throwing himself on the ground in front of his Khan, ‘I ask no reward for doing my duty.’

‘That is why you receive one,’ Temujin said to him.

Later on that day, when Temujin was alone, Jelme came to him and said, ‘My lord, we have captured a Tartar boy, who had hidden in some bushes. He has a gold ring in his nose and a belt edged with sable and tassels, he is obviously high born. I have anticipated your wish, and sent him immediately to Ho’elun, your mother.’

‘Is the boy good looking?’ he asked Jelme.

‘Yes my lord, pretty enough to be a girl.’

‘I understand,’ Temujin said.

The following day Temujin held a meeting. It was decided that he and Toghrlil would ride to meet Wang Kin. Temujin sent Bogorju and Jelme back with the plunder, but kept back Belgutei and his tuman to accompany him to see Wang Kin. Toghrlil sent Senggum back with his plunder, and told Jaganbo to accompany him.

To Subadai Temujin said, ‘You have fifty men that I sent to Halil Lake. They were ordered to prepare a place for resting the warriors and for the injured, due to your plan they were not needed. Go to them and wait there for me, I will join you in three days.’

Temujin and Toghrlil set off towards the southeast to meet Wang Kin and reached him at the end of the first day. The Jin had already stopped for the day and set up camp. Wang Kin granted them an audience soon after they arrived. He was a small thin man in his mid-fifties with thinning hair and long moustaches. His eyes were alert and never still. They both bowed low, knowing that they were showing their respect to the emperor, through Wang Kin.

As the elder, Toghrlil took the lead. ‘My lord minister, the Lake Buyur Tartars will trouble you no longer, they cease to exist. We planned to await your arrival, but an opportunity arose and the task is complete.’

‘Then I have accomplished my mission without striking a blow. I am thankful, Toghrlil of the Kereit, and give you the title of prince. Henceforth, you will be known as Wang Khan. To Temujin of the Borjigin, I give the title Ja’utquri, the Keeper

of the Frontier. When I return, I will report all to my sovereign and try to gain for you both, still higher titles.'

They spent the night eating, drinking and being entertained by dancers, jugglers, and musicians. Temujin was conscious of not making the same mistake as his great grandfather and drank frugally. Before they departed the following morning, Temujin asked Wang Kin if he could examine a coat of armour and a helmet.

'Of course, of course,' he said. He signalled two soldiers, who ran over and came to attention in front of Temujin. 'Please, take a look. We have been perfecting the design, unfortunately a number of soldiers have died in the process, but that is the cost of progress.'

Temujin inspected the armour and saw that it was made from thin plates of metal, a finger's-breadth wide and a hand's-breadth in length, and that there were eight holes pierced in each plate. A series of the plates were bound together by leather thongs and then several of these strips had been joined to make an armour plate. The metal strips were polished so brightly Temujin could see his reflection in each one. The armoured coat was long and reached well below the knees, but showed the robe beneath. It opened all down the front, but was fastened to the waist with short sleeves of armour plate finishing just above the elbow. The metal helmet had a spike at the top centre, but pointing slightly backwards with a wide neck-guard covering the shoulders and coming round under the chin.

'What is it like to wear and fight in?' he asked Wang Kin.

Wang Kin ordered one of his attendants to fetch a suit of armour and a helmet. 'The easiest way to answer that question is for you to put one on and try it, Ja'utquri.'

The attendant came back at the run and helped Temujin on with the armour and helmet. He could feel that it was not that different from his normal coat, slightly heavier, but not as restrictive.

Wang Kin spoke a language Temujin didn't understand, but assumed it was Chinese. One of the soldiers drew his sword and attacked Temujin. He just had time to draw his own sword and block the blow. The Jin soldier swung again and Temujin

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side-stepped and swung his own sword, which the warrior blocked.

‘Enough,’ Wang Kin called. ‘Well Ja’utquri, does that answer your question?’

‘It does, my lord, thank you.’

‘I give you that suit of armour and helmet as a gift.’

‘You are very kind, my lord,’ Temujin said, as he took the armour and helmet off and stowed them on his horse. He mounted Qara, and then he and Wang Khan bid farewell to Wang Kin and his advisors.

Once they reached the Kerulen, Wang Khan embraced Temujin and they took separate paths. Wang Khan followed his son home to the Black Forest, whilst Temujin went to Halil Lake to join Subadai.

4

October 1194 – September 1198

Temujin arrived at Halil Lake in the early evening to find forty naked men shivering and huddled around a large blazing fire. He was told by one of the warriors, that Subadai was away collecting wood for the fire.

Belgutei's warriors sat on their horses laughing when they recognised the naked men as their comrades, and began teasing them mercilessly.

'Have we missed the women?' one shouted.

'These are the women,' another said. 'The warriors have just left,' which brought howls of laughter.

'Hey, pretty boys, where's the queue?'

'Is that what we're wearing for war now?'

The naked warriors took it in good heart, and Temujin ordered Belgutei to see to it that they were given clothes, horses and weapons from his own men's spares.

'What happened here?' Temujin asked Subadai, when he returned from collecting wood and building up the fire.

'Sachai Baiki and his Churkis surprised them, my lord,' Subadai told him. 'He came with a tuman of warriors, my men were clearly outnumbered. They fought bravely, killing more than their number, but they were easily overcome, and ten of my warriors were killed. As you see, he stripped the rest and took everything. We buried the ten when I got here, but we left the seventy dead Churkis for the vultures.'

Temujin was furious. 'I will kill that man with my bare hands,' he said. 'What possessed him to do such a thing to my men?'

'Apparently,' Subadai responded, 'he has sided with the Tartars, probably with the expectation that they would overcome you in battle.'

'That is how the Tartars must have known we were coming,' Temujin guessed. 'When I sent word for him to join me he must have sent warning to the Tartars, and agreed an alliance with them. All this time he makes a promise to my face,

but works against me when he is out of sight. His whole clan will suffer for his treachery. When did the attack happen?’

‘Three days ago my lord, just before I got here.’ Subadai had never seen his Khan so angry.

‘Do you know which way they went?’

‘They went west my lord, along the bank of the Kerulen.’

‘We will rest here tonight.’ Temujin said. ‘Tomorrow, we will hunt them down, no matter how long it takes us. You will take your forty warriors, who are well rested, and I suspect eager for revenge, ride on ahead and find the Churkis. When you do, you will keep them in sight and send word back to me. I will be following you.’

In the morning, as soon as the forty warriors were ready, Subadai led them away at a gallop. Temujin and Belgutei’s tuman followed in their wake at a much slower pace, along the course of the Kerulen. On the second day of their pursuit of Sachai Baiki, the weather changed and it began to rain incessantly. The ground became soft and slippery underfoot, and in some places it became dangerous and they had to move inland to prevent the horses from injuring themselves.

The warriors pushed on through the driving rain, cold and sodden, but uncomplaining. All were eager for revenge. The treachery, by people they had trusted, they knew, was unforgivable.

It was four weeks before two of Subadai’s warriors’ rode into the camp one evening, looking tired and hungry.

‘My lord,’ one of the warriors said, ‘Subadai has found the Churkis. They are camped on the Kode u aral plain near the Hentey Mountains and Subadai keeps them under surveillance.’

‘This is excellent news. How long will it take us to reach this place?’ Temujin asked the warrior.

‘Two days from here my lord, if you hurry, but three at walking pace.’

‘Do they show any signs of preparing to move?’

‘It doesn’t appear so, my lord. I think that they are preparing for the winter.’

‘Well done men, get something to eat and then rest.’ Temujin said to the two warriors. ‘We will leave at first light,’

They followed Subadai's warriors for three days and late on the afternoon of the third day, left the Kerulen and headed towards the Hentey Mountains. At last they came upon Subadai and his warriors in a forest at the base of the mountains.

'Where are they?' Temujin asked him. The long journey had lessened his anger, but it boiled just under the surface, and Subadai knew that death awaited Sachai Baiki and his clan.

Subadai led Temujin and Belgutei on foot, out of the forest, and up a wide mound that hid them from the plains in front. They climbed twenty feet to the top of the mound and lay down peering over at the plains below, and there before them was the Churkis camp. Hundreds of tents were spread over several miles of the grassy flat plain, each with its own pens for horses and livestock. Men, women and children were busy at their daily tasks as the light began to fade.

'We will attack them at first light tomorrow,' Temujin said to Subadai and Belgutei. 'We will kill everyone, and the men can have the women before we also kill them, and your forty warriors can keep all the plunder.'

'Thank you, my lord, that will make them very rich men indeed,' Subadai exclaimed, amazed at Temujin's generosity.

'They were dishonoured and shamed by my kinsman,' Temujin said. 'Sachai Baiki is my cousin. Compensation is necessary, for those who have suffered at his hands.'

'When you say *everyone*, my lord, does that include the children?' Belgutei asked horrified.

'*Everyone*, brother, means *everyone*. I want people to understand that if you fail to keep a promise when it is given, you pay with your life and the lives of your clan. Sachai Baiki made a promise, not just for himself, but on behalf of his clan and they all failed to fulfil that promise. That would have been bad enough, but then they went over to my enemies and killed ten of my men. This is an insult beyond forgiveness. After tomorrow, the Churkis will exist only in the memories of old people. It will also remind my allies and my enemies, that if you break your word to Temujin, then punishment will be swift and brutal.' He scrambled from the top of the mound, ending any further discussion, and walked down the hill.

An hour before first light, the men were woken, briefed on what was required and moved into position. The tuman had been split into three groups. One group, under the command of Temujin, would attack from the forest, skirting round the mound, one from the left of the plain under the command of Belgutei, and the third, from the right under Belgutei's second-in-command, Bataar. The Churkis' only escape would be the Kerulen, which, after the rainstorms of the previous month, was now close to bursting its banks and the torrential flow was far too dangerous to cross on foot or horse.

There was no sun and it threatened to rain, but a depressing light gradually replaced the darkness as the three forces began to move forward. Temujin had decided that there should be no accompanying noise and because of this, it was even more frightening. The mounted warriors rode from tent to tent killing everyone, outside and inside, with the exception of the young women and girls, who were herded before them, to be saved until after the slaughter had ended. The killing went on for hours, as each group made their way slowly towards each other leaving the dead, dying and screaming behind them. Cries for mercy were ignored. Temujin's warriors wanted vengeance, and only blood would satisfy this need.

Subadai had been ordered to take his forty warriors and capture Sachai Baiki and his brother Daichu alive. As they neared the centre of the camp, however, there was heavy resistance and the fighting was hard and difficult. Around midday, they burst through the defending warriors to the chief's tent, only to find Sachai Baiki gone, and his wives and children cowering in the darkness. Subadai ordered his warriors to kill them all where they sat, with the exception of two of Sachai Baiki's lovely daughters and one of his young wives. These three women were dragged out screaming and put with the other female captives.

Subadai reported to Temujin, 'Sachai Baiki and Daichu have fled, my lord.'

'Find them Subadai,' Temujin said to him. 'And remember, I want them alive. I will wait here for you to return, no matter how long it takes.'

Subadai rode out of the Churkis camp with his men to hunt the two brothers down.

There were only a few pockets of resistance left now, which were soon overcome. Belgutei then ordered his warriors to carry out a sweep throughout the whole camp and kill any they had missed, to gather up the plunder, and then move the dead bodies into piles for burning. After that, they would then set up camp to await the return of Subadai and his men.

The thousands of young women and girls were herded into pens and guarded. They screamed, wept and wailed enough to wake the spirits. Any woman thought too old or too ugly was killed and the bodies dragged and thrown on the piles for burning. Temujin ordered a feast to be prepared from some of the livestock they had liberated from the Churkis. The plunder was loaded onto carts for Subadai's forty warriors.

That night, the men ate and drank better than they had for many months. Once they were full and drunk on the copious amounts of airag, they were ready for the women, something else they had not had for a long time. It started with just a few warriors making their way towards the pens where the women were kept, but then it turned into an exodus. Each eager to pick the best. At first they sat on the fences, taunting the women and trying to decide which one to take first.

'What about that one, Toodei?' one warrior asked his brother.

'A bit skinny,' Toodei replied.

'That one over there then?'

'Face like a bear,' Toodei grimaced.

'I'm not going to be kissing her.'

'Still, you don't want the ugliest of the bunch, think what the other's will say.'

'What about that one?'

'I wouldn't, a bit too fat for me.'

'We're not going to marry them, lets just grab one and get to it.'

In the end, they jumped over the fence and grabbed the nearest woman, ripped off her clothes, threw her on the ground and raped her. Thousands of men began raping, beating or sodomising the captive women. Some of the women were raped

and sodomised by two men, some of the men formed queues, and as one finished, another would take his place. Women who tried to resist were beaten senseless, others attempted to welcome the men with open arms and open legs. The men were like crazed beasts on the scent of blood, it was like a scene from a nightmare. After they had been satiated they watched others copulating, whilst they recovered for another turn, and commented on the size and technique of others around them.

‘What was yours like, brother?’

‘Lay a bit still, but not too bad.’

‘Mine fought like a she-wolf, but I slapped a few times and she soon settled down to it.’

‘Look at the size of him over there, hung like a donkey.’

‘The size of yours, I’m not surprised you’re impressed by that small thing.’

‘Look at his, she’s not going to be very satisfied with that inside her.’

‘Ready for another one?’

‘Yeah, just about.’

At first, the screaming and crying of the captives was horrifying, but it eventually died down to a whimper, as the rape and abuse went on throughout the night, and continued into the next day. Temujin told Belgutei to tell the men to get some rest, as they would have another feast that night and another turn with the women.

Subadai did not return for three days, and the feasting and raping continued throughout this time. Some of the men began to become attached to the women they had chosen, and promised to save them if they could.



Subadai picked up Sachai Baiki’s tracks just outside the camp. They were heading northwest around the base of the mountain towards Lake Baikal. There were ten of them that had managed to escape the massacre. They were riding fast and making no effort to hide their tracks. Subadai sent two men ahead to keep watch on them from a distance, and, with the rest of his

warriors, he followed them, staying just behind and out of sight, waiting his chance.

Saicha Baiki stopped to rest, setting up camp at the end of the second day, and one of the two men rode back to tell Subadai. He stopped just beyond their camp and waited until the early hours of the next morning, and when they were sound asleep; his warriors crept into the camp by the light of the dying fire and killed everyone but Sachai Baiki, and his brother, Daichu.

‘Temujin would like to talk to you two fine warriors,’ Subadai told the Churkis brothers.

‘Let us go Subadai,’ Sachai Baiki pleaded for his life and that of his brother. ‘I’ll make you a rich man.’

‘I am already a rich man,’ Subadai said smiling, ‘and your promises, as you have shown, mean nothing.’

‘Please, Subadai you know Temujin will kill us.’

‘If I hadn’t been ordered to bring you back alive, I would kill you myself. Those men you killed were my men.’

‘I’m sorry. I didn’t know they were your men.’

‘Bind and gag them,’ Subadai said to two of his warriors. ‘I don’t want to listen to them whining all the way back. Tie them on their horses backward, that’s the least I can do for them.’ Putting a man backward on his horse was a sign he was riding to his death.

It took them all of the next day to reach the camp. As they approached, the hideous glow in the darkness mesmerised them like something out of a tale told to frighten children. The stench of burning flesh and death made them retch, and they could see the dark shadows of men decapitating women and feeding the hundred of fires with headless corpses. The smoke created a dark menacing cloud that hung over the camp and hid the quarter moon.

‘My lord,’ Subadai said, ‘it took some time to catch up with them, but here they are.’ Subadai’s warriors cut the two brothers off their horses and took the gags off, then threw them in the dirt in front of Temujin.

‘Well done Subadai. You should be glad that I sent you after them. It has been like living in a nightmare here. A necessary evil, but I am glad that it is nearly over.’

‘I am glad, my lord,’ Subadai confirmed. ‘This does not look as though it has been pleasant.’

Temujin looked down at his cousin. ‘Why, Sachai Baiki, when I treated you as a member of my family, would you break your promise and go over to my enemies?’ Temujin asked him.

‘We have not done what we promised, Temujin,’ Sachai Baiki said. ‘You have every right to take our heads.’ He leaned forward baring his neck and his brother followed him. Temujin drew his sword, swung it twice and took off their heads. ‘Throw their bodies on the fire,’ he said to no one in particular.

The following morning, before they set off, Belgutei inspected his warriors and found three women dressed as men. The warriors who were responsible were identified. This was a minor matter, which Belgutei dealt with himself. Both the women and the warriors were executed and thrown on the smouldering fires. All warriors knew that disobeying orders was punishable by death, they had no complaints.

It took them a week to reach their camp. As soon as they got there, Temujin took the armour and helmet to his master backsmith, Charchiutai. Jelme and Subadai’s father was old now, unable to stand at the anvil and work the bellows or swing the hammer; he trained and guided others in his skill.

‘Can you copy these, my friend?’ Temujin asked him. ‘And can you make enough for all the warriors?’

‘So, Great Khan, you would have me copy other people’s work,’ Charchiutai complained. ‘Is this what you have brought me down to, a copier of inferior work?’

Temujin smiled. As Charchiutai had aged in his service, he had become ever more cantankerous. ‘If it is inferior work, then you can improve on it, can you not?’

Charchiutai did not answer immediately, but inspected first the armour, turning it over in his gnarled hands, examining the metal plates by bringing them close to his clouded eyes, and testing the strength of the ties that held the plates in place. Then he picked up the helmet, knocked it with his knuckles, banged it on the chair, and said, ‘I will come to you within the month with my answer.’

On the thirtieth day, Charchiutai hobbled into Temujin's tent unannounced with one of his assistants. Temujin had just sat down to his evening meal with Borte.

'This suit of armour,' Charchiutai said, without waiting to be asked, 'has been created to my own specifications, and is far superior to that shoddy piece of work you brought me, Great Khan.' He signalled his assistant impatiently to bring the armour forward. 'Please, try it on.'

Temujin stood, and the assistant helped him on with the armour. Borte hovered round, straightening a crease here and a ruffle there.

'You look magnificent, my husband,' Borte said, admiring the workmanship, 'so strong and handsome. I particularly like the golden robe beneath the armour, it gives you a presence.'

'I will be wearing this coat of amour in battle, my love,' Temujin laughed. 'Not in bed.'

'Yes, but you should look like a Khan, when you ride into battle, my husband.'

'Do I not look like a Khan now?' he asked her, raising his eyebrows.

'You know that is not what I meant,' she said coyly.

'You have excelled yourself Charchiutai. What of the armour for my warriors?'

'My assistants are working night and day. I am hoping they will finish them before, Tengri calls me.'

'You will outlive me, my friend.'

'I certainly hope not, Great One,' Charchiutai grunted. 'I am bone weary and ready to make the journey to Eternal Heaven. My sons are distinguished warriors in your service, and I can die a happy man.'

As Charchiutai shambled out with the help of his assistant, Temujin knew that the old man did not have long to live, and he would be sad to say goodbye to this loyal blacksmith, who had come down from the mountains and given him two remarkable sons.

Once the two visitors had left, Borte began helping him off with the armour and then undid his belt.

‘The armour does not include the belt, Borte,’ he said, taking her hand. ‘What of the meal, I am hungry?’

‘I am hungry also, my husband,’ she replied, moving her hand to his belt again. ‘The meal can wait. Seeing you so strong and powerful in that armour, has stirred something inside me.’



There was peace on the steppe over the next two years. Temujin spent the time re-organizing and consolidating. Bogorju extended his spy network, and organised continuous training for the tumans. Jelme organised the replenishment of weapon stocks and training for the elite guard. The blacksmiths produced armour and helmets for all the warriors of the eight tumans.

Although Charchiutai died in the second year and was buried with great honour, his legacy lived on in the blacksmiths that took his place at the furnaces and bellows.

Across the steppe, there was an increasing undercurrent of fear among the tribes. They were afraid of Temujin’s growing power and his alliance with Wang Khan of the Kereit.

This was further demonstrated, when the two allies found an excuse to attack the Barin tribe, who had been stealing livestock and horses from some members of a clan in Wang Khan’s tribe.

Senggam arrived at Temujin’s camp in the middle of May. The sky was a deep blue and the sun, not yet at its hottest, still made it too warm for winter jackets. ‘My father, Wang Khan, sends greetings, and asks if you would like to join him in an attack on the Barin tribe?’

‘What about you Senggam?’ Temujin taunted him.

‘What about me?’ Senggam answered belligerently.

‘What do you want?’

‘I want what my father wants.’ Temujin could clearly see that Senggam was a poor reflection of his father. Although he had a strong lean body, he had no ambition, no individual thoughts of any note, and was happy to live in the shadow of his father.

‘Tell Wang Khan,’ Temujin said, tired of playing with Senggum, ‘it will be good to get back in the saddle. I shall come to him in two weeks. Are two tumans enough?’

‘More than enough,’ Senggum replied. ‘The Barin, are a weak tribe led by a chief called Taidju, who is a small-minded person, and can’t see beyond his next meal.’

‘I have found to my chagrin, that there are many people that answer to the description you give,’ Temujin said, smiling and looking directly into Senggum’s eyes. Senggum turned, got back on his horse, and rode away with his detachment of warriors.

Subadai had been promoted to tuman commander six months previously, and Temujin decided to take him and Qasar with him. He left Bogorju and Jelme in charge. This campaign would provide an ideal opportunity to test the new armour under battle conditions.

Temujin met Wang Khan, as agreed. ‘Now I see why you wanted that armour from Wang Kin,’ Wang Khan said, as they embraced. He walked around Temujin, Subadai and Qasar, inspecting their new armour and helmets. Temujin had a gold-coloured robe beneath his armour, whilst each of his commanders, had robes of blue. The eight tumans all had different coloured robes so that they were identifiable in battle. ‘Your blacksmith has done a good job copying the Jin armour, and improved on it, I see.’

‘Yes,’ Temujin said. ‘The Jin armour plates were sewn side by side, these plates are smaller, but overlap so weapons can’t sneak between the plates. All my warriors have armour and helmets now.’

‘You have been busy since we last met, my son,’ Wang Khan said with a look of concern.

Temujin noticed the worry etched on Wang Khan’s face, and knew that the old man had begun to fear the growing power of his ally.

‘What information do you have on the Barin?’ Temujin asked Wang Khan at the war council.

‘You always want to know information,’ Senggum cut in. ‘We know that they are stealing our horses and livestock, what else do we need to know?’

Temujin smiled. 'I was thinking more along the lines of how many warriors they have? Are they expecting us? What is the layout of their camp?'

'We don't need to know any of that,' Senggum said mockingly. 'We just ride in, kill them and take the plunder.'

'Senggum,' Wang Khan hissed, 'shut up, you dolt. You know absolutely nothing.' Senggum stamped out of the meeting. To Temujin, Wang Khan said, 'I've told him he's staying here to guard the camp, but I sometimes wonder whether that is beyond him.'

Temujin said nothing. Wang Khan's eyes told Temujin everything he needed to know about what his father thought of Senggum. As his only son, he was obviously a major disappointment to him.

'The Barin have about eighty thousand men,' Wang Khan said sitting down and groaning as he did so. He was getting old now, and Temujin was sure that if Senggum had been the son his father wanted, he would have stepped down already. 'But they prefer the comfortable life of herding, rather than fighting. As warriors they are poor quality and overcoming them, even with forty thousand, should not be too difficult.'

'Will they be expecting us?'

'It is unlikely. I was surprised when I heard they had been stealing from some of my people. They have not done that before, and I have not approached Taidju for an explanation or compensation. I could have dealt with it peacefully, but an insult is an insult, and this seems like a good opportunity to expand our power, increase our wealth, and reduce our enemies.'

'I agree, my father,' Temujin said. 'No insult should be left unpunished, otherwise disrespect will soon follow.'

It took them two days to reach Barin territory, which was adjacent to the Kereit lands along the Ongiin River, towards the Gobi desert. Temujin's two tumans, looking all the same, were impressive riding together. Qasar's warriors had robes of yellow, whilst Subadai's warriors had robes of red. Not only did they look like an army now, but the armour would reduce confusion in battle. It was now easy to distinguish between friend and foe.

On the second night, they camped just out of sight of the Barin camp and at first light attacked. Wang Khan was right, Temujin thought, the Barin warriors aren't up to much. By midday it was all over, Subadai had captured their chief Taidju, and Sidji Bijhi, the brother of the Merkit chief Tukta Bijhi, both of whom were beheaded. Thousands of the Barin warriors were killed in the battle, but also thousands were captured and would be sold into slavery. The plunder in livestock, horses and women and children was enormous, and they shared it out evenly between them.

Temujin was pleased when Subadai and Qasar reported that no men had been lost only fifteen horses, which were easily replaceable. The armour was saving lives already, Temujin thought. Wang Khan, however, had lost nearly five hundred men. Temujin had the notion that maybe the armour could be extended to protect the horses, and he would discuss this with the blacksmiths when he returned.

'My father,' Temujin said to Wang Khan, 'another success and considerable plunder to add to our wealth. I thank you for including me in this raid.'

'We are allies, and allies should fight as one to destroy each other's enemies. Together we are stronger than if we were alone.'

They parted on good terms and went their separate ways. It took Temujin two weeks to reach his camp, loaded down with plunder, which was distributed among the men who had gone with him.



Bogorju came to Temujin one day in September of that same year. 'My lord, I have heard through one of my spies that Tukta Bijhi, and the remainder of the Merkit, are camped by the Selenga River.'

Temujin was sat in his tent with Borte, and they both looked up at him. The name Tukta Bijhi brought back memories of a time each would rather forget. 'Send word to my father, Wang Khan and tell him I will come to him in one week with

two tumans, ask him if he wishes to join me in attacking them before winter sets in.'

This time, Temujin took Temuge and Qachi'un and their tumans and met Wang Khan on the way, who joined him with a further two tumans. When they reached the Selenga River, they found that the Merkit had received word of the attack and packed up and left in a hurry. They pursued the fleeing Merkit and caught up with the last of the clans. They fell on them and slaughtered them to a man, but lost the others. Tukta Bijhi was among those who had escaped.

'My father,' Temujin said to Wang Khan. 'This is a small return for our efforts,' indicating the few horses, carts and weapons. 'I want you to keep all the plunder. It is my fault that Tukta Bijhi escaped. I should have kept him under surveillance, and had a better plan of attack.'

'This was a shared venture, my son,' Wang Khan shifted on his horse, not for the first time. His arse must be falling out, Temujin thought. It often afflicts old warriors, and no doubt will trouble me, if I am lucky to live so long. 'We should therefore share the plunder. No blame should be apportioned to either of us. Tukta Bijhi is a wily old bastard; he is more slippery than a jerboa.'

'No, I am thankful you joined me, even though we were only partially successful. I insist you take it all, it will repay you for your generosity in accompanying me.'



In June of the following year, Bogorju told Temujin that Wang Khan had attacked the Merkit again. 'He captured Jiluan, the son of Tukta Bijhi and Kutu, his brother. He also killed Tugan another of his sons, and seized all of Jiluan's herds and people and kept them for himself. It was dishonourable, after you had let him keep all the plunder from the last raid.'

'The time will soon come, when everything Wang Khan has will be ours anyway, but not yet. We still have many enemies out there on the steppe and together we can defeat them, but

alone we would be in danger of losing everything we have gained. You must learn patience, Bogorju.'

It was a quiet and peaceful summer and to keep the warriors active, a hunt was held over July and August to supplement the winter food supply, before the slaughter of the herds in October.

In September, Bogorju again came to Temujin. 'My spies in the Naiman camp tell me that Inanche Bilge has died. His two sons have argued over one of their father's wives, who, I am told is a beauty. They have divided up the Naiman territory between them, and Taiyang has kept the level country, whilst Buyruq, the younger of the two brothers, has taken the mountain places. They are now enemies.'

'Which one of the two brothers is the weaker?' Temujin asked.

'Bairuk, the younger brother,' Bogorju replied. 'He has fewer warriors than his brother.'

'We will ride to visit Wang Khan, to discuss a possible attack. You will accompany me, leave Jelme in charge.'

The following morning Temujin, Bogorju and Temuge, with his tuman set off to visit Wang Khan. It was an uneventful journey and they arrived after two days.

'My son,' Wang Khan said, smiling as he embraced Temujin. 'I am pleased to see you, what brings you this way?' But before Temujin could answer, Wang Khan was telling his attendants to organise a feast for that night. 'We will indulge ourselves to celebrate the visit of my favorite son and ally. So why are you here?' he asked again.

'I have come to talk to you my father, about the Naiman.'

'What about them?'

'Inanche Bilge has died.'

'Has he now?' he said, flamboyantly sitting down in his gold seat and signalling Temujin and Bogorju to sit also. 'Eternal Heaven has smiled on me, that I should outlive him after he supported my brother against me.'

'We are both fortunate my father, that you have lived so long.'

'Why is that?'

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‘Because now it allows you to get your revenge on the Naiman,’ Temujin told him. ‘And it allows me to hunt down my two enemies Jamuga, and my half-brother Begter, who are living with them.’

‘The Naiman are still stronger than both of us combined,’ Wang Khan said surprised. ‘What makes you think we can attack them and win, just because their chief has died?’

‘His two sons have argued over a woman. The tribe is divided between the two brothers. They have and broken up the Naiman territory, which has weakened each brother. We will attack one of the brothers.’

‘Won’t the two brothers reconcile their differences if one of them is attacked?’

‘No, they are now deadly enemies.’

‘Then we have another reason to celebrate,’ Wang Khan said, and laughed heartily.

5

April – October 1199

‘At last, my father, we have reached Buyruq’s territory,’ Temujin said wearily to Wang Khan, as he looked up at the frozen peaks of the Altai Mountain range. They had set off in mid-April from the upper reaches of the Kerulen and headed southwest towards the Gobi desert, following the course of the Ongiin River, and skirting round the edge of the desert. The march had taken them two months and they were now exhausted.

‘We should rest now before we attack,’ Wang Khan said, looking twice his age. It was late in the afternoon, and although the sun was shining there was a biting wind, which reminded them that summer had not yet arrived.

‘Yes, let us rest today,’ Temujin replied. ‘Tomorrow morning we will hold a war council and decide on our plan of attack.’ He would hold his own war council tonight with his commanders of the nine tumans he had brought with him. Unlike Senggum, he was not prepared to ride in blind, and although he had received information from the spy within the Naiman camp, it was not recent information.

Once they had set up camp he called Bogorju to him. ‘Tell Chimbai, to obtain up to date information on the Naiman. We don’t want to be walking into a trap if they have learned we are here. I will hold a war council tonight, he should make sure he is back by then. Let the tuman commanders know when I expect them.’

That night they sat around the fire inside Temujin’s tent, ‘Let us hear from Chimbai first,’ Temujin said. Chimbai had been promoted to the equivalent of a tuman commander, and he was now in charge of the spy network, which had grown considerably from its early beginnings, and took up far too much of Bogorju’s time.

Sat around the fire, besides Bogorju and Jelme, were Temujin’s four brothers. The other tuman commanders were, Subadai, Muqali of the Jahair, who had joined Temujin; Chila’un, who, like his brother, had been promoted; Boroqul,

who, as a boy, had been found in the Churkis camp and brought up by Ho'elun; and Jochi, Temujin's first son, who was now twenty-three.

'My lord,' Chimbai said, 'as you know the Naiman are like blades of grass on the steppe. They are spread for many miles along the base of the mountain range. If you attack in one area, they will rise up in many other places to attack you. They are a powerful tribe with many clans.'

'So what you're saying is that when we do attack, we will only surprise some of them and the rest will have time to prepare and attack us?' Belgutei asked, seeking clarification. A look passed between Temujin and Bogorju, which went unnoticed by the others.

'Yes,' Chimbai said, slightly embarrassed that Belgutei needed further explanation.

'When you say they are like blades of grass on the steppe, how many warriors is that exactly?' Temuge asked.

'I would estimate two hundred thousand, but it could be many more,' Chimbai said, unsure of himself.

'That's not very exact Chimbai,' Qachi'un challenged him. 'Is your spy a dung gatherer that can't count?' There was a smattering of laughter, but most realised the seriousness of the situation.

'I can't be exact because the Naiman are camped not just on the plains, but also in the mountains and this makes estimating their numbers very difficult. I do know that they have twenty tumans and that is what my figure is based on.'

'Are they organised?' Temujin asked him.

'They are as organised as we are, my lord, and are still very much as they were under Inanche Bilge, when he was alive. Buyruq has two senior commanders, who should be considered dangerous. Edetukluk and Kokse u Sabraq each control half of the army, but Sabraq is the senior and advises Buyruq. Their weakness is, of course, Buyruq, who is both the younger and the weaker of the two brothers.'

'Have they had word we are here?' Boroquk asked the obvious question, which had slipped by everyone.

'My spy assures me that they have no idea we are here.'

‘It seems that we should attack in many places at once then,’ Qasar concluded.

‘Yes, but then we weaken ourselves by splitting our forces, and one of these could become isolated,’ Bogorju observed.

‘Then, what if we split into two groups of four, that way we would be attacking in four places across the whole mountain range,’ Subadai said, with an insight most of the others lacked.

‘That seems to be a good compromise,’ Temujin said. ‘Two groups of five tumans each at the extremes of their camp will attack from the sides and front and the two groups with four tumans each will attack in the centre. Bogorju will command the five tumans on the right, and Jelme will command the four tumans in the centre. I will put this plan to Wang Khan at the war council tomorrow.’

After all of the tuman commanders had left, Bogorju called Chimbai to him. ‘I know that was the first time you have been asked to provide information at a war council, but it was considerably less than Temujin and I expected from you. For effective decisions to be made Temujin must have accurate information, not vague statements such as *blades of grass on the steppe*; that tells us nothing. Warriors could die based on the information you provide. Do you understand?’

‘Yes, sir.’ Chimbai said, head held high. ‘It was my fault. I should have rode on ahead and sought out the spy. In the end, I did not have enough time to gather the proper information and be back for the war council. In future, I will plan better, and anticipate the information that the Khan needs.’

‘See that you do, Chimbai. Temujin, nor I, will tolerate another fiasco as we have just witnessed. Meet with your spy again tomorrow and verify the information you have provided, and the Khan is eager for information on Jamuga and Begter.’

At the war council the next day Temujin outlined his plan, which was agreed by all those present. They would attack the following morning at first light, using the darkness to move into position. The tuman commanders went and briefed their men and everyone rested, awaiting the onset of night.



Temujin was between his own two forces with his elite guard, which had now grown to two thousand, one half had been left to guard Borte and his younger children, the other thousand were with him now. Bogorju was to his right and Jelme to his left.

As planned, they attacked at first light, and initially, the warriors made some headway because of the chaos involved in the surprise attack, but the Naiman quickly organised themselves, and then movement towards the mountains was slow and bloody. The ground was littered with the dead and dying. Screaming horses thrashed in agony, and rivers of blood squelched underfoot.

The mounted Naiman warriors appeared to present an impenetrable wall. Temujin could see they were the most disciplined and organised warriors the Borjigin had fought, and on this point, Chimbai had been right. Women, children and livestock were caught up in the battle and were running in every direction, impeding progress. They ran screaming and wailing, slipping on the bloody ground, then picking themselves up dripping congealed blood, hair and skin, looking for a place to hide to escape the carnage.

Temujin could see that his warriors were clearly visible in their colour-fringed armour, and was pleased that they held their line. He was in the front line, elite guards protecting his left, right and rear. His sword arm, dripping blood, was as heavy as lead. Naiman warriors fell before him, but they did not die easily, and every man he killed was replaced by two more. His shield arm was jarred numb with parried blows. A brief respite, as he fell back to be engulfed by the guard. He looked around, the fighting was fierce and it was difficult to see how progress could be made, and then the Naiman began to fall back. The withdrawal was clearly well organised, and the fighting became particularly gory, as every inch was lethally contested. Then a loud cheer went up from the Borjigin, as the Naiman suddenly

withdrew *en masse* and merged into the dense forest at the base of the mountain.

Bogorju and Jelme converged on him. They were covered in blood, which ran in rivulets down their arms and legs dribbling into the blood-red mush beneath them. ‘My lord, do we pursue them?’ Bogorju, dripping in sweat and breathing hard, asked.

‘Let us assess our situation first, and find out how Wang Khan has fared before we decide,’ Temujin replied, removing his helmet and wiping his forehead with his sleeve. ‘Send messengers to Wang Khan.’

The messengers returned and informed them that the Naiman had withdrawn all along the line, and that Wang Khan was eager to pursue them.

‘Jelme,’ Temujin said, ‘leave one of your tumans here to collect up the plunder and await our return. The rest of us will pursue Buyruq.’ To the messenger he said, ‘Return to Wang Khan and tell him what we are doing and suggest that he do the same.’

As a combined force, they followed Buyruq, who had moved northwest towards the pass between the Altai and Tien Shen Mountain ranges. Edeltukluk brought up the rear of the Naiman withdrawal with fifty thousand warriors. As they caught up with him, he turned to take a stand, whilst the bulk of the Naiman continued their withdrawal.

Temujin and Wang Khan’s combined force of a hundred and sixty thousand fell on the Naiman warriors. Edeltukluk was heavily outnumbered, but his warriors fought bravely to the last, delaying further pursuit, giving their lives so that Buyruq could escape. The last few were captured, together with Edeltukluk, whose saddle girth strap snapped and he was thrown to the ground losing his shield and sword.

Bogorju ordered a detachment of warriors to take the captives, horses and weapons back to where they had left Boroqu’s tuman, and then return. Temujin, after conferring with Wang Khan, decided to continue with the pursuit.

Towards evening, they came upon the main Naiman force under Kokse u Sabraq, who clearly had greater numbers and had chosen his position, to make a stand, well. They

stopped and Wang Khan rode across his warriors to talk to Temujin.

‘It is nearly evening my son,’ Wang Khan said, clearly struggling with the exertion of battle and the pursuit. ‘We should make camp tonight, and attack them in the morning.’

‘So it shall be my father, we will rest here tonight, and continue in the morning.’

As Temujin finished the evening meal and was sharing a skin of airag with Bogorju and Jelme and discussing the day’s events, Chimbai sought him out.

‘My lord, I have found out that Jamuga rides with Sabraq, and he is advising him on how you wage war. Begter chose to seek refuge with Taiyang, when the two brothers parted.’

‘I should have known that Jamuga would be here working against me,’ Temujin said. ‘Wherever my enemies are to be found, Jamuga seeks them out and aids them in opposing me. As for Begter, he knows my wrath is great and my revenge will be terrible. He finds the farthest place to hide from me, and is without honour. I will separate his head from his shoulders before I am done.’

‘If Jamuga is with Sabraq,’ Jelme said, ‘then we should anticipate the unexpected. He also is a man without honour.’

‘Yes,’ Temujin said. ‘We should be on our guard. Nothing will be as it seems. Jamuga knows me too well.’



‘Why are you here, Jamuga?’ Wang Khan asked him, clearly annoyed at being woken up in the middle of the night, when he had only just managed to get to sleep. He ached all over and knew that he should be at home taking it easy. He was far too old for riding thousands of miles to fight battles. The lumps falling out of his arse were causing him agony, they throbbed continuously. The cushion on his saddle didn’t help much.

‘My lord, I bring grave news,’ Jamuga whispered conspiratorially, waiting to be asked to sit down, but the invitation did not come so he remained standing.

‘It is grave news that you are here,’ Wang Khan said irritably, ‘siding with my enemies.’

‘I have been living with the Naiman to protect myself, and what is left of my tribe, from Temujin.’

‘And well you might Jamuga, after you tried to ambush him, not once, but twice.’

‘They were mistakes on my part, but I should be allowed to make amends.’

‘If you submit to Temujin, then I am sure he will be generous. After all, you were once anda-brothers.’

‘I will not submit to him.’

‘Then you will perish.’

‘That might be so, but not before I warn you. Temujin has betrayed you tonight.’

‘That is not possible. You lie to cause trouble between us. Why should I not call my guards and have you executed?’

‘Wang Khan, I have always been your friend. I would not risk my life in coming to warn you unless it was true,’ Jamuga said emphatically, deciding to sit without the invitation.

At that point, Senggum joined them. He had been woken by the guard that had admitted Jamuga to Wang Khan’s tent. ‘I was informed that we had a visitor, father,’ and turning to Jamuga, he said, ‘what brings you here, Jamuga?’

‘I have come to warn your father of Temujin’s betrayal, but he thinks it is a ploy to cause trouble between them.’

‘Father, Jamuga has always been your friend, you should listen to what he has to say,’ Senggum entreated Wang Khan.

‘How could Temujin betray me? We have just spent the day fighting the Naiman side by side and then pursuing them here. Now you tell me he has turned against me. I don’t believe it. What possible reason could he have for turning against me?’

‘I was with Sabraq in his tent earlier, hidden behind a screen. Temujin arrived with his two commanders, Bogorju and Jelme, and they were plotting your ruin.’

‘This can’t be true. Temujin is a son to me, not a coward who treats with the enemy behind my back.’ Wang Khan clambered out of his bed and both Jamuga and Senggum saw the dried blood on the back of his trousers, just before he put a gold-embroidered coat on to protect against the cold. ‘You have

twice tried to kill Temujin, why did you not murder him when he was there in front of you?’

‘I wanted to, believe me Wang Khan, but Sabraq would not allow it. He thought Temujin might try to barter for my head, in exchange for betraying you.’

‘Father, you know Temujin always wants more than he has. This could be his opportunity to destroy the Kereit, and make himself Khan over the entire eastern steppe.’

Wang Khan was beginning to doubt his belief in Temujin. Senggum was right, Temujin was always planning for the future, feeding his ambition to be more than he is and of course, there is the prophecy. ‘How is my downfall to come about?’ he asked Jamuga.

‘The Naiman will attack at first light and although Temujin’s forces will line up at your side, when Sabraq turns all his forces towards you, Temujin will also turn and attack you.’

‘Listen to him father, he speaks the truth. We must do something to avoid our destruction.’

Wang Khan knew that he had to do something. It was possible that Jamuga was lying, but if he challenged Temujin he would of course deny it, whether it was true or not, so he would be none the wiser. If it was true, the Kereit would be wiped out. He must not let that happen.

‘Summon my commanders immediately, Senggum,’ he said to his son, who rushed out of the tent.

Jamuga said, ‘I must leave, my friend, otherwise Sabraq might get suspicious, but be sure I tell the truth,’ and he slipped quietly out into the darkness smiling to himself, and went back to the Naiman.

Once all Wang Khan’s commanders had arrived he said to them, ‘Make sure the fires are burning well, so that Temujin and the Naiman think we are still here, in half an hour we will mount up and ride quietly out of the camp and return home.’



A messenger had been sent to find out why Wang Khan and his commanders were late for the war council, and returned at the gallop. ‘My lord,’ he shouted, out of breath, ‘they are not there.’

‘Where are they then?’ Temujin asked confused.

‘There is no one there, my lord, they have all gone,’ the messenger spluttered.

Temujin still failed to understand what the messenger was saying. ‘Are you sure you went to the right camp?’

‘Yes, my lord, the fires were still burning, but everyone appears to have left in the night.’

‘Why would Wang Khan leave without telling me?’ he spoke aloud, but to no one in particular.

‘This is the work of Jamuga,’ Jelme said.

Bogorju spoke up then, ‘If it is true that Wang Khan has left us, then we must withdraw now whilst there is still darkness to mask our withdrawal.’

Temujin was still confused at this turn of events, but agreed with Jelme, it must be the work of Jamuga, why else would Wang Khan leave? But regardless of why Wang Khan had deserted during the night, he knew that alone they could not hope to defeat the Naiman, who now outnumbered them and also, had an advantageous position. He gave the order to withdraw and return home.



Kokse u Sabraq awoke the next morning early. He was a tall man of forty-one, gaunt looking, with sad eyes and had risen fast to command half the Naiman army, together with Edeltukluk, in the service of Inanche Bilge, his cousin. I should be chief now, he thought, not those two ungrateful brats who, by dividing and weakening us in the eyes of our enemies, have destroyed the Naiman all on their own. If we had been one tribe still, these Borjigin and Kereit upstarts would not now be attacking us. He could see the dying fires dotted over the dark landscape in front of him, and as the light gradually filtered across the plain, he knew that Jamuga’s plan had worked. In fact, it had worked

better than they had anticipated. He gave orders for the men to be woken and then to mount up ready to move in half an hour.

‘I see the plan worked Sabraq,’ Jamuga said, looking across the plain below, and stretching his arms upward to remove the stiffness from a night sleeping on the hard ground.

‘Better than expected, my friend. Wang Khan must have been convinced by your arguments.’

‘I was losing the battle until his idiot son, Senggum, came in and supported everything I was saying. He hates Temujin as much as I do, and will do anything to see him brought down in his father’s eyes.’

‘I’m sure they expect us now to run away with our tails between our legs, but they will be sadly disappointed,’ Sabraq said, smiling and chewing on a piece of cold hard beef.

‘What do you mean Sabraq?’ Jamuga asked surprised.

‘We will do something they won’t expect, attack them as they run for home.’

‘Attack who, Temujin or Wang Khan? Assuming they did not leave together.’

‘It is unlikely that they left together, after what you said to Wang Khan. If they were still together, they would still be here. The fact that they are not here suggests that they left separately. I will follow Wang Khan, he is weaker than Temujin, and not as organised, and his troops are not as disciplined.’

‘Yes, that might be so,’ Jamuga said, eager to do Temujin harm at any opportunity. ‘Temujin, however, presents a greater risk to the Naiman in the future.’

‘That may be so, but we are not now at full strength and should we lose the battle, it would damage the Naiman considerably. Also, if we destroy Temujin’s ally, then it will be a long time before Temujin is a threat to us.’

‘I will not be coming with you. My friendship with Wang Khan might still be useful to you, and if I am seen fighting against the Kereit, that friendship will be over.’

Sabraq and his ninety thousand Naiman warriors followed quickly in the tracks of Wang Khan, who was slowed down to walking pace with the large amount of plunder taken at the first battle. After three days, Sabraq caught up with the surprised Kereit rearguard, which was commanded by Jaganbo,

and another of Wang Khan's younger brothers. The battle that ensued was bloody and quick. The Kereit warriors were seriously outnumbered, surrounded and crushed between the Naiman superior forces. They died, first under a hail of arrows that appeared to come out of nowhere, then under slashing swords, stabbing lances and crashing axes. The Kereit quickly succumbed, and Sabraq took over seven thousand warriors as captives together with fifteen thousand horses and numerous weapons. He then followed after Wang Khan's main forces, and after six weeks entered Kereit territory, easily capturing families, property and cattle along the way.



News came to Wang Khan that Sabraq and ninety thousand warriors had defeated his rearguard, had entered his territory, and was now intent on destroying the Kereit. What have I done, he thought to himself? By listening to Jamuga and Senggum I have put my whole tribe in danger. He called for Senggum to attend him.

'Take what is left of our army and send the Naiman back to where they came from. It is your fault that we are on the brink of disaster, so don't come back unless you have saved us.'

'Father, it is hardly my fault, I...,' Senggum began to plead.

'Don't stand here arguing with me, you fool, get out there and save us,' and Wang Khan dismissed him with a wave of his hand.

He told one of his attendants to fetch a messenger. 'Ride with all haste to the Khan of the Borjigin, and tell him we are under attack by the Naiman. Beg him for his assistance, otherwise the Kereit will be ruined.'



'My lord,' the messenger said to Temujin, who had made the journey in less than a day, 'Wang Khan is under attack by the

Naiman and begs your assistance. He says that, without your help the Kereit will be ruined.'

'Does he now?' Temujin said gravely. 'He deserts us in the middle of the night and leaves us to our fate, now he wants our assistance. 'Take the messenger away,' he said to a slave. 'Give him food and drink and a new horse while we consider Wang Khan's plea.'

'Surely you are not considering helping Wang Khan?' Bogorju asked. 'The Naiman will do our job for us.'

'Unfortunately Bogorju,' Temujin said, taking a drink of qumys, 'they might not stop there. Once they have defeated the Kereit, they might turn their attention towards us. Also, as I have said before, if the Kereit are destroyed, then we lose our allies, and others might then consider that we are weak enough to attack. No, we still need the Kereit. We will help him to help ourselves. Take Muqali, Boroqul, Subadai and Temuge, and go to him with all haste.'

Bogorju and forty thousand warriors rode through the night and arrived the following morning.

'We have arrived just in time,' Muqali said to Bogorju, as he observed the Kereit falling back and fleeing under the onslaught of the superior numbers of Naiman.

'There,' Muqali pointed, 'is Senggum. His horse is injured and he will soon be overrun.'

Bogorju signalled his men to attack and he made straight for Senggum, killing three warriors who were bearing down on him. He gave Senggum the horse he had been riding, and remounted himself on a grey stallion Temujin had given him as a mark of great favour. He rallied Senggum's own warriors as they were fleeing the battlefield.

'Kereit warriors,' he called to them. 'I have come with forty thousand Borjigin. We are allies and the Naiman have taken your wives, children and property, but all is not lost. Return to the battlefield, together we shall defeat the Naiman and recover your possessions.' At that, the Kereit warriors stopped, turned, and under Senggum on his new horse re-joined the battle.

The Naiman were drunk with victory and unprepared for an attack. The combined force of Borjigin and Kereit now

numbered eighty thousand. They fell on the now disorganised Naiman, who were busy counting their plunder and congratulating themselves on their new-found wealth. The fresh Borjigin warriors and the Kereit seeking revenge slaughtered everyone in their path. The Kereit especially, gave no quarter, trying to expunge the embarrassment of the defeat they had just suffered. The Borjigin commanders were methodical in the way they rounded up the Naiman. Sabraq was killed by an arrow piercing his neck, and soon after the Naiman resistance collapsed. Fifteen thousand fled empty-handed, leaving seventy five thousand either dead or captured.

Wang Khan rode out onto the battlefield to speak directly with Bogorju. He had tears in his eyes. 'Bogorju, you and your four splendid leaders have saved my people and my property, I am overwhelmed with gratitude. Return with me now to my tent.'

He gave Bogorju ten golden goblets and a mantle of honour and gifts of similar high value to the other four commanders. As they were leaving Wang Khan said, 'Once I appeared as a fugitive, naked and hungry and Temujin received me, he nourished and clothed me. How can I thank my magnificent son for his goodness? In former days, Yesugei brought back my people, and now Temujin has sent his five heroes. With Heaven's help, you have vanquished the Naiman and saved me, I will think of these deeds and never forget them.'



When all was quiet again, Temujin visited Wang Khan at the Black Forest. He took with him only a thousand of his elite guard.

Wang Khan greeted him, 'Your ungrateful father, is overjoyed to see you,' and he embraced Temujin, with tears in his eyes. 'I am undeserving of your favor, my son. I left you on the battlefield, like a coward in the night, and then you sent your five heroes to save me from ruin, when it would have been simpler to let the Naiman destroy me.'

‘Father,’ Temujin said, ‘I have yet to understand why you left the battlefield, when we were poised to achieve a great victory.’

‘Jamuga came to me, like a thief in the night, and said you had betrayed me to the Naiman to ruin me. I am an old fool to have listened to him. I nearly dismissed him as a liar, but then Senggum sided with him and planted great doubt in me. Between them they convinced me, I had no other choice than to depart. If I had come to you for the truth, you would have denied it, in truth or in lie, either way, I would not have known the truth, so I left.’

I might have known Jamuga was at the root of this, Temujin thought. And Sunggum has shown again that he will do anything to discredit me in his father’s eyes, even at the destruction of his own tribe. To Wang Khan he said, ‘I cannot live on in safety without your assistance my father. The Naiman on one side of me and my false plotting relatives on the other afflict me. My relatives raise up the Taijut, and every other enemy against me, but seeing your love for me they know that while you are alive and unchanged and are still ruling the Kereit, they cannot destroy me. You too, my father cannot live on in safety without my firm friendship. Without me, your false brothers and cousins, assisted by their allies, would split up your people and steal your lands. They would kill you, unless by swift flight, you were able to save yourself from ruin. Senggum, your son, would gain nothing; he too would be swept both from power and existence, though he does not see this at present. I am his best ally, as well as yours, my father. You are my greatest ally and support to. Without you, my enemies would rise up at once and overwhelm me, but were I gone and my power was in their hands, your power would pass soon to your deadliest enemies, your relatives. Our one way to keep power and live on in safety, is through a friendship, which nothing can shatter. That friendship exists now and we need only to proclaim it. Were I your true son in truth, all would be quiet and settled for both of us.’

Temujin at last came to the end of what he had to say. He knew that if Wang Khan adopted him as his son, there would be strong opposition from Senggum, and of course,

Jamuga would feed on this. He also knew, that it was a gamble worth taking. The only reason that Jamuga had been able to sway Wang Khan to leave the battlefield was his doubts over Temujin's loyalty. As his true son, these doubts would not exist.

Wang Khan sat for some considerable time thinking over what Temujin had said. I am old, he reasoned with himself. To whom shall I leave the direction of my people? My younger brothers are without leadership qualities, my brother Jaganbo is also unable to stand against enemies alone. Senggum is the only man left me, but whatever Senggum's merits may be, I will make Temujin his true brother. With these two sons to help me, I may live on securely.

Wang Khan at last responded to Temujin's argument, 'We shall fight side by side in the war against our enemies,' he said, full of emotion. 'I adopt you as my true son. In going against wild beasts, we will hunt with combined forces. If men try to raise quarrels between us, we will lend no ear to anyone, and believe only when we have met and talked carefully together over everything and proved it.'

'My father,' and Temujin said this now in a different way. For many years he had thought of Wang Khan as his father and protector, through friendship, but now it had been made formal, and had real value. 'Together we will sweep our enemies before us,' and they embraced as father and son.

The crushing defeat of the Naiman had weakened them considerably. Jamuga's plotting had worked against him, because it had raised Temujin above every rival, including the weakened Kereit. Now that a formal alliance between the two tribes existed, their enemies saw them as a terrible threat. As the snows began to fall that year, an uneasy quiet descended across the steppe. People wondered what the following spring would bring.

6

March – April 1200

Temujin was discussing tribal re-organization with Bogorju and Jelme again, when Chimbai, sought him out. ‘My lord, our spy in the Taijut camp says that the chief of the Merkit, Tukta Bijhi, has sent his two brothers, Ordjank and Kutu, to persuade Tarqutai Kiriltuk to join him in attacking us.’

‘And what was Kirlituk’s response to this request?’

‘The chief of the Taijut is always eager to move against you, my lord. He is now preparing to attack you as soon as the snows have melted, and the Merkit are now marching to join him on the edge of the Gobi desert.’

‘Well, let us surprise them instead.’ He turned to Bogorju and said, ‘Send word to Wang Khan, that I shall come to him in two weeks and together we will attack the Taijut and Merkit forces, before they attack us.’

‘It will be difficult for the horses, my lord,’ Jelme said.

‘The horses will survive. Each year the snows hold us back, but this year will be different. The Taijut and Merkit are waiting for spring, but we will not. They will never expect us to move now, so it is a good time to do so. I will meet with the commanders tonight, and we will hold council, inform them. It is time to rid ourselves of these enemies that continue to plague us.’

The snow was deep on the ground, but it was not as hard as it had been. The temperature was gradually creeping up, and in a month, there would be a dramatic change to the landscape as white turned to green. Temujin knew that attacking the Merkit and Taijut before they could attack them would take them by surprise. Waiting to be attacked was foolish and not profitable. Taking the battle to the enemy was the only way to win wars and plunder.



Tarqutai Kiriltuk and his Taijut had spent many years wandering the steppe, keeping one step ahead of Temujin, whom he knew, would dearly love to kill him and wipe out his tribe. The ambush by Temujin on the Altai Ridge had been disastrous for the Taijut and since then they had been weak, but numbers had slowly risen and he now had eighty thousand warriors. It was still not enough to attack Temujin on his own, but with the one hundred and twenty thousand of the Merkit, it was more than enough. That was why he had been pleased when Tukta Bijhi's brothers had come to him with the plan to combine forces. Now, he could finally rid himself of his long time enemy, and make himself rich beyond measure.

It was important, he knew, to bring the Borjigin to battle alone, and that would then leave Wang Khan and the Kereit, isolated whom they could attack at a later time. Together the Borjigin and Kereit was a formidable force and no tribe on the steppe could stand against them. He knew that the Merkit had been enemies of Temujin's family for generations, and would therefore not betray their alliance. The snow would soon be gone and they would then march for honour and wealth. Other chiefs would bow down to him and shower him with gifts for ridding the steppe of this parasite Temujin. We would all then live in peace and others might look to him to lead them.

He was proud of the fact that during this time of evading his enemies, he had not lost any weight. He just wished he could get rid of the damned flies that seemed to follow him around and which seemed to get worse in the summer months. Once Temujin was dead, he could dispense with the guard that surrounded him at all times and the two slaves who tasted his food and drink before he did. Temujin, he knew, had resorted to poison, and he had survived two attempts, but two of his tasters had died. The shaman had confirmed that it had been Temujin who had instigated the attempts on his life. Temujin, the shaman had said, was becoming afraid of Kiriltuk's growing influence and power. Well he might be, he thought.

He looked around at the Taijut and Merkit enjoying themselves at his expense. The feast had been organised in Tukta Bijhi's honour. He thought that maybe he should say something, but it seemed a shame to spoil their enjoyment. He

had told the cooks to spare no expense, there were succulent meats including cow, horse, yak, sheep, wolf and donkey, and enough airag to keep them all drunk for a month. He had also supplied thousands of slave girls to serve the warriors, and provide them with pleasure later, although some had not bothered waiting, and were copulating amongst the gathering, to lewd comments by their comrades.

‘Is that it? It was hardly worth dropping your trousers for.’

‘Make her squeal Ambikai, harder, longer, that’s it, forwards, backwards. We’ll make a man of you yet.’

‘Don’t look at her face, it’ll put you off.’

‘If she’s been giving you the eye, why is she fighting like a she-wolf? Hardly welcoming behavior scratching, spitting and kicking like that, hit her in the mouth, that’ll make her want you.’

Kiriltuk thought that organizing this feast was the least he could do, he was very happy that in a few short weeks he would be rid of Temujin. He held up his hand and a general hush descended on the gathering.

‘I welcome Tukta Bijhi, the chief of the Merkit, his brothers and his warriors,’ Kiriltuk said.

There were only muted cheers in response, because the warriors knew that shortly they would be required to leave the warmth and safety of their tents and the love of their families to go and fight for their existence.

‘These fine warriors have come to join us in a fight for our lives, and our way of life. Temujin of the Borjigin has been preying on tribes across the steppe for far too long, and with that old man of the Kereit, Wang Khan, they have brought fear and misery to everyone. It is time to lift the mantle of fear and eradicate them from the steppe. First we will destroy the Borjigin vermin, and then the Kereit.’ He bit a chunk of beef from the portion of leg one of his tasters handed him, and the juices ran down his chin and onto his jacket. He wiped his chin with the back of his hand and his sleeve, then wiped this on the leg of his trousers. He swilled the beef down with airag, and then continued. ‘Alone we cannot hope to win against the Borjigin, but if we combine forces then we have a chance. We

must attack the Borjigin and Kereit separately, because they have been quicker than we to see the advantages of combining forces. They are weakest when they are alone, so it is then we must attack them.'

Nobody realised Kiriltuq had finished, and the gathering continued waiting expectantly for him to continue. The Tajut knew that he often spoke with long pauses, but he tended to come back to the point sooner or later. Tukta Bijhi, thought Kiriltuq had finished and stood up to reply. They had all had far too much airag to drink, and the female slaves serving them were gradually losing the clothes they had started the evening in. He thought he had better say something quickly, otherwise no one was going to listen to what he had to say whilst they were raping the slave girls.

'Friends and allies,' he shouted. He could see by their faces that they would much rather be drinking and eating before they focussed their efforts on pleasuring the slave girls. Somebody talking, especially about war, would spoil the atmosphere. 'I am glad that Kiriltuq has agreed to join me in attacking Temujin of the Borjigin.'

Tarqutai Kiriltuk sat smiling and glass-eyed now, in a seat that he had commissioned to be specially made to take his size and weight. He was a small man, but the size of three men around the waist. The flies buzzed around him, which others didn't mind because it meant they were left alone.

'It is time to rid ourselves of this parasite Temujin,' Tukta Bijhi continued, 'who feeds his ambition on the lives of his own people.'

There was a muted cheer and some murmuring. The warriors knew that attacking the Borjigin was a risky endeavour. Temujin's warriors were the best on the steppe, they had armour, which no one else had, and they were far better disciplined and organised. It was becoming increasingly clear to everyone, that no one could stand against the Borjigin, especially now, that he had been adopted by Wang Khan, and they had combined forces.

'We will take them by surprise just as they are waking up from the winter,' Tukta Bijhi shouted enthusiastically. 'No one has attacked the Borjigin for many years, and they have

accumulated women, children, livestock and property. After we defeat them, we will all be rich.' This was something they understood, and they cheered, drank more airag and eyed those damned attractive slave girls Kiriltuq had brought out of hiding especially for them. 'Enjoy yourselves now,' Tujta Bijhi finished off, 'soon we will be fighting for our future on the steppe.' The shouting and screaming drowned Tukta Bijhi's warning as each man tried to grab the nearest slave girl.



Temujin met with Wang Khan as planned, and together they marched south towards the Gobi desert. In agreement with Wang Khan, Temujin sent out a detachment under Subadai, to reconnoitre the road ahead and the enemy camp. Temujin had already been informed of what Kiriltuq and Tukta Bijhi had said at the feast in the Taijut camp three days ago, and looked forward to making them eat their words.

They arrived towards the end of March. The snows were just beginning to melt into the steppe, and with the rise in temperature and the partial glimpses of sunshine, it brightened their spirits. It had been hard on the horses, a hundred and forty had become lame and had to be killed, and then eaten. They camped some distance away from the Taijut camp and digested the current information provided by Temujin's spies.

Taijut families were hosting the Merkit warriors, and relations between the two tribes were now strained. The Merkit were gradually depleting the Taijut stores of both food and drink. There had been a number of rapes, not of the slaves, but of the wives and daughters of the Taijut, which had resulted in revenge killings. No training had taken place and the Merkit were idle most of the time. Whilst the Taijut were out completing their tasks, the Merkit were free to prey on their food, drink and women. The Taijut were outraged at the Merkit behavior, and neither Kiriltuq, nor Tukta Bijhi, were doing anything about it. Some of the Taijut were holding secret meetings and there was talk of killing the Merkit whilst they slept.

‘Maybe we should just wait and let them kill each other,’ Jelme said laughing.

‘I would like to do that,’ Wang Khan said, ‘but my warriors have tasks to complete with spring coming. The sooner we get this over with the better.’

‘Yes, we won’t be waiting,’ Temujin agreed. ‘They sound like a pretty chaotic army to me.’ He turned and addressed Chimbai, ‘And they have no idea we are here?’

‘None at all, my lord,’ Chimbai answered. ‘They are so disorganised that they have posted no guard at all, and will only know we’re here when we chop their heads off. They are planning to start their march in three days time and are holding another feast tomorrow night.’

‘We will attack the morning after the feast then,’ Temujin said, ‘whilst they are still bloated and drunk.’ Wang Khan and the commanders all agreed that this was the ideal time to attack, and they waited for the time to pass discussing tactics and strategy. They decided to spread their twenty tumans out across the whole of the enemy camp by forming a semi-circle, facing the desert. Temujin and Wang Khan would position themselves with the two central tumans and lead from the front.

Moving into position during the night, they were ready for the attack as the first light of day forced itself through the dark clouds. The attack started, and the noise from the horses thundering hooves and the howling warriors was deafening, but, as Temujin had anticipated, even with this wake-up call, the Merkit and Taijut were slow to react. The slaughter went on for hours and the Borjigin and Kereit warriors had never had a battle so easy. The resistance was paltry and futile, and only a few of the enemy were able to put up any kind of fight. The battle was all over by mid-afternoon, and Temujin and Wang Khan sat outside Kiriltuq’s tent waiting for Bogorju and Jelme to provide them with a report.

‘My lord,’ Bogorju said, as he walked up to them with Jelme at his side. ‘We have killed a hundred and twenty thousand and eighty thousand have been taken captive. Chila’un has slain Kiriltuq, but Tukta Bijhi has escaped again with his two brothers.’

‘That man has a thousand lives,’ Wang Khan said, referring to the Merkit chief. ‘Every time we attack him, he manages to slip through our fingers.’

‘We will catch him soon enough,’ Temujin said smiling. ‘Soon, there will be nowhere on the steppe left for him to hide.’ To Bogorju he said, ‘Chila’un has done me a great service, once you have divided the plunder, take out of our share the ten best horses and give them to him.’

‘That’s a very generous reward for one of your commanders,’ Wang Khan said, surprised at Temujin’s generosity.

‘I have said before my father, that I value loyalty above everything else. Loyalty is the only thing that matters on the steppe, and when it is shown, it should be rewarded. Kiriltuq has been my enemy since I was nine years old. Sorgan Shira and his two sons saved my life, when I was sure I was going to die at the hands of Kiriltuq. Now one of these sons has rid me of this enemy. This service is worth singling him out for reward.’

The plunder, although still considerable, had been reduced by the Merkit stay with the Taijut, but both Temujin and Wang Khan, were still pleased that these two tribes were now crushed beyond recovery, and they returned home with their share of the plunder.



Although the Taijut were destroyed, Temujin knew that there were still pockets of resistance, and that two of these, the Katkin and Saljut clans, who had been aligned to the Taijut, could still cause him trouble. Now that their tribal chief was dead and their protection gone, Temujin decided to try peaceful means to gain their support. He sent word for Chila’un to attend him.

‘You will travel to the Katkin and Saljut clans acting as my envoy, with a thousand warriors,’ Temujin said to Chila’un. ‘To their chiefs you will say: *Each Mongol clan should support me, I could then protect all without exception.*’

Chila’un returned from his journey after two weeks, and reported to Temujin. ‘What was their response?’ he asked him.

‘My lord, I attended a meeting with both clan chiefs and their senior commanders, and was insulted. The Saljut chief took sheep entrails from a cooking pot and slapped me about the face with them. They then hit me and kicked me as I walked to my horse and shouted abuse at me as we rode away. The message I was told to give you was, *‘Tell Temujin, there is his answer.* I was dishonoured and shamed in front of my men.’

‘I am sorry for this Chila’un,’ Temujin said to him, mortified. ‘If I had known they would do this, I would have sent someone else. They are stupid, they must know I cannot let insults of that kind go unpunished, and that they are in great danger now.’

A week after Chila’un’s return, Deisechen, Temujin’s father-in-law arrived with his wife, two daughters, and his horses and livestock. Borte had not seen her family for many years, since Temujin had taken her away to live with him, and she was overcome with happiness, bursting into tears as she hugged first her father, then her mother and two sisters.

‘My father, my mother I am overjoyed to see you,’ and she ushered them into her tent, and offered them food and drink.

‘I have come to join your husband, my daughter, it is not safe to live anywhere else.’

‘Why is that, old man?’ Temujin asked Deisechen, as he entered the tent and embraced him.

‘The insult by the Katkin and Saljut to your envoy,’ Deisechen told him, ‘has brought about an alliance of tribes, which the Unggirat have agreed to join, to defeat you.’

Temujin’s face was grave. ‘Let us talk of these serious matters later,’ he said. ‘First we will indulge Borte in this happy reunion. I am sure she has many other, more important things to discuss.’

Borte sent an attendant, to fetch her sons and daughter to join the family reunion. She was glowing with pride, as she introduced her four strong handsome sons and her beautiful daughter, to her mother and father. She was very happy because her husband loved her, showered her with beautiful gifts, and had made something of himself.

‘Tell me Deisechen,’ Temujin said to his father-in-law sometime later, ‘why haven’t you married off your two lovely daughters?’ He stood up and looked at each of the two girls in turn, they blushed and averted their eyes. Ulagen, was eighteen and Shria, was twenty. They were both very pretty women, with Borte’s fine features, but both lacked Borte’s strength of character.

‘It’s not through want of trying, but they’re both terribly shy, and don’t want to leave us on our own. They are happy being at home.’

‘A Mongol woman should be married, and producing warriors,’ Temujin said, in all seriousness, but with a twinkle in his eyes. ‘My two senior counsellors, who are like brothers to me, are already married to sisters, and it seems appropriate that we should continue the tradition.’ Borte took his hand in hers and laughed excitedly. ‘They will be related to me by marriage, and will live close to Borte, and yourselves.’

‘Who are these two senior counsellors you speak of?’ Deisechen asked.

‘Bogorju and Jelme.’

‘I have heard their names, of course. Word of their valour and bravery in your service has spread across the steppe. You honour me, by linking all three of my daughters to the leaders of your tribe.’

‘So be it then,’ Temujin said, and sent an attendant to fetch Bogorju and Jelme.

‘My lord,’ Bogorju said, as he and Jelme entered the tent.

‘Come in and sit down, you are now officially part of my family.’

‘We are?’ Jelme asked surprised.

‘If it wasn’t for me, you two would have no wives and no children,’ Temujin said laughing. ‘Their wives had both had a boy and a girl each.’

‘And we are very grateful, my lord,’ Bogorju said.

‘Tomorrow you will be even more grateful. Borte has two lovely sisters, and to celebrate your marriages to them, we will organise a feast. Ulagen, will be married to Jelme, and Shria, to Bogorju, it is settled then.’

Bogorju and Jelme both looked around confused, and Borte said, pointing to the younger of the two sisters, 'This is Ulagen, Jelme,' and both women began giggling and glowing crimson, as everyone's attention in the tent focused on them. 'And this, Bogorju,' she said, pointing at the elder of the two sisters, 'is Shria.' Bogorju and Jelme smiled like idiots, not knowing what else to do. 'And this is my father and mother,' Borte continued the introductions.

Bogorju was the first to recover his composure. 'We are both honoured my lord, that you should deem us worthy to bring us into your family, and with such precious jewels,' and the two sisters, began giggling again.

'Deisechen,' Temujin said laughing, 'you'll have to watch this one, he has a way with words. You'll have more grandchildren before you know it.'

As the evening was drawing in, Temujin sent Jochi and his three brothers, to organise land close by and set up Deisechen's tent, ready for habitation and to build pens to house his horses and livestock.

Whilst Borte was talking with her mother and two sisters, Temujin took Deisechen, Bogorju and Jelme to one side of the tent. 'What is this information you have for me, Deisechen?'

'The Unggirat have joined those two clans of the Taijut, the Katkin and Saljut, and other clans of the Jahair, Durban, Kunkurat and Tartar, and they aim to defeat you. Sagaadai would not have gone against you, but he died five years ago. Mongo now leads the Unggirat, and he is weak. At a meeting they killed a stallion, a bull, a dog and a ram, and swore on these sacrificial victims, to guard their secret faithfully and attack you and Wang Khan without warning or mercy.'

'How long ago was this meeting?' Jelme asked.

'I packed up and came here as soon as I heard, it has taken me two weeks to get here, and the meeting was two days before I set out. They are planning to meet at Lake Buyr Nor, and march from there. They agreed to meet in one month from that meeting, so you have less than two weeks now, before they meet.'

‘Chimbai’s spy network seems to have broken down,’ Bogorju said. ‘We should have known about this meeting when it happened.’

‘I’ll leave you to find out why we didn’t know Bogorju. In the meantime, prepare to march the day after tomorrow. Send Subadai with his tuman tomorrow morning to reconnoitre the way to Lake Buyr Nor, and to report back to us along the route when the confederates meet.’

‘What of Wang Khan?’ Jelme asked.

‘There is no time to send word to him, we will attack them on our own.’

‘Should we not all leave tomorrow, my lord?’ Bogorju asked.

‘We will either meet these allies at Lake Buyr Nor, or riding towards us, it makes little difference. More important are your marriages, and the one night of opportunity to father more children before you go into battle,’ and he smiled at them both.

‘We will leave now, to brief the commanders and set things in motion, ready to march,’ Jelme said.

‘Agreed,’ Temujin said. ‘But keep in mind these two lovely sisters and your duty as husbands.’

They all smiled at each other, and Bogorju said, as they turned to leave, ‘We will, my lord.’ They bid goodnight to Deisechen and his wife, and the two beautiful sisters, who burst into a fit of giggles again, and departed.



Subadai left with his tuman the following morning at first light. It was now spring, and the weather had turned warm with the melting of the snow. High lush grass, for the herds to graze on, covered the steppe. During that day the whole camp was a hub of activity as people were either involved in organizing the feast, or preparing to march the following day.

The feast was only for the commanders and their wives and was a happy occasion. The two sisters were dressed in fine robes and rich jewelry, but they looked at the ground most of

the evening. They still, however, looked beautiful and there were many envious looks and comments made.

‘I trust your new wives will be pining for your return?’ Temujin asked Bogorju and Jelme, the next morning as they sat on their horses ready to march out.

‘My new wife will be sleeping whilst I’m away,’ Jelme said. ‘She certainly didn’t get much sleep last night’ and he grinned.

‘You can be confident that I did my duty as always, my lord,’ Bogorju, always too formal, laughed.

Lake Buyr Nor was east, following the course of the Kerulen River. It took them eight days of forced marches to draw close. Subadai met them on the evening of the eighth day and Temujin ordered a halt for the night, and then held council.

‘The clans have been arriving slowly over the past few days,’ Subadai said. ‘They are armed and ready for battle. There is no feasting, and no drinking. They sit and wait for the other clans to arrive.’

‘We could attack them now whilst only some of the clans are there,’ Qachi’un offered.

‘No,’ Temujin said. ‘The other clans would then just fade away, only to appear at a later time to threaten us. We will wait until they all get here, and then we will attack.’

‘Have they posted guards,’ Jelme asked his younger brother.

‘Yes,’ Subadai replied. ‘They appear to have learned from the mistakes of others. They have a number of guards and rise before first light. We will not surprise them. They have no tents with them, and sleep under felt rolls on the ground ready to fight, and their horses are saddled, and ready close by.’

‘This will be a real battle then?’ Qasar said, stroking his club. ‘Not like that massacre of the Taijut and Merkit.’

‘How many have arrived so far?’ Temujin asked, ignoring Qasar’s comment.

‘I estimate about thirty thousand, but there are many more clans still to come.’

‘We have three days to wait until the agreed meeting day. Subadai, keep them under surveillance, and keep me informed of any change in their situation. We will camp here until the day

after tomorrow and during that night, we will approach their position in line and attack as they are about to march.'

During the next two days of waiting, Subadai sent a stream of messengers to inform them of new arrivals, and estimated numbers. The final messenger as they were marching closer, informed them that ninety thousand warriors, from many different clans stood against them.

'It will be another massacre then,' Qasar boasted.

'Never underestimate the enemy, Qasar,' Temujin warned him, 'that is a quick way to Eternal Heaven.'

The allies came up to where Subadai had been observing the enemy, and he joined the battle line with his tuman. The mission he had been assigned now completed. They came into sight of the enemy, and Temujin gave the signal to attack. Galloping forward, they rained arrows on the confederates, who were not yet formed up into battle lines. Many of the enemy fell under the hail of arrows, and began shouting and reaching for their bows as the arrows fell amongst them. Then they were mounted, and began to propel their own arrows towards the oncoming Borjigin, but these took very few lives, skimming harmlessly off the armour and helmets, some found arms and legs, which caused only minor injuries, and a few took warriors in the eyes, mouth or neck and killed quickly. The two opposing forces collided in a clash of swords; axes; lances; and shields. Now too close to use their bows and arrows, which hung loosely attached to their saddles, each warrior responsible for his fate, as he parried, slashed and stabbed at those in front of him. It was kill or be killed. No quarter was given. Qasar could be seen by all, like a giant on a horse, smashing heads, breaking arms and bodies with his club, as he cut a swathe through the enemy ranks. The two separate enemy forces were quickly surrounded by Borjigin warriors. Subadai also stood out amongst the many, and enemy warriors tried to shift left or right so that they did not have to face him. A gap opened up, which was quickly filled by Subadai and his warriors, and this split the enemy into a third isolated group, which were quickly surrounded on all sides by Borjigin, and slowly exterminated.

Temujin was sweating in his armour, his right arm was leaden, but he continued to cut and slash. Blood sprayed in his

face, as he hacked a man's neck nearly through, the head hanging by sinews, resting on the shoulder, the eyes still open in a deathly upside down stare. Blood dripped down his arm onto his hand, making it difficult to hold the hilt of his sword. He knew that he had to fall back, but he felt the battle was beginning to turn, as the enemy warriors were cut down in their thousands. Some of the confederates broke free of the encircling warriors, and made a run for it, no one pursued them. It was the beginning of the end though, as many either battled their way through the encirclement, or tried to surrender. There were, however, many sections that fought on relentlessly, and it was therefore not safe to stop fighting. As such, many of the enemies were cut down unnecessarily as they were trying to surrender.

At last, towards midday, the fighting came to an end. A bewildering muddle of thrashing bodies, corpses, and body parts, littered the steppe. Horses and humans screamed in a mantra of death. The Borjigin warriors waded through the quagmire of blood, shit and piss to put the horses out of their misery, and execute the enemy wounded.

Bogorju reported in some time later on the situation. 'Of the ninety thousand that stood against us, seventy thousand are dead, twelve thousand have been captured and eight thousand have escaped. We have lost nine thousand, and eleven thousand are injured.'

Temujin's face was grave. Nine thousand lost, he thought, that's nearly a tuman of warriors and we will lose at least a thousand of the eleven thousand injured, a heavy price to pay for so little gain. The enemy had been tenacious, fighting bravely to the end, regardless of the cost. Their losses were testament to this, and he decided to spare the captives if they agreed to join him.

He put his offer to the captives, and to a man they declined. He ordered Chila'un to organise their executions. The Saljut chief was amongst their number, and Chila'un executed him personally in revenge for the insult shown to him as envoy. It took the Borjigin the rest of the day to decapitate twelve thousand warriors, and on Temujin's orders, twelve gruesome piles of heads were erected on the plain, as a warning to others

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who might want to conspire against him. They moved away from the carnage of the battlefield, and made camp for the night.

The following morning they set off home. As they neared the Timurha River they came across a detachment of eight thousand Taijut and Merkit warriors. Temuge and his tuman peeled off from the main body and chased them some distance, before eventually catching them and killing them to a man.

The remaining three thousand Kunkurat, who had escaped from the battle, came up behind Qasar's rearguard with the intention of joining Temujin. The Kunkurat chief, however, had no chance to make his intentions clear before Qasar turned his tuman as a body, and attacked them, misinterpreting their approach as hostile. The Borjigin killed eight hundred before the Kunkurat could extricate themselves from the slaughter and escape.

7

September 1201 – February 1202

‘There are many here who have suffered at the hands of the Borjigin and Kereit tribes,’ Jamuga said, as he looked around at the assembly of chiefs and military commanders, some of whom were sat on their horses, others were standing and some were sat on the ground.

It was late in September, and they were gathered on the bank of the Argun River. There was lots of head nodding and murmuring, because they knew that Jamuga spoke the truth.

‘I have called this Quriltai of all those tribal leaders who stand against the Borjigin and the Kereit, to suggest a military alliance. I know many of you here are age-old enemies. Tukta Bijhi of the Merkit, you have never sat down with the Naiman until today; the Jajirat and Ikirat have been continually at war with each other; and the Tartars have been everybody’s enemy,’

There was laughter among those who had fought the Tartars over the years.

‘It is time to set aside these differences and petty squabbles. The alliance between Wang Khan and Temujin is of much greater concern, because it threatens our very existence and our way of life. I know both of these chiefs, and I tell you my friends, Temujin will not rest until he is Khan over all our people.’

There were angry shouts from those gathered: *kill him, wipe them out, and destroy them.*

‘Yes, that is what we must do,’ Jamuga continued over the shouts, ‘but those who have tried to stand against him, have been crushed mercilessly. These attacks are not just raids for plunder; they are more than just raids you have suffered, my friends. Temujin has a higher purpose; those who do not bow to him, are expunged from the steppe. Those who formed an alliance last year, the Kuralat, Durban, Katkin and Saljut, to name but a few, the remnants who are here among us, are testament to this. For those who doubt me, they should go to Lake Buyr Nor, and look at the twelve piles of skulls he has left

as a sign of what is to come.’ At this reminder, there were angry outbursts, but Jamuga continued over the noise. ‘Save your anger, my friends, if we don’t destroy Temujin, we will all be markers along the path of his destiny.’

‘You talk only of Temujin, Jamuga,’ Buyruq of the Naiman said. ‘What of Wang Khan?’

‘Buyruq my friend, you know me because I have been staying with you out of the reach of Temujin, believe me when I say, that Wang Khan is nothing without Temujin. Wang Khan is old, and his power will soon pass to Temujin, as his adopted son. When this happens, no one will be safe and no one will be able to stand against him, he will sweep all before him, is that what you want?’ There were angry shouts, and Jamuga continued. ‘We must form an alliance and attack Temujin, and then turn on Wang Khan, but we must also appoint a leader from among us.’

‘As you have told us, Jamuga,’ Mongo, the chief of the Unggirat said, ‘you know these two chieftains, and have been friends with them in earlier times. You know this Temujin, and how he thinks, you are the right man to lead us.’

‘I will lead you, if you can all agree, but not otherwise,’ Jamuga said to the assembly.

There was heated debate amongst the other chiefs, but eventually Autchu, chief of the Taijut, following the death of Tarquитай Kiriltuq, stood and said, ‘We proclaim you Gur Khan, Jamuga, and it has been agreed that I will be your second in command.’

‘At Lake Buyr Nor,’ Jamuga responded, ‘there were many animal sacrifices to Eternal Heaven, and an oath was made to keep the plans secret yet, Temujin knew of the alliance and the plan to surprise him, and he surprised them instead. He has spies everywhere. Before we discuss our plans on how we will attack and defeat Temujin, we should make an oath that all here will be bound by.’

Jamuga walked down to the bank of the river and at the top of the bank, he pointed to a tree and told them to push it down. They put their combined weight against the tree, tearing it from the earth and it fell towards the river, taking part of the bank with it. ‘Should any man disclose our plans,’ Jamuga said,

‘may he fall as this earth falls, and be cut off, as these branches are cut off.’ With that, he withdrew his sword and hacked off a branch from the tree and swore the oath, and all the others did the same. They then built a fire with the wood and sat around it to discuss their plans. Late in the evening, it was agreed that they would meet in one month, with their warriors at the Tula River, and from that place, attack Temujin as one army and slay him.

Kuridai, of Jamuga’s own people, the Jurait, had accompanied Jamuga from the Naiman camp to this meeting place as one of his attendants. He had heard the oath, and the plan to attack Temujin, and under the cover of darkness he slipped away, leading his horse along the bank of the Argun to where it met the Kerulen. Bogorju had recruited him as a spy many years ago and his allegiance, since that time, had been to Temujin, who he admired greatly. Over the next three days, he made his way to the Borjigin camp, and reported to Chimbai.



Subadai and Qasar were stripped to the waist and stood facing each other. They had seen off the competition easily over the previous week, and they both knew that this would be the ultimate test of their wrestling skills. Subadai stood a head taller than Qasar, but carried more bulk, which made him slow and cumbersome. The crowd had been eagerly awaiting this finale to the weeklong wrestling competition and the betting was frenetic, making Subadai the clear favourite.

‘Come on little brother,’ Subadai taunted Qasar, ‘don’t dance around like a Jerboa, let’s give the crowd what they want.’

Qasar knew that if Subadai got him in his grip that would probably be the end of the contest. His only chance was to use Subadai’s own weight and slowness against him. He moved warily around the circle that had been marked in the ground.

They came together, clasping hands around the other’s upper arms and leaned into each other, pushing and pulling and trying to gain the advantage, by shifting their weight from one foot to the other. Qasar could hear Subadai’s heavy breathing in

his ear, and his whispers: 'Give in now Qasar. I'm too strong for you. You're weak after all your fights, just let me put my arms around you and it'll all be over.'

Qasar could feel Subadai's fingers slowly creeping round his arms towards his back, drawing him in to a bear hug, from which he knew there would be no escape, and he would surely lose. Subadai's grip was famous across the steppe, and he would be crushed into unconsciousness. He tore himself free of Subadai's grasp, first from the right arm, then the left and started pacing round the circle again. Subadai stood still, and put on a pained expression.

'Let's not prolong the inevitable, little brother, I have the advantage of size, weight and good looks.'

Qasar smiled at him, because he knew Subadai was trying to goad him into making a mistake. 'Yes, but you have the disadvantage of a mouse's brain.'

Subadai laughed. 'And that, from someone who would kill for a mouse's brain,' and he made a lunge for Qasar, but he easily moved to one side, and gave him a kick up the backside. This brought howls of laughter from the crowd.

'Now that isn't in the spirit of the contest,' Subadai said, quickly turning to face Qasar again.

'No, but it felt good,' Qasar said, and grinned.

Subadai controlled his anger, he didn't like being made a laughing stock, but then he knew that Qasar was using it as a tactic to get him to act rashly.

They came together again and both men were sweating. Rivulets were running down their faces, and onto their straining muscled bodies.

Qasar pretended to be drawn into Subadai's grip, but at the last moment, he lifted both his feet off the ground and pushed his weight downwards. The combined weight of his body and the sweat from the two men, allowed him to slide down Subadai's chest and out of his grip and land on his knees in front of his opponent. He quickly darted through Subadai's open legs and jumped to his feet behind him. Subadai stood there, surprise fixed on his face like a petrified spirit. Qasar kicked him at the back of the knee joints, and Subadai crumpled to the ground, landing heavily on his knees. Subadai felt Qasar

push him forward and then his face was in the dirt as Qasar sat on him, then wrapped his hands round his face and pulled backwards. He knew Qasar had the better of him, and it galled him to think he had fallen for the trick so easily and so quickly. He raised his hand in submission, and Qasar released his grip.

‘I used to rely on my size like you, Subadai,’ Qasar said smiling, and they both got up, ‘but there is always someone who is bigger than you are. Temujin made me realize that I had to use what little brains I have, as well as my size. As in war, with the right strategy and tactics, the single warrior can overcome an army, and Temujin has shown us that on the battlefield. Weight of numbers alone, although clearly an advantage, is not enough.’

‘Thank you, little brother for showing me the error of my ways,’ Subadai said sarcastically. ‘Next time though, I will crush you, and feed you to the dogs.’

The crowd was not happy, many had lost fortunes betting on Subadai, but a few had made fortunes betting on Qasar.

Temujin walked up to the sweating men leading a white stallion, which was the winner’s prize. ‘Well done Qasar, I see you have learned the lesson well.’ He turned to Subadai and said, ‘You assumed your size and weight alone would be enough Subadai; on the battlefield that will get you and your men killed.’

‘My lord,’ Subadai said smiling, ‘I have learned another valuable lesson under your tutelage, and I shall never forget it.’

Bogorju came up to Temujin then and said, ‘My lord, I have news.’ They moved towards Temujin’s tent and entered. Chimbai and Kuridai bowed low as Temujin and Bogorju entered. ‘What have you to report, Kuridai?’ Temujin asked him.

‘My lord, I have travelled three days and three nights to reach you. I come from a Quriltai called by Jamuga, and attended by the chiefs and military commanders of the Merkit, Taijut, Naiman, Jajirat, Unggirat, Jurait, Saljut, Kunkurat, Katkin, Ikirat, Kurulat, Durban and Tartars. Jamuga has convinced them to attack and slay you, and he has been proclaimed Gur Khan.’ Kuridai took a breath.

‘That will make, Jamuga happy,’ Temujin said smiling. ‘The title of, Khan of Khans is what he has always wanted. What else do you have for me, Kuridai?’

‘They have agreed to meet in one month at the Tula River, and from that place launch their attack and kill you.’

‘You have done me a great service, Kuridai and demonstrated your loyalty in risking your life to come here.’ He turned to Bogorju, ‘Give him land, a tent, a hundred horses, sheep, and goats from my own stock, and let him choose a wife from those who are unmarried.’

‘My reward is to be in your service, my lord,’ Kuridai said, throwing himself on the floor in front of Temujin.

‘That might be so Kuridai,’ Temujin said smiling, ‘but now you can live in comfort, whilst you are in my service.’

After Chimbai and Kuridai had left, he said to Bogorju, ‘It is late in the year for raids; the snow will soon be upon us. Send Chila’un to ask Wang Khan to bring his army quickly. We will march against Jamuga and his allies and take them by surprise.’



‘My lord,’ the warrior said to Jamuga, ‘Temujin has learned of our plans and marches against us with Wang Khan. They are about a day away, travelling towards us along the Kerulen.’ Jamuga had sent warriors out in all directions to identify how far away the tribes that were joining him were, but he had known that they would come back with this news. When he had found out that Kuridai, his attendant, was missing, he had known that he had been betrayed. He had said nothing to the other chiefs, not wanting them to know that it had been one of his own men that had betrayed them. All of the allies had not yet arrived, and he knew he needed more time. He called his two shaman’s Buiruk and Kuduk to him, and asked them what they could do to give him the time he needed.

‘We will raise a wind and make rain to strike in the face of Temujin and his allies, my lord,’ Kuduk said.

‘Make sure this wind and rain does not affect my plans, or you will pay with your lives,’ Jamuga warned them.

Kuduk swallowed, and his mouth went dry. Everyone knew that controlling the weather was a rather hit and miss

affair at the best of times. He said, 'We will do our best, my lord,' and they left to conduct the rituals, and commune with the spirits and Eternal Heaven.

Jamuga passed word to those chiefs, who had arrived to begin preparing for battle, just in case Buiruk and Kuduk failed in their attempt to delay Temujin and Wang Khan.



They were drawing close to Jamuga's meeting place on the Tula River, when the skies became dark as night, storm clouds gathered, and the wind started to squall. Forward movement became extremely difficult, and they had to cling to their horses, to stop themselves from being blown backwards. Both Bogorju and Jelme were concerned at this sudden change in the weather, and Bogorju said to Temujin, 'We cannot continue in this, we must find shelter. The snow will soon come, and with the wind, visibility will be poor.'

'I agree,' Temujin shouted back over the whistling of the wind. 'Pass word to move into the forest,' and he pointed to their left at the sprawling expanse of trees. 'Tell the men to lie the horses down and secure them to the trunks of sturdy trees, then they should lie with the horses and cover themselves with their felt rolls, which they should peg down securely.' Wang Khan nodded in agreement as Temujin looked at him.

As the two armies reached the forest, the snow began to fall and swirl about them. The snow was light at first, but as the men were frantically securing themselves and their horses in tabans, around the trunks of the trees, it grew consistently heavier, and they had to work in pairs to prevent their felt rolls from being whipped away by the wind. Each felt roll was secured to the one next to it and pegged down, so that a tent was formed around the base of the tree, which was then populated by ten men and ten horses. By the time they were under their felt rolls, the snow was a foot deep and they could not see their hands in front of their faces.

Temujin could not see Bogorju or Jelme in the darkness under the felt rolls, but he could hear them trying to calm their

horses. He curled up in the crook of Qara's neck, who was snorting, and he could feel the horse's heart beating fast. He stroked the beast's neck and spoke softly to him, 'It's alright boy, I'm here; lie still.' The wind lashed the felt rolls, and the snow whipped through the gaps between and beneath them, thunder crashed overhead, and lightening created an eery glow.

'If I was superstitious,' Temujin shouted above the clamour. 'I might take this as an ill omen.'

'It is just a snowstorm, nothing more,' one of his two companions shouted. He couldn't tell which one.



Jamuga stood looking with Buyruq and Auchtu, at the darkening sky and was impressed by the powers of his two shamans. The wind was blowing strong in a westerly direction, towards Temujin's approaching forces. Instead of rain, they have brought snow, he thought, as small white flakes landed on him, very quickly though, he became concerned. The small flakes turned to large ones, the wind began to swirl and change direction, and the snowstorm was upon them without warning.

'Heaven is not gracious today,' he said to his two companions. 'That is why this misfortune is meeting us.' He had great difficulty in seeing Buyruq and Auchtu through the heavy snowfall, even though they were by his side.

Jamuga's forces were unprepared for the quick onset of the snowstorm. They had no shelter and no plans set in place for this situation. Giving orders had become impossible. The heavens became as night, snow flurried about them, and the wind howled like angry spirits. The horses panicked and bolted, taking the warriors into the fast flowing Tula River to drown, down ravines to be broken on the rocks beneath, out onto the open steppe to freeze to death. Some of the men tried to lie their horses down, but it was too late. The horses tore the reins from their master's hands in fear, and ran anywhere. Some of the men tried to cling on to the reins, and were dragged along to their deaths.

The snowstorm continued unabated for two days and three nights, and on the third day, the sun shone in a bright blue sky and snow lay thick on the steppe as if it was the middle of winter.

Jamuga had managed to find a small covered place with Aughtu beneath a fallen tree, and they had forced their terrified horses in and lay with them during the snowstorm. During those long days and nights, as the wind thrashed, and the snow fell heavy on his felt roll, he knew that he would never overcome Temujin. It must be true, he thought, that Eternal Heaven has chosen Temujin as the next Khan of the Mongols. He was thwarted in everything he tried to do; it was as if Tengri intervened on Temujin's behalf to keep him alive, and to vanquish his enemies. He wept at the realization that his childhood dreams of greatness would now come to nothing. He remembered the time he had spent with Temujin and their great friendship, and if he was being honest with himself, he had known then that Temujin's life force shone brighter than his. Maybe he should have bound himself to his friend then, together they could have shared greatness, and he would not have been cast aside and forgotten. As they left the protection of the fallen tree, Jamuga knew that he could not now join battle with Temujin. He gathered together those he could find, but many had left him, or died. Of the one hundred and twenty thousand that were with him before the start of the snowstorm, he and Aughtu now had about fifteen thousand, and they were in poor condition. Buyruq of the Naiman had gone; as had many of the other chiefs, and they had taken their men with them. Jamuga discussed the situation with Aughtu, and they decided to withdraw down the river, with the few warriors they had left.



Temujin crawled out from under his felt roll into two feet of snow, and the first thing he thought was that there was not going to be any battle with Jamuga. All around him men and horses were appearing from under the carpet of snow, which

had been brought in by the wind and covered the forest floor. Beyond the trees the snow was deeper, and there were drifts in places that were as high as a man.

‘The men and horses have had a good rest and are ready to move at your orders,’ Bogorju said to Temujin, as he forced his way through the deep snow, ‘although we won’t be moving very fast in this snow. I wonder how, Jamuga and his men have fared in this. That was the worst weather I’ve seen in many years, the snowfall is a month early.’

‘Send Subadai with a small force to find out what has happened to Jamuga,’ Temujin said to Jelme. ‘We will wait here until he returns.’

Jelme went to find Subadai, and as he trudged through the snow, he got hit on the back of the head by a snowball. Demonstrating their warrior skills, both Temujin and Bogorju, dived to the ground, as thousands of snowballs flew through the air towards them, followed by a chorus of laughter.



It took Subadai two days to travel the short distance to the Tula River. The horses had great difficulty moving through the deep snow, and he wished he hadn’t brought them. It probably would have been better on foot, he thought. At times, they had to dismount and force their way through the deep snowdrifts using their swords and axes to cut a passage. It was the most difficult journey he had ever undertaken, and they became tired very quickly and had to keep stopping for short breaks. On the evening of the second day they arrived at the intended meeting place of the confederates, to find it deserted, except for the dead bodies underfoot.

He had the feeling that many had lost their lives here, and his men and their horses were spooked by a haunting feeling of wandering spirits, and the eerie silence that permeated the place. The men scouted around and found tracks leading down to the river. They also discovered many other bodies, both horses and men, petrified in death, which could be seen in the frozen river and smashed on rocks in the ravines. It was

clear to Subadai, and his men that a disaster had taken place here. They started to make their way back towards their own people, and camped that night some distance away from what they now considered a haunted place. They found it easier returning the way they had come, and got back to where the army waited for them late the following day.

‘My lord,’ Subadai reported to Temujin. ‘The meeting place was deserted, and we found tracks of about fifteen thousand leading away from us down the river.’

‘Only fifteen thousand,’ Temujin asked astounded, ‘what has happened to the thousands of warriors that came to fight for Jamuga?’

‘They are either dead or they left, my lord. We found a large number of bodies, both horses and men, but because of the snow, we could not accurately estimate Jamuga’s losses. They were clearly not as fortunate as we were, and the place felt haunted and inhabited by many lost spirits. We did not stay longer than was necessary.’

‘There will be no battle with Jamuga, this winter then,’ Temujin said, to no one in particular.

‘The alliance will not stay together now,’ Jelme offered.

‘I am sure that many of the chiefs will see the disaster as an ill omen,’ Bogorju said. ‘They will convince themselves that they were wrong in forming the alliance in the first place, and this might work to our advantage.’

‘That might be so,’ Temujin said thoughtfully, ‘but it is clear that Jamuga will not stop in his efforts to kill me. He will continue to work against me, and we will always be under threat from the other tribes forming alliances against us.’

‘We must take the initiative;’ Qasar cut in. ‘If we do nothing, sooner or later, another alliance will be formed. We should attack those tribes who formed this alliance individually, and wipe them from the steppe.’

‘For once, you speak with insight, my brother,’ Temujin said, leaning back against the log behind him. ‘If we do nothing, they will try again. It is time to put an end to their ability, or desire, to form alliances against us. During this winter we will make plans to finally rid the steppe of our enemies.’

In the terrible conditions, it took the allies three weeks to reach home. Wang Khan stayed with Temujin for a further two weeks, until the ground became easier to travel and then the Kereit departed.

Throughout that winter, Chimbai was instructed to gather all the information he could on their enemies through their network of spies so that, in the spring, they would be in a position to immediately launch attacks.

‘It is many years now that we have been together,’ Temujin said to Bogorju and Jelme, one day late in February, as they sat in his tent warming themselves around the hearth. ‘We are all of a similar age, and the years continue to pass us by. My dream, as you know, is to unite the Mongol tribes under one leader, but I sometimes think that this continued fighting against our enemies is getting us nowhere. Soon we will all be too old to make this dream a reality. We must have a clear plan for the future, with an end in sight. Soon we will attack the Taijut, but then what? Do we come back to our tents and live an easy life waiting for someone else to attack or insult us? We know who, and where our enemies are, and we have up to date information on their numbers and fighting capabilities. We now need to take the initiative and plan a long-term campaign accordingly. When we have destroyed the Taijut we will move against the Tartars, and then the Naiman and so on, until they have all been defeated.’

‘What of the Kereit?’ Jelme asked.

‘We will leave them until the last. Wang Khan might still be useful to us. Also, if Wang Khan dies, he will leave his tribe to me as his son and ally, fighting them then, might not be necessary.’

‘Senggum and Jabango will not accept that situation without a fight,’ Bogorju pointed out.

‘There is no doubt that Senggum will have to be killed, but I think Jabango will come to accept my leadership.’

‘Our warriors will want to return to their wives and children after each attack,’ Jelme said. ‘They endure hardship and the possibility of death on the understanding that afterwards, they can live a better life from the proceeds of these attacks.’

‘We will have to change the way they think, they can live an easy life during the winter months, but between April and September we fight. At the moment we react to events, instead of initiating them ourselves. If we plan our attacks to eliminate our enemies, one after the other, then how long will that take us?’

Bogorju sat and thought for a long time and then said, ‘I estimate it will take us four years to eliminate all those who stand against us. If we attack the Tajjut and Tartars this year, then we will still have the Naiman, Oirat, Merkit, Ongut and the Kereit. Of course, there is still Jamuga with his Jurait, and a few other scattered tribes.’

‘Four years is when it ends then,’ Temujin said resolutely. ‘We must pursue our enemies with vigour, and not allow them to take breath, or join forces against us.’

‘Have you thought what you will do after you have united all the tribes?’ Jelme asked.

‘Then my friend, I will go and see the sea,’ Temujin said smiling.

8

March – May 1202

The winter had been spent, not only acquiring information, but also replenishing weapons, horses and armour and carrying out training.

In early March, Temujin launched his first attack that year on the Tajut in the North, with the intention of eliminating them completely, so that they would no longer serve as a threat to him in the future. He acted without the assistance of Wang Khan in order to maintain secrecy and to increase his power, without adding to the already considerable resources of the Kereit, which he knew would cause him problems in the future if he did have to fight them.

They arrived some distance away from the Tajut camp on the last day of March, and Temujin held a war council with Bogorju, Jelme, Chimbai and his tuman commanders, which had now increased to fifteen.

‘We have been over this many times,’ he said to them. ‘Chimbai informs me that the Tajut sit in their tents ignorant of our attack. Under the cover of darkness, you will move your men to the positions assigned to you, so that by first light, we surround them. There is to be no gaps between tumans through which people can escape, we finish off the Tajut here. For far too long they have been a threat to us, and it ends with this battle. Are there any final questions?’

The commanders all knew what the plan was and the importance Temujin attached to eliminating his old enemy, there would be no mistakes. The men were yet to be briefed on the plan; secrecy had been maintained with only those present at the meeting having been told what their objective was and how they were to carry it out. None of the tuman commanders had any questions and they left to conduct their own briefings before darkness descended, and they began moving to their allotted positions.

At first light, Temujin’s forces attacked and the Tajut initially were taken by surprise, but they had obviously planned

for such an attack and quickly organised themselves into defensive positions around the camp. What started as a massacre soon became a fiercely fought battle, and each defensive position took its toll in time and men. Late in the afternoon, as the light was beginning to fade, Temujin was with his elite guard and a detachment of men assaulting a position held by large numbers of Tajjut. He was at the front cutting and slashing with his sword, but the Tajjut were well organised and had archers on the hill, behind their main force. Qara was hit in the eye with an arrow and it pierced his brain. As the horse fell sideways like a stone, Temujin lost his balance and took a sword blow to the neck, which severed an artery and he fell spurting blood, severely wounded.

Bogorju had become separated from Temujin in the heat of the battle and was fighting further along the line, but Jelme saw Temujin fall and immediately jumped from his horse, which bolted and he ran to Temujin's unconscious body ignoring the hail of arrows and the flailing swords and axes. Temujin was in terrible danger of being trampled beneath the horses of his own men. No one had seen him fall other than Jelme, even Temujin's guard were oblivious to their Khan's injury, and those that survived, would pay with their lives afterwards. Jelme could see that Temujin was bleeding heavily from a wound in his neck and needed urgent attention, or would quickly die. He took hold of Temujin's arm and heaved him onto his shoulders and then ran through the Borjigin attacking forces as arrows rained down all around him. At last, he reached a quiet place between two hills and gently lay Temujin down.



The fighting was particularly heavy now, and Bogorju knew that they would have to break off the attack soon because the failing light would make it perilous to continue. He cut off another Tajjut warrior's head and blocked a lance thrust with his shield. He was tired and saturated in other men's blood, the smell was overpowering and he felt sick to his stomach. He took a quick look around, but could not see Temujin or Jelme. The

movement of the battle had forced him to become separated from them and he now broke off fighting to pull back and ride behind the line of battle to find and rejoin Temujin. Three times he rode back and forth to find his two comrades, but could not find them. Then suddenly, he spotted a familiar horse lying lifeless, with an arrow protruding from its eye. His heart was in his mouth, as he rushed to the horse, but Temujin was nowhere in sight. Temujin must now be fighting on foot, he thought, but he looked and could not see him. He ordered the withdrawal before it became too dark to pull back effectively, and the men broke off the battle slowly, whilst covering each other and they made their way back to the camp.

Bogorju questioned all of the commanders, who then asked their men, but no one had seen Temujin fall, one minute he was there with them, the next he wasn't. The elite guard that had been assigned to Temujin and whose job it was to protect their leader were assembled, but they had also seen nothing, being too heavily involved in the fighting. Of the one thousand, there were only eight hundred and thirty-four left, and Bogorju ordered their execution then and there, for failing in their duty.

Bogorju then led a detachment of warriors with torches to search the battlefield. They looked at every one of the thousands of corpses, but still they could not find him. At last he decided to give up and wait until morning, when things would be clearer. It crossed his mind that Temujin might have been captured, but he dismissed the thought because the Tajut would immediately have used him as a tool to seek their surrender. He had a sleepless night and he had to keep pushing the idea of life without Temujin from his mind, 'Temujin still lives,' he muttered to himself over and over again and hoped it was true.



Jelme knew that he had to clean the wound and stop the flow of blood. The sword had obviously cut deep and severed the major artery in the neck. Temujin would soon bleed to death, unless he did something quickly. He had nothing clean with which to wipe

the wound and remove the dirt, so he leaned over and clamped his mouth over the open gash and began sucking the fresh blood. He spat it out, but not before swallowing a mouthful of the viscous salty liquid, which made him retch. At last, he felt that the wound looked clean and tore off a piece of his robe to press to Temujin's injury. He knew he could not tie the cloth around Temujin's neck because it would restrict his breathing and so, he held the cloth tight to the livid gash. He lay there for many hours until his arm ached from the pressure, and as night came and the darkness was complete, he gradually released the pressure and felt whether the bleeding had stopped. He had to rely on touch in the blackness and pressed his fingers gently to the cloth and the surrounding area a number of times, until he was sure that the bleeding had ceased.

Temujin's breathing was light, but steady, and Jelme knew that he had to leave his Khan alone and get something to drink for both of them. He had left everything on his horse and had lost his sword when he had lifted Temujin onto his shoulders. He realised that the fighting had ended and that he had no idea where he was, or the outcome of the battle. The Borjigin would have withdrawn some distance away to regroup, and he knew he would not be able to reach them. His only course of action was to raid the Tajjut camp and steal a skin of mare's milk. He stripped naked, so that it would be easier to escape if he were captured, and headed in the direction of where he had last remembered being. As he approached what he thought was the Tajjut camp, he could hear warriors talking in hushed voices and see shadows moving. None of the enemy saw him because the Tajjut had not lit any fires and the camp was as black as night. He tripped over a dead warrior and when he searched the body he found a skin of milk, from which he quickly took a mouthful to slake his thirst. He continued feeling with his hands for anything else that would be useful, and found a pouch of beef and also helped himself to the corpse's sword. He then crept back through the Tajjut lines and found Temujin where he had left him. He checked the neck wound to make sure the bleeding had not started again and found that the cloth was dry and hard with congealed blood.

As the night gradually made way for the day and the light filtered through the darkness to announce the arrival of morning, Temujin awoke and Jelme put the skin of milk to his lips, from which he drank eagerly and deeply. At last, Temujin said, 'My eyes have regained their sight and my soul is now clear again.' He lay there cradled in Jelme's arms for a long time and then said quietly, 'I had a vision Jelme, I sat in the presence of Tengri who looked very much like Muunokhoi, my old warrior instructor. He asked me what I was doing sat there with him instead of completing my mission, it was as if I was a boy again, I was terribly frightened and I thought I would piss myself, as I had done as a boy,' and a smile crossed his face. "Tengri said, "leave me now and do not return until you have completed your mission." I asked him what my mission was and how long it would take and he said, "You know what your mission is Temujin, and it will last your lifetime and your sons', and their sons will carry on the mission. You will cross many lands and see many people." Will I see the sea? I asked him, and he replied, "you will see many seas my son, but you must leave now, your men are waiting for you, your time has not yet come to sit in my presence," and then I woke up.' He pulled himself into a sitting position and as the day dawned he saw a great patch of blood there beside him. 'Why is that blood so near to me?' he asked Jelme.

'Your horse was killed by an arrow and as he fell you were wounded in the neck,' Jelme told him. 'I carried you from the battlefield to this place.'

Temujin put his hand up to his neck and felt the hard cloth stuck to the wound.

'I did not think to move you from here, because you were too weak and bleeding heavily,' Jelme continued. 'Your wound was dirty and I sucked out the filth with my mouth, swallowing some of your blood as I did so.'

'When I was in these dire straits,' Temujin asked, now remembering what had happened, 'how did you have the courage to go to the enemy naked. If they had caught you, would you not have said that I was here wounded?'

Jelme was shocked at the suggestion. 'I would never betray you my lord, my life is yours. If they had caught me, I

would have told them that I had surrendered to them, but that you had seized me. Learning that I had surrendered, had stripped me and were preparing to cut off my head when I escaped, and ran to them for refuge. They would have believed every word, given me clothes and sent me to labour. I would then have stolen a horse and ridden back to you.'

'When the Merkit were seeking my life on Mount Burhan you defended it, now you have staunched the flow of blood from my neck and saved my life,' Temujin said with tears in his eyes. 'When I was dying of thirst, you risked your own life to get drink and restore me. I shall not forget while I live these great services,' and he embraced Jelme.

'We should try to return to our camp now,' Jelme said to him, embarrassed by this sudden show of affection.

As the two friends began walking towards the camp they were spotted by Bogorju who had commenced another search, and he galloped up to them.

'Thank Tengri you are still alive, my lord,' Bogorju said, as he jumped from his horse. 'We searched all over the battlefield last night and feared the worst. I questioned everyone, but no one saw you fall, we found your horse dead with an arrow in his eye, but of you there was nothing.'

'It is because of Jelme, that I am still alive. He risked his own life to save mine,' Temujin said, emotion making his voice hoarse.

'The men who were assigned to protect you have been executed, my lord,' Bogdo, the commander of the guard said, 'they clearly failed in their duty.'

'They certainly did,' Jelme said angrily. 'They were too busy enjoying the fighting to notice when their lord had fallen severely wounded, and they also failed to notice when I carried him from the battlefield.'

Temujin and Jelme mounted spare horses and returned with Bogorju to the main army, who cheered when they saw Temujin and Jelme. They had all spent a difficult night thinking that their Khan had died, and had worried about their future. The shaman was called to dress Temujin's wound properly, and then Temujin asked Bogorju for a report of the battle.

‘We withdrew because of the onrushing darkness, my lord,’ Bogorju told him. ‘We plan to finish the battle this morning and the men await your orders.’

‘Jelme and I will remain here to recover from our ordeal, take the army Bogorju and be back here by midday with those who remain of the Taijut.’

‘My lord,’ Bogorju said, and swung up on his horse and led the army out to battle.



The Taijut were waiting in their defensive positions and expected the Borjigin to launch a similar attack as the one the day before, but in view of the time constraint Bogorju was under, he decided to mount a fast frontal assault in two waves isolating each position. The first wave would kill or injure as many as they could without stopping to engage in hand-to-hand combat, but continue on to the next position. The second wave would mop up. Once the first wave had overrun all the defensive positions, they would return and attack from the rear. This strategy proved most effective, and took the Taijut completely by surprise. Each position was overwhelmed by the speed of the Borjigin attack, and the superior numbers that bore down on them, and they were unable to counter such a strategy, as Bogorju had expected, and the Taijut surrendered by mid-morning. Those warriors left alive were rounded up and marched to the Borjigin battle camp, and Bogorju left Chila’un and Qasar, with two detachments of warriors, to collect up the plunder and follow on when they had done that.

Once Bogorju had returned to the battle camp with the captives, they were lined up and made to kneel. They numbered forty-three thousand warriors, and there were five times that number in women and children that Chila’un and Qasar were bringing with them.

Temujin ordered Bogorju to find Autchu, if he was still alive, together with his male children and grandchildren, and brought to the front of the captives. When this was done, and the thirty-five related warriors knelt in front of him, he ordered

his guard to chop off their heads. He then addressed the captives, 'Tajut warriors,' he spoke softly because his neck was sore and he did not want to open up the wound, 'you now have a choice. You can either agree to join me, or you can join your chief and his kin and feed the earth with your blood.'

Fifteen thousand agreed to join Temujin, but the remaining twenty-eight thousand were led some distance away from the camp and followed Autchu to Eternal Heaven. The executions took the remainder of the day and the heads were stacked into neat piles of a thousand on the steppe.

The next day he met with all of his commanders to find out how many warriors had been lost, where in the tumans the losses had occurred, what promotions were required and the names of those warriors who had earned special reward for their valour. He made the promotions there on the battlefield, and allocated rewards for valour from the plunder before it was split between the men.

The captives who had agreed to join the Borjigin were then brought to him one at a time, and he made them swear an oath to Eternal Heaven that they would not work against him. He then allocated each of them to places within his army, where men had died either in battle or other circumstances, and they became the responsibility of the tuman commanders they were assigned to.

One young Tajut warrior, who was named Jirqo'adai of the Besut clan, was brought before Temujin and after he had sworn the oath said, 'I am the warrior who killed your horse, lord.'

Temujin looked at him without betraying the anger he felt. He admired the man's honesty; he could have said nothing and no one would have known. 'Were you aiming for me and hit my horse by mistake?' he asked the warrior.

'No lord, I always hit what I aim for,' Jirqo'adai said, his face expressionless, but Temujin saw the glint in his eyes. 'I am the best archer there has ever been.'

Temujin began to warm to this young warrior, who was certainly no more than fifteen. 'Than there has ever been in the Tajut, you mean?' Temujin attempted to clarify his statement.

‘No lord,’ Jirqo’adai replied. ‘I always say what I mean. No man living can match me at archery.’

Bogorju and Jelme glanced at each other and smiled. They both knew what was about to transpire.

‘Is that so?’ Temujin said, his interest piqued, and he also smiled as he looked at Bogorju and Jelme, ‘find our ten best archers,’ he ordered them, ‘tomorrow we will hold a competition.’ Turning back to the young Besut he said, ‘If you beat my archers, I will take you into my service as one of my elite guard, but if you are beaten by any of them, you will lose your head in payment for killing my favourite horse.’

‘I accept your offer, lord,’ Jirqo’adai said confidently, ‘but if I win, I would also ask a favour.’

‘And what might that be?’ Temujin asked, surprised at the audacity of the young man.

Jirqo’adai became shy all of a sudden, blushed and averted his eyes, ‘There is this girl...’ he stammered.

‘There is always a girl,’ Temujin laughed. ‘You want me to give you this girl that you’ve fallen in love with?’

‘Yes, lord,’ Jirqo’adai said, shuffling his feet.

‘Is it not enough that I will give you your life if you win?’

‘Life without her would not be worth living, lord.’

‘I will give this girl to you, but we are being premature, first you have to win.’

‘I will win, lord.’

The young Besut was taken out, and the procession of captives swearing the oath and being allocated to positions within the army continued until late in the night.

News of the competition had already spread throughout the army, and there was a betting frenzy. Temuge was the clear favorite and the Besut warrior the outsider. No one had seen him fire an arrow, but they knew that Temuge excelled in archery skills.

Some of the severed heads of the Taijut warriors, who had declined to join Temujin, were lined up for the short-range bows at fifty, one hundred, one hundred and fifty, and two hundred yards. For the long-range bow, at three hundred, three hundred and fifty, four hundred, and four hundred and fifty

yards. There were eleven of these gory targets, lined up at each distance, and staring back at the contestant.

Each warrior had a short and long-range bow, together with the exact number of arrows for each part of the competition. Their task was to hit the left eye socket of each head. A hit anywhere else would be deemed a miss.

Jirgo'adai could see that the targets were the severed heads of Tajjut warriors, some of which he recognised, but it didn't bother him. They were dead, and their souls were in Eternal Heaven, the heads were just empty vessels now. He also knew that Temujin had chosen the left eye socket as the target, because that is where his arrow had entered Temujin's horse. He was not afraid, he had spent many hours practising every day for as long as he could remember. He had always wanted to be a warrior, and of all the weapons in the warrior's arsenal that he had been trained in, he had found the bow to be the most elegant and trustworthy. He could kill a man many yards away without risking his own life, and the more he practiced the more he hit what he aimed at. He learnt to judge the effect of the weather on the flight of the arrow, and the angle and strength of pull for each distance until he was perfect. He pictured in his mind the arrow entering the target, and it was as if this made it come true. The other warriors had thought that he had a spirit that sat on each of his arrows and guided it into the target because no matter how much they practiced, they could not match his accuracy or the distance he could shoot an arrow.

This skill with the bow, and his growing reputation within the tribe, had attracted the girls and he would often walk through the camp to practice on the steppe to the sounds of female giggles hidden behind tent flaps or carts, a flirtatious eye here and a shy glance there. He was thirteen, when he caught a glimpse of, and fell in love with, Sharia, the daughter of Autchu the chief of the Tajjut, who did not hide like the others. She brazenly watched him, smiling at him as she milked her father's sheep. He had known then that he could never possess her. A chief's daughter was always married off to a chief or chief's relation from another tribe to form alliances, but he could dream. Then one day he had met her, when he was returning from practising on the steppe, it was as if she had been waiting

for him. Their eyes met and she just came to him and kissed him on the lips, softly like the touch of a butterfly's wings and then she was gone. He stood there for a long time with his eyes closed, wondering if it had really happened, or if he had imagined it. He had not seen her since that time, but her beauty, her smell, her kiss had overwhelmed his thoughts every day since, and he knew that he could not love another as he loved Sharia.

'You will go first on the short-range bow,' Jelme told him, dragging him back to the present, 'and you will go last on the long-range bow. Are you ready to start?'

'Yes, lord,' he said, as he picked up his short-range bow in his left hand and nocked an arrow with crane tail-feather fletchings on the string. The string had been made from horse skin, from which every bit of fat had been removed, and then it had been stretched and twisted to remain taut. He pushed the bow forward, and pulled the string all the way back to behind his right ear with his thumb. This was supported with his index finger curling around his thumb, and placed on top of the thumb joint at the base of the nail with the other fingers curled and forming a fist. He then hooked the bowstring on his bone thumb ring, which protected the thumb pad from damage when he released the string. He knew that other, more wealthier warriors, used thumb rings made of Chinese jade or agate, but his bone ring had served him well up to now. His left arm was fully extended, and he was ready to release his first arrow.

The whole army was out to witness the spectacle and was gathered along both sides of the short-range competition distance, from fifty to two hundred yards. There was an expectant hush, as they saw the young Besut warrior pick up his bow and nock an arrow. He released the first shaft, and it flew straight and true into the left eye socket of the head, positioned at fifty yards. They saw him quickly select another arrow, pull, aim, and release. As it flew through the air he was already sending the third, and then the fourth. It was as if four different archers had sent the arrows thud, thud, thud, thud, as they squelched into the eyeballs one after the other, with barely a breath between them.

There was first a stunned silence, as everyone realised they had underestimated this Besut archer. Loud angry shouts followed, as they thought about the plunder they were about to lose. The crowd was quickly brought under control, by a sign from Bogorju and the competition resumed. Nine of the other ten competitors hit their targets, but one missed the eyeball at two hundred yards with the metal arrowhead disintegrating the nose instead. There were now ten competitors for the long-range part of the competition and Temuge went first. There were only a very few archers, who could hit a target beyond three hundred and fifty yards, and Temuge was one of those, but he had never even tried to hit anything at four hundred and fifty yards. He took his time, he could not understand how the young Besut could be so fast, he will be slower in this part of the competition, he thought. He took careful aim, gauging the direction of the wind and slowly released the longer beech shaft arrow. He hit the targets at all distances up to four hundred yards, but the last arrow at four hundred and fifty yards fell inches short and smashed into the gaping mouth. The remaining Borjigin competitors missed at varying distances between three hundred and four hundred yards. Only Temuge had managed to hit the eye at four hundred yards.

The crowd waited expectantly, to see if Jirgo'adai could match Temuge. They were willing him to fail, and expected him to take his time as the other competitors had done. No one could hit targets that far away with the speed he had despatched his arrows using the short-range bow.

They stared wide-eyed, with mouths agape as he selected an arrow, pulled, aimed and released. He didn't even wait for it to hit the target before the next one was gone, then the next. Before he pulled the last arrow from his quiver he looked around at the stunned onlookers, and smiled. They all knew he was going to hit the target as he nocked the arrow, pulled, aimed and fired. Even before the arrow had hit its target, he turned and bowed low towards Temujin and said, 'My lord, I believe I am now in your service.'

Temuge came up to Jirgo'adai, and slapped him on the back, 'Brilliant,' he said to the young warrior, 'I've never seen anything like that before. The best archer there's ever been, or

probably ever will be.' Jirqo'adai just smiled, as the other competitors came up and congratulated him.

Temujin stood up, and walked towards the group gathered around Jirqo'adai. 'You spoke the truth Besut. From this day forth you will join my elite guard and be known as Jebe, to commemorate the arrow you sent into my horse and in honour of your great skill with the bow. What is the name of this girl you would have me give you?'

'Sharia, my lord,' he replied, and he was suddenly transformed from the confident archer, into a blushing shy boy, and those gathered round him could see this physical change and laughed.

'A girl will do that every time.'

'Yeah, they turn your knees to jelly, at the thought of their heavenly bodies.'

'I wish I had a horse for every time I've been like that about a woman, I'd be a rich man ten times over.'

'It's never happened to me, but then I don't like women that much.'

Temujin asked Bogorju to find the girl, and have her brought before him. To Jebe he said, 'Bogorju has gone to fetch the girl you speak of, we all want to see what changes the archer into an asshole.' Everyone burst out laughing, but Temujin remembered what he had been like, when he had first met Borte, very much the same, he thought.

Bogorju returned with a very beautiful, slim and dark-haired young girl who appeared to be a year or two younger than Jebe.

Temujin looked her up and down. If I hadn't promised her to Jebe, he thought, I might have taken her for myself. 'So you are the girl Jebe is moonstruck over?' he said to her. 'Who was your father?'

Sharia, stood straight and held her head high looking Temujin directly in the eyes, and he was reminded again of Borte. 'Autchu, my lord, the chief of the Taijut.' Temujin smiled and turned to Jebe, 'You didn't tell me that Sharia was Autchu's daughter. You have lofty ambitions lad, I will have to keep my eye on you.' To Sharia he said, 'I have promised you in marriage

to Jebe, who is now in my service, what are your thoughts on this?’

‘I am yours to do with as you please, my lord,’

‘That may be so, but that is not what I asked you. Answer the question.’ This girl reminded him so much of Borte, standing proud and speaking her mind.

‘I am pleased with the choice, my lord.’

‘Good, then it is settled,’ and he turned to Jebe, ‘you’d better keep this Sharia close Jebe, others would surely change places with you,’ and those within earshot burst out laughing.

On the long journey back to the Borjigin camp, Jebe took Temujin’s advice. Sharia rode with him on his horse during the day, and slept with him under his felt roll during the night. He had never been happier. He understood now why Autchu had been so afraid of Temujin, his warriors were frighteningly loyal, and he treated them as human beings instead of servants. He knew he had made the right decision to choose life over death.

9

June – October 1202

When Borte saw the dirty bandage around Temujin's neck, she was mortified and ran to him, hugging him and kissing his neck and then began crying. 'I knew this day would come,' she wept, 'what has happened to you, my love?'

'It is nothing, Borte,' Temujin said, shocked at Borte's reaction, 'a minor scratch only,' he lied.

'Tell me the truth, what happened? If you don't tell me I will get it from Bogorju or Jelme.'

He knew that she would. She always knew when Bogorju and Jelme were hiding something, and they tried to avoid her if they were trying to keep a secret, but she always found them, and when she looked at them, with her beautiful dark eyes, they told her everything. They were like sheep's intestines in her hands. Temujin told her what had happened, and how Jelme had saved his life twice on that night. She wept as he told her and they held each other close through the night. In the morning, she had a new resolve. Temujin knew that she was up to something, but he also knew better than to ask. She dressed his wound, and after breakfast he kissed her and left for the day.

The day after their return, the commanders were immediately set to work integrating and training the new additions to their tumans. Jelme oversaw the training, and Bogorju created a new tuman, the foundation of which, was loyal Borjigin taken from the other tumans and brought up to full strength by Taijut warriors. The newly promoted Qubilai was to be their commander, and Bogorju would help him to build them into a cohesive unit. The blacksmith was tasked to provide armour for the Taijut warriors, and the women were busy making robes in the colours of the tumans the Taijut had been allocated to.



Jebe was being inducted into the guard, but unlike Temujin, Bogdo took an instant dislike to him, and began making his life difficult. He was training all day, every day and nothing he did was good enough for Bogdo. Jebe suffered the jibes and taunts and the endless practice, knowing that Sharia was waiting for him in their tent, and that one day her dream would come true. She had told him that she was very happy, that she also had fallen in love when she had first seen him that day in the camp, and the kiss was to tell him that. She had known that someday they would be together, she didn't know how at the time, but she had once had a dream, and in that dream he was a great warrior riding on a white stallion, and she was by his side. She now knew that her dream had been a message from Tengri, and that they shared a destiny that had already been laid out before them.



After Temujin had left, Borte called the blacksmith to attend her. She gave him specific instructions on what she wanted made. She then sent word for Bogdo, to come to her.

'Bogdo,' she said to him, as he stood in front of her. Temujin's first wife had never summoned him before, in fact, he couldn't recall ever having heard of anyone who had been summoned by the Khan's first wife. 'You are one of my husband's senior commanders are you not?'

'Yes, my lady,' he stammered. He was beginning to get worried now, wondering if he had done something to offend her.

'My husband, the love of my life, and your lord and master nearly died vanquishing the T'aijut,' Borte spoke calmly, but her eyes were cold and her face unsmiling. 'It was only through Jelme's valour that he still lives.'

‘The guard who failed in their duties were executed, my lady,’ Bogdo explained.

‘Are you not the commander of the guard, Bogdo?’

‘I am, my lady.’

‘Then you should have been executed?’

‘What! Me, my lady?’ he asked, and his face contorted into a mask of horror at the thought, ‘but I was nowhere near your husband when this happened.’

‘Do not speak of your lord, as ‘my husband’ Bogdo.’ She was beginning to dislike this snivelling man intensely. ‘He is your Khan, and you will refer to him as such.’

‘Yes, my lady.’

‘Is Temujin’s life not your responsibility?’

‘It is, my lady.’

‘Then you failed in your duty.’

‘As I explained, my lady, I had delegated the task to the minghan commander, and the men under his command. It was they who failed in their duty.’

‘If Temujin lost a battle would he blame his men?’

‘No, my lady.’

‘And yet you too easily point the blame at your men.’

Bogdo opened his mouth to complain, but thought better of it and closed it again.

‘You can leave now, Bogdo,’ Borte dismissed him. ‘I have heard enough of your excuses.’

As he left Borte’s tent, Bogdo had a feeling of impending doom, and was angry at being humiliated by a mere woman. Who did she think she was, talking to him like that he thought? If it had been any other woman, I’d have lopped her head off. He knew that Borte didn’t like him, but he couldn’t see how she blamed him for Temujin’s injury. He decided to take his frustration out on the new Besut boy, whom he disliked intensely. Just because he was a good archer didn’t mean that he should just walk into the guard. Bogdo was commander of the guard, and he should have been consulted on whether the Besut was suitable or not.



That night as they were lay in bed together, Borte spoke to Temujin about Bogdo, and as usual she came straight to the point. ‘You should replace Bogdo as the commander of your guard, my husband.’

Temujin was surprised at Borte’s suggestion. It was very unusual for her to become involved in military matters, but he knew that she had a rare insight into men’s minds, and he always valued her opinion. ‘What makes you say that, my love?’ he asked her.

‘Bogdo only cares about himself. Your life is his responsibility, yet he failed in this respect. He is too quick to blame others for his own mistakes, and I fear for your safety if he remains in his position.’ Tears welled in her eyes, and her lips began to quiver.

She has always known how to get her way with me, he thought. ‘Who do you suggest should replace him?’ he asked her, knowing that she had given this great consideration.

‘Subadai,’ she immediately said. ‘He can be trusted to put your life before his own.’

‘But Subadai is a tuman commander,’ he offered lamely.

‘If you need an excuse to move Bogdo, just say that you feel he needs command experience and swap them over, but tell Subadai the truth.’

‘You seem to have it all worked out my love,’ and he smiled. He knew he would not get any peace until he acquiesced to her request. ‘I will do as you suggest,’ he said, and she hugged and kissed him.

‘There is another matter I wish to discuss with you,’ Borte said, as she started to remove her clothes. She was now thirty-eight and had given birth to five children, yet her body had remained firm, and it still excited him. He knew he was being manipulated, as he had been many times before by this woman he loved, but he didn’t mind because it was always for good, never to harm.



The following day, Temujin instructed Bogorju to swap Bogdo and Subadai over.

Bogdo was provided with the reason that Borte had suggested, but he knew who was behind the change, and he swore to get even with Temujin's meddling wife.

Subadai was told the real reason for the change, which he understood, and agreed with.

Jebe was thankful that his tormentor had gone and his life now became infinitely better, because Subadai was a much fairer commander who did not punish him for any reason. In fact, Subadai began to praise his skills and this motivated him to do better.



Two nights before their departure, to finally settle accounts with the Tartars, a feast was held that had been organised by Borte, and was to be attended by the commanders at all levels. Jelme was to sit in the place of honour next to Temujin, but he had no idea why.

The feast was underway. Temujin stood to address his commanders; the wound across the left side of his neck now healed, but still sore, and beneath his robe was a four-inch livid scar. 'My friends, my commanders, my family, I am glad to see you all here enjoying yourselves,' and they were. It had been a long time since they had been permitted to relax, eat and drink without thinking of the consequences. 'I have already said enough, my friends,' Temujin finished, 'let me make way for Borte, who has organised this splendid feast. I am as much in the dark as you are about its purpose,' and he sat down.

There were over fifty types of meat, and many other delicacies, which Borte had obtained from passing traders who had come from China, and other exotic lands that she had never heard of, nor even knew where they were, such as India,

Samarkand, and Khwarism. She guided the cook in their preparation for the feast. None of those present had seen or tasted such things, but it was fun trying them, and washing the strange dishes down with abundant measures of airag and rice wine. Even those warriors and their wives that sat watching the feast, were enjoying themselves.



Jebe sat with Sharia, in a secluded spot hidden amongst some bushes on a hill overlooking the feasting and merriment. They were huddled together, wrapped in his felt roll, holding hands, and sharing their own feast.

‘That’s Bogdo,’ he said to Sharia, pointing to a small squat man, ‘the one talking to that servant carrying a bow. He wondered what a servant was doing with a bow at a feast, but he soon stopped wondering, as Sharia brushed his face with her hand and kissed him. ‘We should be listening to what our lord and master is saying,’ he whispered to her, as she pulled him down and started to rummage in his trousers. Their first night together had been a distinct embarrassment to him, and he blushed every time he thought about it. She seemed to know what to do, but he had no idea at all. He was too quick, and she had to coax him back to life again and again. Since then, he had been a bit better, and she had become more insatiable. Sleep was far from her mind when they went to bed at night. In the mornings, rather than feeling rejuvenated and ready for the day ahead, he felt as though she had sucked the life out of him during the night, like some strange nocturnal spirit, and wanted nothing more than to go back to sleep. Her touch and the way her fingers brought him to life were exciting him and she moved on top of him, kissing his mouth and neck. As he began to respond, he heard a noise close by, they both froze, and he slowly pushed her off him and sat up to see who it was. He could see the silhouette of a warrior squatting nearby with an arrow nocked in his bow.



Borte stood up to loud cheering, and being unused to speaking in public, her voice at first was too soft, and as she realised that only those close by could hear her, she spoke louder. ‘Jelme, as you know sits in the place of honour, and is there any man here who doubts his right to be there,’ she paused, but no one spoke up. ‘You all know how he risked his own life to save Temujin’s, when you fought the Taijut,’ there was head-nodding and table-banging. ‘To you he saved your Khan, but to me he saved, my husband and my love,’ tears ran down her face. ‘I wish to give Jelme my own reward for this service,’ and she bent down to retrieve something, that had been hidden by the side of her seat.



Jebe could see the warrior was taking aim at Temujin and pulling the arrow back. Without thinking of the danger to himself, he sprang from his concealed place in the bushes, and jumped on the warrior just as he released the arrow. The warrior was knocked off balance, and Jebe punched him in the face. It was dark and they were two shadows fighting in the long grass. Jebe was a lot younger, smaller and lighter than the warrior, who recovered quickly and ran at Jebe, hitting him in the chest with a shoulder, knocking him to the ground and then pinning him down. The warrior wrapped his hands around Jebe’s throat and squeezed. Jebe’s life was quickly being strangled out of him.

Sharia ran screaming at the stunned warrior who was pinning Jebe down, and jumped on his back digging her nails into his eyes and face. The noise she was making would certainly attract attention, and the warrior’s life would soon be over if he didn’t stop her. He released one hand of his stranglehold on the boy and hit the girl in the face with the back of his fist, but she didn’t let go and began to scream louder, which he hadn’t thought was possible. When Jebe saw the warrior hit Sharia, he found a strength he never knew he had and hit the warrior in

the throat, which made him release his other hand from around Jebe's neck and he pushed the warrior off him.

At that moment, Temuge appeared with a group of warriors and grabbed them both. They were dragged by their coats along the ground and down the hill to where the feast was being held and there was light to see by.

Subadai and his guard surrounded Temujin and Borte. Borte had been hit by an arrow, which now protruded from her upper left arm. 'Are these the assassins?' Subadai asked Temuge.

'It would seem so,' Temuge said. 'They were out there in the dark fighting each other.'

Bogdo came into the circle surrounding the two men on the floor. 'It's that Besut archer. I knew he couldn't be trusted. He seeks revenge for the slaying of Autchu, that girl's father.'

Subadai grabbed Jebe's coat and hauled him up so that his face was level with Subadai's face. 'Is this true Besut?' he spat at Jebe, whose feet dangled ten inches off the ground.

'No, my lord,' Jebe croaked, 'it was him,' and he pointed to the other warrior.

Just then, Sharia forced her way into the circle of men. Her nose was bleeding and her left eye was swollen shut. 'It is true, my lord,' she shouted above the uproar. 'Jebe and I were together in the bushes watching the feast, when this warrior arrived with a bow and arrow. Jebe saw what he was doing and attacked him.'

Bogdo faded back into the crowd at this unexpected turn of events.

Subadai dropped Jebe, who fell in a heap to the ground, and picked up the other warrior in the same way. 'Speak,' Subadai bawled at him.

The warrior opened his mouth as if to obey Subadai's order, when a knife entered his back, severing his spinal column and the nerves connecting his brain to the rest of his body, and he died instantly. Subadai dropped the lifeless corpse and drew his sword. 'Who threw that knife?' he asked, but no one said anything because they had not seen who had thrown it, they had all been too busy watching Subadai, and waiting expectantly for the truth from the warrior.

Jebe clambered to his feet. 'My lord, I think I have an answer. I saw the warrior receiving instructions from Bogdo earlier.' Hands immediately seized Bogdo, who was propelled forward. Subadai felt for Bogdo's knife and found it missing.

'Where is your knife, Bogdo?' Subadai asked him.

Bogdo's face betrayed his fear, and he said, 'It wasn't my fault, she shouldn't have had me moved from my command.'

Temujin walked into the circle with his sword drawn. Those holding Bogdo forced him to his knees.

'Please, my lord,' he pleaded, 'it was Borte's fault, not mine. I had to do it so that I could get my position back.'

'I am glad your father is not alive to see your dishonour,' Temujin said, and swung his sword. Bogdo tried to avoid the blow, and the sword took half his face off. He let out a scream from the hole in the bloody mess that was once his face. Temujin swung the sword again ending Bogdo's life. 'Take this filth away,' Temujin said, indicating the two corpses. 'Leave them on the steppe for the wolves to feast on,' and he turned away.

Jebe went to Sharia and began wiping the blood from her nose and, and kissing her swollen eye. The nose didn't seem to be broken and the eye would heal. 'My love, you should not have risked your life for me.'

'He would have killed you; then my life would have had no meaning,' she said to him, holding back the tears.

'Jebe,' Temujin called to him, 'come here.' Jebe held Sharia tight by the hand, and they both approached Temujin. 'Between you, you have saved Borte's life, and revealed an assassin and a traitor. You have done me a great service. However, I am now left without a tuman commander, and we leave to fight the Tartars in two days. For this inconvenience, you will take Bogdo's place as tuman commander.' Temujin looked at Jebe, who stood with mouth agape, and he said, 'Good, that is settled then. Once the shaman has removed the arrow from Borte's arm, he will look at Sharia, be seated.'

Jebe was confused, and he sat down at the table Sharia led him to. His life had changed beyond all recognition within a matter of a few weeks. He should have told Temujin that he had no experience of commanding men, he was just an archer, but

he was so stunned he couldn't get the words out. How could he now be a commander of a tuman, he must be dreaming, and he would wake up soon.



Once the excitement over the attempted assassination of Borte had subsided, and the shaman had removed the arrow from her arm, applied healing ointment and dressed the wound, she again stood and everyone went quiet.

‘Maybe I should have a suit of armour and a helmet,’ she said, to laughter, cheers, and table banging. The men admired her humor and her courage. In her hand she had a sword, which no one had seen the like of before, and she held it up. ‘When Jelme saved my husband he had to discard his own sword in order to carry Temujin. The blacksmith, working on my instructions, has made Jelme a new sword, and I give it to him so that he will always remember the high esteem in which both my husband and I hold him for saving Temujin’s life,’ and she gave Jelme the sword. ‘One last thing,’ she said, with a smile, ‘the wrist strap is so you never lose it.’ This brought howls of laughter, and then loud cheers and banging on the tables, which eventually died down. Jelme stood there with his mouth open, and holding the sword.

‘Are you going to say something, or are you just catching flies with your mouth?’ Qasar shouted, to great amusement.

‘My lady, I am lost for words,’ Jelme said.

‘That’s not like you Jelme,’ Temujin said, with a grin and more laughter from those assembled.

‘What needs to be said has been said,’ Borte answered him, and sat down cradling her aching arm in her lap.

The commanders gathered round Jelme to look at the sword. The hilt was made from a single piece of ivory, which Borte had obtained from a passing trader, who said it came from an animal called an elephant that was found in a place called India. He couldn’t say what the animal looked like, and neither had he been to the place where it had originated, because the animal tusk had been acquired from another trader. Neither the

animal nor the place meant anything to her, but she loved the feel and the look of the ivory, and was sure she would find a use for it.

The blacksmith had spent many nervous hours engraving, chiselling and cutting the tusk, afraid that it would snap, break or crack with his efforts and incur the wrath of Borte. He had only worked with wood and bone before, and there were always plenty of wood, and animal or human bones, but this ivory was unique on the steppe, he had never seen anything like it before. Unlike bone, the tusk was solid and he found it was hard, and blunted his tools quickly, but he soon had the measure of it, and he worked day and night to create a sword hilt that would be a work of art on its own. When he had finished, it was as if each animal he had created on the ivory was alive.

He next turned his attention to the sword, and unlike the normal Mongol sword of twenty inches, this one would be twenty-four inches and slimmer and thinner, but he needed to create a much harder steel because of this. He sweated over his bellows and forges, and worked his apprentices day and night to find the right consistency of iron and steel. At last he produced a piece of steel that he felt was strong enough, and he heated, cooled and hammered it until it was the finest blade he could ever remember creating. He sharpened the blade edge, until he cut himself just touching it, and polished it to a mirror-like finish.

He also created a metal that was a mixture of mainly silver, with a small amount of gold, and he used this to create the butt of the sword, the sword guard, the collar and the pins to fix the blade to the hilt. He spent just as much time on the scabbard, which was engraved the whole length with Temujin vanquishing his enemies, and he used the silver-gold metal for the cap at the bottom of the scabbard and to surround the hole the sword was inserted into.

The commanders were in awe at the sword's beauty, and Jelme was astounded by the richness of the gift. This sword alone made him a wealthy man, but besides its beauty, it was a weapon without equal. He eventually got the sword back from a

reluctant Belgutei and Qachi'un, and tried it on for size. He took it back to his tent and wept.



Temujin used a similar encirclement strategy with the Tartars, as he had done with the Tajut. Chimbai assured him, that the Tartars were far less organised defensively than the Tajut, and he spoke the truth. The Tartars were in disarray from the moment the attack began at first light, and by late afternoon, they had succumbed to the superior and better trained forces of the Borjigin. Of the one hundred and twenty thousand Tartar warriors, only forty thousand were killed in the attack, which left seventy-five thousand as captives and five thousand who had escaped.

‘The Tartars had a hand in killing my grandfather and his brother, and they will always be a threat to us,’ Temujin said, to those gathered at the council to decide on the fate of the captives. It was late evening, and they were all tired after the day’s fighting. ‘If you all agree, we will kill every male who is higher than the hub of a cartwheel? When it is done, we will make slaves of the others, and divide them between us.’

Not one of them disagreed with Temujin’s suggestion. They all knew that the Tartars were trouble, and would seek revenge at the earliest opportunity, if they were integrated into the Borjigin. The only way to eliminate them as a constant threat was to kill them.

‘So be it,’ Temujin concluded. ‘Tomorrow at first light, we will start the executions.’

They all left the meeting to get some sleep. On his way past some of the captives that his tuman had captured during the day and his warriors were now guarding, one of the Tartars asked, ‘What is our fate to be commander?’

‘To kill every male of you who is higher than the hub of a cartwheel,’ Belgutei answered, without thinking and continued to his horse where he took out his felt roll, and lay down and went to sleep.



Bogorju stayed with Temujin after the meeting. ‘I have some disturbing news, my lord.’

‘What is it Bogorju?’ Temujin asked wearily.

‘Naigun and Daritai, your two uncles and Altan, your cousin disregarded the order not to plunder until the action was over, and seized what they came upon.’ It was a general order that no plunder should be touched until the fighting was over, and then it would be divided honestly, every warrior knew this.

‘Subadai,’ Temujin shouted, knowing that he would be close by. Subadai arrived almost immediately. ‘Take a detachment of the guard, and bring Naigun, Daritai and Altan to me immediately.’

‘My lord,’ and Subadai left to carry out his task.

‘Why did they do it Bogorju? Are they so poor that they cannot wait for their share?’ Temujin asked his friend.

‘They are not poor, my lord, they are just greedy,’ Bogorju answered.

Subadai returned alone shortly after. ‘They have fled, my lord,’ he reported.

‘With or without the plunder they helped themselves to?’ Temujin asked.

‘It seems they left in a hurry, and empty-handed.’



During the night there was a commotion, and Subadai was immediately at Temujin’s side with his sword drawn. Bogorju and Jelme followed immediately after, and these two went to find out what had happened. They returned fifteen minutes later with Belgutei.

‘Three thousand of Belgutei’s captives have killed their guards, stolen horses and escaped,’ Jelme told Temujin.

‘It is my fault, Temujin,’ Belgutei spoke up. ‘I told one of them what their fate was to be, when he asked last night after the council.’

‘Then you will go after them,’ Temujin told him angrily, ‘and do not return until every last one of them is dead.’

Belgutei went and roused his warriors, and they left immediately on the captive’s trail.

By this time, it was light and the executions began straight after the morning meal. Warriors executed ten Tartars each in shifts, by cutting off their heads, which took most of the morning. The massacre eradicated the Tartars from the steppe and ensured that they would no longer be a threat. It also meant that Temujin was now Khan over the eastern steppe. As was customary now, the heads were left in piles of one thousand, as a gory warning to their enemies. Early in the afternoon, Temujin gave the order to march, and they began the long trek back to the Borjigin camp. It would take them at least three weeks to make the journey loaded down, as they were, with considerable amounts of women, children, horses and livestock.



Belgutei followed the tracks of the three thousand escaped captives, they were moving fast and in a north-easterly direction towards the mountains. Soon, however, the tracks became confusing and he ordered a halt.

‘What has happened here Manzan?’ he asked his second-in-command.

Manzan got off his horse to inspect the ground. ‘They stopped as we have, and were joined by many others about six hours ago,’ Manzan replied.

‘What others?’ Belgutei asked surprised.

It was then that they both realised, that it must be the five thousand that had escaped at the end of the battle.

‘Our task will be that much harder now,’ Manzan said, ‘especially if they reach the mountains before we catch them up.’

‘Then we need to ride hard and fast, so that we can stop them before they do reach the mountains,’ Belgutei said. To his

men he shouted, 'We ride fast men, we must catch the Tartars before they can reach the mountains.' If they needed an incentive he added, 'If they get to the high places, many of you will lose your lives when we attack them.'

Three days and nights they followed the Tartars. They drank, ate, urinated, defecated and slept in the saddle, but as much as they tried, they only made up a couple of hours on the captives. They reached the foothills of the mountains late on the third day, and Manzan said, 'The men are tired and need rest before we attack, my lord.'

'If we rest it will allow the Tartars more time to organise themselves, and prepare a stronger position,' Belgutei replied. 'They have already had four hours to welcome us. Inform the men we will move forward.'

They climbed slowly up the mountain pass, following the tracks made by the Tartars. The pass at first, was enclosed on both sides by dense undergrowth and trees, and Belgutei employed outriders to warn of attack from the sides. The undergrowth and trees eventually gave way to steep rocky inclines, which Belgutei guessed, was where the Tartars would be waiting. Stone outcrops overlooked the pass ahead of them, and it would be an ideal place to mount an ambush. He ordered a halt because the light was beginning to fade, and he knew that continuing on through the pass would be suicide.

'We will camp here for the night,' Belgutei said to Manzan, 'but we need to know exactly where the Tartars are, and what they have planned. When it gets dark, send a taban up each side of the pass on foot to find the Tartars and report back. They should not engage the enemy. Post double guards, we don't want to be surprised in the night.'

The two tabans set off up the inclines once it had got dark, and after an hour they heard cries and fighting from the right side of the pass, and assumed that the warriors sent up there had either been captured or killed, because they failed to return.

'At least we know the Tartars are up there waiting to ambush us,' Manzan said.

The other group reported back shortly afterwards and confirmed their suspicions. 'They have split their forces and

hold the high positions,' Belgutei said to Manzan, 'We cannot move forward into the pass, they would pick us off like animals at a hunt.'

'We must also split our forces and climb up the rocks to attack them,' Manzan said. 'They will easily see us coming. It will be dangerous and they will have the advantage of the high position.'

'We have no choice Manzan,' Belgutei said, resigned to the situation. 'We cannot move the men up the rocks in the dark, we would lose too many, and the Tartars would hear us coming. We will attack at first light.'

'I think we will lose many warriors in this attack,' Manzan said. 'It is a pity that they reached these mountains. We have no other options open to us, other than to climb up to them. If we didn't, they would just sit there and wait for us to leave.'

When it was light enough to see by, Belgutei led one half of his men up the right incline, and Manzan led the other half up the left one. At first, it was easy going, but then it became steep and difficult to find hand and footholds. The Tartars, as expected, saw them coming and at first, threw rocks the size of medium-sized cooking pots down at them. Most of the warriors found it easy to avoid these large missiles, but where they did meet human flesh, they sent the warriors plummeting downwards to their deaths. As they climbed closer, the arrows began to rain down on them, and these were considerably more lethal, killing and maiming hundreds of Belgutei's men.

The Tartars also started shouting obscene comments about the wives, daughters and sons of the climbing warriors, and a couple of the braver Tartars urinated over the edge, droplets of the foul liquid splashing on the faces of the Borjigin. This insult enraged the warriors, and they climbed faster to reach the enemy.

Belgutei was the first to reach the top, closely followed by a number of his men, and the Tartars fell on them *en masse*. They fought for their lives with shield and sword, but as more of Belgutei's men clambered over the top of the rocks the fighting became more equal and individual sword fights raged across the area of flat rock at the top of the outcrop. Belgutei

noticed that Manzan and his men had reached the top on the other side of the pass, and were also engaged in battle.

Fighting was fierce and continued unabated throughout the morning, until at last Belgutei felt that they had the upper hand, and he urged his men on to finish the Tartars. They started to encircle the Tartars and push them backwards towards the precipice. His men quickly saw his intentions and they fought harder, and directed their fighting so that the Tartars could only move backwards. Abruptly, it became clear that the Tartars were enclosed, with their only escape now being a hundred foot drop into the pass.

'Rush them, and push them over,' Belgutei called to his men. The Borjigin ran forward, slashing and hacking with their swords, and pushing with their shields. Over two thousand Tartars either fell or jumped to their deaths, rather than surrender.

Belgutei could see that Manzan's men were still fighting and by the looks of it, they were in danger of being overpowered. He ordered his men to aim across the gap with their bows and arrows, a distance of two hundred yards, and well within range. Tartars began to drop on the other side of the pass, and this tipped the balance in favour of Manzan, who pressed home the advantage. Most of the Tartars were slain by either sword or arrow, but a few jumped to their deaths.

Not one of the eight thousand Tartars remained alive, and those Borjigin that still stood, sat or lay down where they were, so tired they didn't have the strength to get up for many hours. Eventually, they started to rise and descend the way they had come. Of the nine thousand five hundred that went up the mountain, only two thousand three hundred came down, and of these many carried injuries, including Manzan who had a deep wound from a Tartar sword to his shoulder.

Belgutei knew that it had been his mistake, which had cost his men their lives, and was deeply saddened by this realization. He ordered the Tartar horses and weapons to be collected up, and then they began the long trek back to the Borjigin camp, which took them over three weeks.

Belgutei kept his own counsel during the long days and restless nights. The spirits of his dead men haunted him

constantly, and he lapsed into a deep depression, which only got worse when Manzan died from his wound. He knew that Temujin would punish him for his error, and for losing so many good men, but he also knew that he deserved it. During the three weeks, another five hundred men died from their wounds. It had been a costly mistake, and he would be lucky to keep his head because of it.

They finally reached the Borjigin camp and were in a sorry state. There were no jibes or comical remarks as they rode through the camp, everyone knew that a disaster had taken place, and people averted their eyes.

Belgutei reported to Temujin, 'They are all dead, my lord. The captives we followed were joined by the five thousand that had escaped, and they reached the mountains before we could stop them. I lost seven thousand two hundred men fighting the Tartars, and another five hundred died on the way back from their wounds, including Manzan. It was a disaster that I brought about, and I deserve to lose my head.'

Temujin looked at his half-brother, and could see that he was suffering greatly from the loss of his men. 'Remember you are a commander, stand up straight,' Temujin said, and Belgutei stood straighter and raised his head. 'You have lost many good men, and you do deserve to lose your head. It is, I am sure, a mistake you will not commit again. You have clearly suffered enough, but a punishment must be given, even though you are my brother. You are relieved of your right to participate in councils of war, and will stand guard outside the tent until I instruct you otherwise. Now go, and when you are rested we will discuss the revival of your tuman.'

Belgutei slouched out. He was bone weary, and close to tears. Maybe I will feel better after sleeping, he thought, but he knew that it would take many months until he could look at his own reflection without feeling revulsion at what he saw.

10

March – September 1203

‘Temujin has grown strong and desires to be the greatest among men,’ Jamuga said to Senggum. Jamuga now resided with the Kereit, and had befriended Senggum, seeing in him a person he could manipulate to get his revenge on Temujin. ‘He has decided to be the one ruler, but he cannot be this unless he destroys your whole family. He has resolved to destroy it, and he will do so unless you prevent him.’

Senggum’s face was a picture of alarm and fear. He hated Temujin with a passion, but he didn’t realize that his now brother by oath, would attack the Kereit. ‘Temujin has never shown any disloyalty to my father, he thought, in fact he has helped him on many occasions.

‘Temujin has made a pact with Taiyang of the Naiman,’ Jamuga continued. ‘He will get help from Taiyang, and is only waiting for the right moment to kill your father. When that is done he will kill you and take your lands, your people, and everything you now have, as he has done with all the other tribes he has conquered.’

‘Why should I believe you now?’ Senggum challenged Jamuga. ‘What you told my father about Temujin and the Naiman last time, was a lie.’

‘It was no lie, Senggum,’ and Jamuga moved closer to emphasize his words. ‘Temujin just changed his tactics, because your father moved in the night and left his army exposed. When your father asked for help, Temujin saw an opportunity to ingratiate himself further, and abandoned the Naiman and turned on them.’

Senggum knew that Jamuga spoke the truth, and he felt afraid. He hated Temujin, and Jamuga had opened his eyes to Temujin’s devious methods. Of course, he thought, why else would Temujin want to eradicate all the tribes from the steppe, such as the Merkit and the Tartars? Temujin is killing everyone, so that he will be the one Khan, and the Borjigin the only tribe. It is up to me, to stop him.

‘It is true what Jamuga says,’ Altan, Temujin’s cousin said. Altan, together with Naigun and Daritai, Temujin’s uncles, had fled to the Kereit when they had been called to account for disobeying orders, and taking plunder before the action against the Tartars, had ended. ‘Naigun, Daritai and myself are witness to his ambition,’ and his two relatives nodded in agreement. ‘We have heard him plotting your ruin with his two lackeys Bogorju and Jelme. Take heed of what Jamuga tells you.’

‘Envoys are moving continually between Temujin and Taiyang,’ Jamuga said. ‘The only reason that they have not attacked already, is that they can’t agree how to share the plunder between them. Temujin wants more than half, which Taiyang will soon agree to.’

Senggum was incensed by what Jamuga and Temujin’s relatives had told him, and he knew that he must act.

‘All the time, Temujin is talking of the ties between himself and your father, whom he also calls, father. Wang Khan has made Temujin the elder son, you are his younger brother. You have lost your inheritance, and soon you will lose your life. Unless you destroy this man very quickly, he will kill you. Do you not see this?’

‘Yes,’ Senggum said, with a mixture of hate and fear in his eyes. ‘I see Temujin’s ambition clearly now, and you are right, we must act quickly before he ruins my father, and then turns on me.’

‘Just say the word,’ Altan said, ‘We will fall on his flank immediately, and slay all of Ho’elun’s children to the last one for you.’

‘I will destroy him hand and foot,’ Naigun said.

‘No, take his people,’ said Daritai, ‘what can he do without people? Whatever you wish to do Senggum, we are with you, and will follow you.’

Senggum went immediately to speak to his father, and he told him of the warning Jamuga had given, which had been supported by Temujin’s relatives.

‘Why do you think this way of my elder son, Temujin?’ Wang Khan asked his son in answer. ‘We have trusted him this far. If we hold unjust evil thoughts of Temujin, Heaven will turn

from us. Jamuga has been thousand tongued always, and what he says is unworthy of credit.'

Senggum could see that his father was not convinced. He is a fool, he thought, I must convince him of the imminent threat Temujin poses to the Kereit. He martialled his thoughts and continued, 'Every man who has a mouth with a tongue in it speaks even as Jamuga does, why do you not believe what is evident to everybody else?'

'Temujin has never been false,' Wang Khan said to his son. 'He has always been truthful and helped me when I needed him. Did his five commanders not save us from ruin by the Naiman, and save your life when all was lost?'

Senggum tried another tack, 'Today you are living,' he said, 'but still Temujin does not honour you. When you are dead, will he let me rule our people? Will he even let me live?'

'My son,' Wang Khan said, 'how am I to renounce my own promise and counsel? We have trusted Temujin up to this time. If, without cause we think evil of him now, how can Heaven favour us?'

Senggum was angry and turned to leave, but Wang Khan held him back. 'It is clear my son,' he said, 'that you will reject Temujin, no matter what I tell you. You will act in your own way, I see that, but victory, if you win it, must be yours by your own work and fortune.'

'Think on this scourge raised against us,' Senggum said to his father. 'If you don't stop Temujin, we are lost, you and I, without hope. If you spare him, we shall both die very soon. We must put an end to the man or be ruined. He will kill you first of all, and then my turn will come very quickly.'

Wang Khan would hear nothing of what he considered the murder of his eldest son; he would at least take no part in it. Senggum kept pressing him until Wang Khan finally said, 'If you do such a deed you must be alone in it. Keep away from me. I want to know nothing about it.'

Senggum left his father, and returned to Jamuga and Temujin's relatives, and together they plotted Temujin's death.

'Some time ago,' Senggum said to the others, 'Temujin asked for my sister, Chaur Bijhi to be married to his eldest son, Jochi, and he offered one of his daughters by a minor wife in

marriage to my eldest son. Wang Khan agreed to Temujin's request at the time, but I argued with my father that we were too high-born for Temujin's offspring, and he withdrew from the agreement. I will now send envoys to Temujin, saying that Wang Khan now accepts his proposals. We will make a great feast of betrothal, and invite him. If he comes, we will seize the traitor and kill him.'

They all agreed to this plan and the following day Senggam sent his envoys to Temujin, accepting the marriage proposals put forward earlier by him.



Temujin heard the envoys words, and was delighted at this change of heart by Wang Khan. 'Tell Wang Khan,' he said to the envoy, 'that I gladly accept his invitation, and will arrive in three days time. I will set out tomorrow.'

The next day, he started out with Subadai and a thousand warriors from his guard, to attend the feast of betrothal. On his way out of the camp he stopped to see his mother and Munglig, his stepfather.

'My son,' Ho'elun said with tears in her eyes, 'I am overjoyed to see you,' and she hugged him, holding her eldest son close for some time. 'What brings you to our home?'

'I am on my way to a feast of betrothal,' Temujin said. 'Wang Khan has agreed to my proposals for his daughter, Chaur Bijhi to marry Jochi, and a daughter of mine to marry Senggam's eldest son.'

Munglig became thoughtful and serious when he heard of the invitation. 'When you first made these proposals,' Munglig asked, 'didn't they refuse?'

'At first Wang Khan agreed, but then for some reason he sent word that he would not agree to it. I assumed that he had been persuaded otherwise by Senggam, but no reason was offered to me.'

'I think you are riding into an ambush, Temujin,' Munglig said, concerned for his stepson. 'Why would they invite you now to a feast of betrothal? You would be better not to go.'

Excuse yourself by saying that you have no horse to travel, or that it is spring and your horses are all out at pasture.’

Temujin dwelled on Munglig’s warning for some time, and at last said, ‘I agree with what you say Munglig. It seems strange that Wang Khan should suddenly have a change of heart without offering me any explanation. I will send Jelme in my place.’



When Senggum saw Jelme arrive, he knew at once that Temujin had seen through his plan. He welcomed Jelme as if nothing were untoward and accepted the reason Jelme offered for Temujin’s absence graciously, even though he knew it was a lie. The betrothal feast was held, and the following day Jelme was allowed to leave unmolested. Senggum then immediately called a council.

‘We must act quickly now,’ he said to Jamuga, and the others involved in his plan. ‘We will move with our army against Temujin tomorrow, but in the meantime, we will send a strong force to seize him.’

Kishlik and Badai, two of Chimbai’s spies in the Kereit camp, were listening at the rear of Senggum’s tent and overheard everything that was said. ‘We must ride fast to warn Temujin, and save him,’ Kishlik whispered. The two spies ran to the pasture and caught their horses, and rode with all speed throughout the night, reaching Temujin’s camp mid-morning on the following day, and told him everything they had heard.

Temujin immediately called a war council, and it was agreed that they would draw Senggum away from the main camp to protect the women and children, and meet him in a place of their own choosing, which they decided would be Kalanchin. It was a large area of flat steppe some distance away, but was ideal for a mounted battle. Jelme was instructed to take a detachment of warriors, follow the enemy, and report at intervals on their progress.

They set off and rode throughout the night, halting briefly at noon the following day. Two of Jelme’s detachment

reached them then, and told them that the enemy were advancing swiftly, and a great dust cloud was just visible on the horizon in the direction that they had come. Temujin urged his warriors on until they reached Kalanchin, and there he stopped and held another war council. Temujin had a hundred and fifty thousand warriors, and he knew that Wang Khan's forces numbered in excess of two hundred thousand, if he had brought all of his army.

'We are probably inferior in numbers,' Temujin said, 'but we are rested, whilst they have travelled long and hard. We have chosen the place, so they must fight on our terms. It will be a hard battle, and many will die today.'

'What do you propose, brother?' Qasar asked.

'If we deploy the tumans with gaps in between, it would allow them to surround each tuman with their superior forces. What I suggest is that we position each tuman next to its neighbour, and we fight on a wide front as a whole army. I will keep two tumans in reserve for reinforcement.'

No one had any better ideas, and so they all agreed the strategy. Jelme arrived then with his detachment. 'My lord, Wang Khan rides with the enemy and they have brought their whole army against us.'

A look of surprise crossed Temujin's face, and he said to Chimbai, 'I thought you said that Wang Khan had told Senggum, he would have no part of it?'

'That was certainly what my spies reported, my lord,' Chimbai responded nervously.

'Well, he must have had a change of mind, and it is as I feared if he has brought his whole army. Tell the men that they must kill two of the enemy for each one of us that is killed,' Temujin said.

'You should not fight, my lord,' Bogorju said.

Temujin turned to look at him, 'Why do you say that Bogorju? What will the men think if I sit on my horse watching them die?'

Bogorju licked his lips. He knew what he was asking Temujin to do, but he also knew that he had no choice. 'If you join the battle my lord, you will be the target, the battle is about

you. If they kill you, then we are finished, and the Kereit will have won.'

Everyone at the council agreed, and Temujin said with a wry smile, 'I had already decided to remain with the reserve tumans, somebody has to know when and where they will be needed. I agree with Bogorju, I will be Senggum's immediate target, he thinks that if he kills me, then his inheritance will be safe. Let us reverse the situation and make Senggum the target. Tell the men that the man who kills Senggum will be rewarded with a thousand horses.'

'Churchadai,' Temujin said, 'I would give you the centre, what is your wish?'

Before Churchadai could answer, Huildar interjected. 'My Khan, I will take the centre and break all who oppose us. I will plant your tail standard on Gubtan, that hill at the rear and left flank of the enemy. From that hill, I will show you my loyalty and valour. If I fall, you will feed and rear my children. Relying on Heaven, it is all one to me when my fate comes.'

Temujin embraced him and said, 'Go and take Gubtan, my friend.'

The rest of the commanders were allocated their positions, and went to line up with their men ready for the battle to come.



Wang Khan did not send his whole army into battle at the start. Hadokji rushed the Borjigin first with his Jirkins, followed by Achik Shilun and the Omans, the Tankaits came next, and a strong force of bodyguards. Huildar met them in the centre and drove them back in disorder then harried them as they retreated. He continued on through them, and placed Temujin's tail standard on Gubtan. Wang Khan sent reinforcements against Huildar, but Huildar and his warriors fought like twice their number and broke them also, but then Huildar was hit by a spear and thrown from his horse. The Kereit forces rallied when they saw Huildar fall and Wang Khan sent further reinforcements. Seeing this, Temujin sent one of the reserve

tumans under Qasar, to strengthen Huildar's warriors, and Wang Khan's forces were hurled back. Wang Khan then sent his own body guards under the command of Shilaimun, which were broken and scattered by Churchadai, who was reinforced by the last reserve tuman under Qachi'un.

Senggum could not watch as the Kereit were beaten and driven back time after time. He knew he could make a difference, if the men saw him on the battlefield, fighting beside them; they would be heartened, and rally again. He rushed into the battle with Wang Khan's last reserve of warriors, without seeking the permission of his father. All forces on both sides were now committed, and the battle had been raging all afternoon. It looked now, as though Senggum's entry onto the battlefield would win the day, but then Churchadai, remembering the reward on Senggum's head, loosed an arrow, and hit Senggum in the cheek. Senggum fell from his horse severely wounded, and when the Kereit saw this, they lost heart.

As the light was fading, the order was given to stop fighting and withdraw. When the Kereit withdrew, there were no cheers from the Borjigin warriors. They had won a narrow victory, but many of their friends and relatives lay dead or dying on the battlefield. They were bloody, drenched in sweat and tired.

Temujin ordered his warriors to withdraw, and sent men out onto the battlefield, before it became completely dark, to bring back those that were still alive. He told the men he had selected for this task, to find Huildar in particular.

Once these men had returned with the dying and injured, Temujin ordered a further withdrawal, some distance from the battlefield. When they had set up camp, Temujin held a council of war.

'Where is Bogorju and Boroqlu?' he asked those assembled.

Jelme answered, 'They are missing, my lord, as is your son Ogodei. The men you sent to bring in the injured saw no sign of any of them.'

It was as if he had been shot through the heart with an arrow. 'Those two faithful men were to protect my son, and now they have died with him.' With great effort he put his loss

aside; he knew that many had died and that he was not the only one to have lost friends and relatives.

‘How many have we lost, Jelme?’

‘Sixty thousand, my lord, and some tumans can no longer function. Huildar’s tuman has only three hundred and twenty warriors left, and Churchadai has a thousand two hundred. There are one thousand seven hundred injured, and many of those will soon die, either tonight or tomorrow. Huildar is badly wounded, but is expected to recover.’

‘The men must rest, eat and drink and we must tend the injured. Subadai, take ten of the guard and ride to the enemy camp. Keep them under surveillance, and inform me of any preparations they might make to attack us. We will post minimal guards tonight, so we rely on you for early warning of any impending attack.’

‘You can always rely on me, my lord,’ Subadai said. ‘I will never let you down,’ and he left to select those of his men who were uninjured, and less weary than the others.

‘Rest now,’ Temujin said to the other commanders. ‘I will walk among the men, and talk to them to lift their spirits. We will meet again tomorrow at first light.’

They all left, and with a heavy heart Temujin walked amongst the warriors who sat or lay on the ground by their horses. Some were already sleeping; some just sat and stared into the black expanse of the steppe, too tired to sleep. Others were talking over the battle, the killing, the near misses and the wounds they had received and inflicted.

Temujin spoke with them, laughed with them, and cried with them. He comforted those who were dying of terrible wounds, bleeding their life away into the dirt, holding their entrails in place from gaping stomach wounds, cradling severed arms and legs. He told them, that he had never seen such courage and valour. That they would sit at Tengri’s side in Eternal Heaven. All night he threaded his way through his army, he knew he could never sleep with this burden of sorrow weighing him down. Towards morning he realised that his warriors could not fight another battle. We must leave this place, he thought, Wang Khan is too strong for us. If we continue to fight, we will lose everything. Yet, moving the injured will

certainly kill them. He agonised over what he should do throughout the night. He grieved greatly for his two friends and his son, and when morning came, he continued moving among his warriors. His heart, although heavy with sadness, was also bursting with pride at the loyalty of his warriors. He eventually came across Huildar, ‘My anda, you are a man of your word; my tail standard still rests on Gubdan. A finer warrior does not exist.’

‘You flatter me, my lord,’ Huildar said, as he tried to sit up, but Temujin pushed him back down.

‘The shaman has said that if you don’t lie still, the wound will not heal.’ The spear had entered Huildar’s side, tearing muscle and flesh and then exited through his back. The wound now needed time to heal; moving would open up the wound and start the bleeding again.



The commanders reported for the war council at first light as ordered, but Temujin was not there. They waited for two hours, talking quietly among themselves, and then Jelme said, ‘I will go and find him.’ He rode his horse through the men, as they were waking up and preparing the morning meal. He eventually found Temujin, still wandering and talking to his warriors.

‘My lord,’ he called to Temujin, ‘the commanders await you.’

‘Jelme,’ Temujin said, staring at him with sunken eyes, ‘we have lost so many men. I cannot ask them to fight again.’

‘What of the war council, my lord?’ Jelme asked, worried at the sight of his Khan.

‘Yes, the war council,’ Temujin said, appearing to suddenly remember. ‘Is it first light already? I have not spoken to all of the men yet.’

‘The men will understand. We must discuss what we are to do next, my lord.’

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘they know I have other responsibilities. I will walk with you, my friend,’ and he held on to Jelme’s saddle as they moved off. They walked slowly to where the other

commanders waited, and it was close to midday when they finally arrived.

‘Have we heard from Subadai?’ Temujin asked Jelme.

Those assembled could all see that Temujin had not slept, his face was strained, his shoulders hunched, and his head bowed.

‘No, my lord,’ Jelme answered him, ‘but then you only asked him to report if the Kereit were preparing to attack.’

‘Yes, I did, and they obviously aren’t attacking, so we will not hear from him.’ His speech was slow, and his commanders could all see that the loss of so many men had hit him hard. He had also lost Bogorju, who had been with him for over thirty years, and his son Ogodei. It was as if he carried a fully-laden cart on his back.

‘Should we have the men prepare for battle, my lord?’ Churchadai asked, clearly concerned for Temujin. None of them had ever seen him like this.

‘We will not be going into battle unless Wang Khan attacks,’ he said vacantly. ‘We will stay here today, to give the wounded time to heal, and then we will leave this place tomorrow by midday. I pray to Heaven that Wang Khan does not attack. Tell the men to be ready, but we will wait for word from Subadai.’

Temujin lay down and curled up in the foetal position, then went immediately to sleep. Jelme went to his horse, untied the felt roll and brought it back to cover Temujin. He then sat down cross-legged next to him, whilst the other commanders rode back to their men to prepare, and wait for an attack if it came.

The day was warm, and the sun broke through the clouds, but Jelme knew that it would be some time before it could penetrate the dark heavy cloud that hung over them.

No word was heard from Subadai, the rest of that day, or during the night. Temujin slept through, and awoke the following morning. He was still greatly saddened by the number of his warriors that had died, but he looked considerably better. He ate the hot broth Jelme had prepared for him, and drank down the mare’s milk offered.

‘What news, Jelme?’ he asked when he had finished.

‘None, my lord, we wait.’

A number of the men nearby started shouting and pointing. Jelme stood up and looked in the direction they were indicating. It was a lone rider in the distance coming from the direction of the battleground. Someone with keen eyes said, ‘It is Bogorju.’

Temujin heard his friend’s name and stood up to look himself. The figure certainly looked familiar, but he could not see the gold edging of his robe, which would identify the rider as one of his senior counsellors. He waited patiently until the rider came closer, and then it was clear it was Bogorju. Temujin turned his face to Heaven and struck his breast, ‘Thank you Tengri for saving my friend,’ he said.

‘My horse was killed by the enemy,’ Bogorju told them, as he reached Temujin, and jumped off the mount. ‘Whilst I was escaping on foot, I saw a packhorse that had wandered from the Kereit. I cut the straps of its burden, mounted it, and rode here.’

Temujin embraced him, ‘Heaven has been kind in returning you to us,’ he said, with tears running down his face.

Word spread fast through the camp, and many rode up to welcome Bogorju back, some embracing him, some slapping him on the back, and some joking about the nag he had rode back on. Once the welcomes had finished, Jelme briefed him on the losses and what had been decided in his absence. ‘We are now preparing to leave,’ he said finally. ‘Word has been sent to Subadai to return with his men, and then we shall depart.’

‘This has been our worst battle,’ Bogorju said. ‘It seems that the injury to Senggum saved us from an even greater disaster.’

‘The Kereit were too strong for us and remain so,’ Jelme said, ‘even though they have lost probably ninety thousand warriors. Temujin knows this, and he will devise a strategy to overcome them.’

Another cry went up and everyone turned to see another lone horseman riding slowly towards them from the battlefield. It soon became apparent that it was Boroqul. As he drew near, they could see that beside Boroqul’s legs, two others were hanging down near them. Boroqul was drenched in blood, and his face was a mask of sorrow. ‘It is Ogodei,’ he said to Temujin,

as he brought his horse to a halt, and jumped to the ground. 'He was injured in the neck from a sword blow, and I had to suck out the congealed blood from the wound. He has lost a lot of blood.'

Temujin helped Jelme to gently pull Ogodei off Boroqul's horse, and they laid him down on the ground. Temujin wept when he saw his son's injury and the paleness of his skin. The shaman was called immediately to cauterise the wound and gradually, Ogodei came to. Temujin held him beneath the shoulders and lifted him up, as he put a drink of qumys to his lips. 'I am still alive then?' he managed to ask between drinks.

'Tengri is not yet ready for you to sit at his side,' Temujin told him, 'but you have been sorely wounded, my son, and must rest to get your strength back.'

Subadai returned then, and reported to Temujin. 'The Kereit are leaving in the direction they came, my lord.'

Temujin gave a sigh of relief. 'I am glad they have broken off the battle, like Ogodei, we need time to heal. We will camp here until it is safe to move the wounded, and then we will march to the east.'

They remained where they were for two weeks, and the men passed the time sleeping, eating, drinking and hunting. They then marched slowly towards the east and each day, early in the afternoon, they set up camp for the night. Warriors were sent out to hunt for food during the daily marches and gradually, they all began to heal in mind and body.

One day, when they were just setting up camp for the night, Kadan Daldur, one of Chimbai's spies in the Kereit camp rode in. They provided him with food and drink before they questioned him, as he had obviously ridden many days to reach them. Temujin assembled his commanders meanwhile, to hear Kadan Daldur's words.

'When Senggum was wounded,' he said, 'Wang Khan said to his commanders, "We have attacked a man with whom we should not have quarrelled. I am sad to see the spear that has been driven into my son, but he is alive and will soon be riding again into battle. Many of our warriors have not been as lucky, and they now sit now at Tengri's side."' Achik Shilun spoke then

saying: "When you had no son, you were praying to receive one, now you have a son you should spare him." This moved Wang Khan, whose heart was not really in the attack, and was only persuaded by Senggum after much effort. He then gave up all thought of further battle, and said to his attendants: "We return home. Carry my son back with care, do not shake him." They then set off home.'

'Thank you for bringing this news Kadan,' Temujin said to the spy. 'It is now clear why Wang Khan broke off the attack. We have a lot to thank Churchadai for.'

The next day, towards evening, they buried Huildar, on a hill near the Kalka River. He had joined the hunt two days before, against the advice of the shaman, and when he wrestled a wild boar into submission, his wound opened and he died that night.

After another month, they came upon the Unggirat tribe who had previously joined the alliance, together with many others, under Jamuga.

Temujin sent Churchadai with a composite tuman to talk to their leader. 'Tell him,' he told Churchadai, 'to remember that my wife is one of their people, and we therefore have a blood bond. They are to submit to me or prepare for battle immediately. If they submit, then I will not harm them, but will expect their warriors to join me when I call.'

Churchadai returned after three hours. 'They submit to you, my lord. They have forty thousand able warriors who await your orders.'

Temujin continued eastwards for a further two weeks and finally set up camp for the winter on the eastern bank of the Tugeli.

11

October 1203 - January 1204

Winter had gripped the steppe in its cold hands. Rivers and lakes were frozen, the snow covered the mountains and plains like a white blanket, and the Borjigin had time to recover. They had settled into their camp at the Tugeli River and Temujin had called a council with his commanders, who were sat in his tent huddled around the fire to keep warm, and he outlined the strategy he had decided upon. 'We can do nothing against the larger army of Wang Khan,' he said quietly. 'We will wait until a more favourable time to destroy the Kereit presents itself. Those clans, who joined him in battle, will soon return to their herding and milking. In the meantime, I will send conciliatory messages to Wang Khan and Senggum, to try and convince them that I am not a threat and we will wait and bide our time.'

He sent an envoy, with a detachment of his guard, to the Kereit camp with the following messages: To Wang Khan: *We are now east of the Tugeli, and the grass here is good despite the snow. Our horses are satisfied and grow strong. Why were you angry with me, my father, why did you bring such great fear on me? If you had cause for concern, why not talk to me, as we had previously agreed? Why wage war against me? People divided us, but you know well our agreement, that if men should talk to either one of us to the harm of the other, we should not believe what was said till we, you and I, should talk and answer each other's questions truthfully. But my father, have we had any personal explanation? Though small, I am worth many large men, though ugly I am worth many men of much beauty. Moreover, you and I are two shafts of a single cart, we are like two wheels of that cart. When your uncle waged war against you with an army, you came to my father praying for his assistance, and my father drove out your uncle who fled, and my father brought back your people. It was then that you and my father became sworn brothers, and moved by gratitude, you spoke these words to him: 'For your help to me I will repay not only you, but your children and your grandchildren. I swear by High Heaven that I will do so.'* After that Erge Qara, your brother, obtained help from the Naiman and made war on you, and drove you to such desperation that you lived on stolen goat's milk. At last, you came to

me as a wretched beggar, and I accorded you all the honour of a Khan because of your friendship with my father, and like my father, I got your people back. After that, when we were pursuing Buyruq of the Naiman, and fighting his commander Kokse u Sabraq, you made fires in the night time, deceitfully withdrew and deserted me. Sabraq captured half your people, their wives and children, and your property, and again you asked me for assistance and I gave it. I sent my five best commanders who saved you and Senggum, and restored what the Naiman had taken. At that time, you thanked me most heartily. Why attack now without cause, why attack when I have not done any evil to you or Senggum?

Wang Khan sighed deeply when he received this message from Temujin. 'Take this message back to your Khan,' he told the envoy: *I should not have quarrelled with you my son; I should have stayed with you.* He cut his finger, and let the blood from the wound drip into a small horn. *If I harm you, may I be cut as this finger is cut.* He gave the horn to the envoy.

To Jamuga: *Through envy and hatred, you have parted me from my father. In former days when we lived side by side, you nurtured this hatred. Drink poison and have done with it, your death will not be mourned.*

To his relatives Altan, his cousin, and Naigun and Daritai, his two uncles: *I know not why you deserted me. You have withdrawn from me now, and are helping Wang Khan even after proclaiming me Khan. What you have begun, you can never finish, and I advise you to meet with me so that we can discuss how you might assist me.*

To Senggum: *I am a son of thy father born with my clothes on; you are his son born in nakedness. Once our father showed equal kindness to both of us, but dark suspicion attacked you, and fearing lest I might trick you in some way, conceived a great hatred and cast me out unjustly. Cease causing grief to your father, go to him now and drive out his sorrow. Unless you expel from your heart that old envy against me, it will be clear that you have the wish to be Khan when your father dies. Should you wish to confer with me, send two men for that purpose.*

Seething with anger, Senggum said to the envoy, 'Tell Temujin these words?' *When you spoke of my father as Khan, you called him an old murderer while you did so. When you called me your sworn friend, you jeered at me referring to the Merkit, and said that I came into this world to handle ram's tails and excrement. I know the hidden*

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sense of your speeches; I know what your plans are. Battle is my first, and last answer to you.

‘Jamuga and your relatives did not send a reply to your message my lord,’ the envoy said, concluding his report to Temujin.

‘I did not expect answers from Jamuga, or my relatives,’ Temujin said to the envoy. ‘You have done well. Rest now, I will have another message for you to deliver soon.’



‘Your father is old now, and does not have the strength of will to carry this war through to the end,’ Jamuga said to Senggum. ‘He thought the war unjust from the start, and he sees your injury as Tengri’s mark of displeasure.’

Senggum touched the deep jagged wound in his left cheek. He was still healing, and the entry and exit wounds still seeped blood and green slime, even though the shaman applied salve, made from herbs, twice a day. He preferred to stay inside now, because the children called him names, and ran screaming to their mothers at the sight of him. When he did go out, it was in the dark, and he covered that side of his face with a silk wrap.

‘Every time your father looks at you, he is reminded of his decision to attack Temujin, and the unjustness of that decision. He feels that Eternal Heaven does not look favourably on the Kereit now. Temujin is sending messages with words your father wants to hear, they feed his guilt. He is convinced that, to make things right, he must recognize Temujin as his heir again, to appease the wrath of Heaven. He is a fool Senggum, and Temujin’s strategy is working. Temujin knows he cannot beat Wang Khan’s forces on the battlefield, so he is biding his time and sending your father his sweet lies to win the Kereit another way.’

‘I know, I know,’ Senggum hissed, ‘but what can I do?’

‘Your father has outlived his usefulness,’ Jamuga continued to press the point. ‘He has turned into an old fool, and more than that, he is a dangerous old fool. If he recognizes

Temujin as his heir again, then your inheritance and your life will be lost.'

'I hear your words Jamuga, but I cannot convince my father that Temujin's words are lies. He sees him as the son he deserved. I am a continual disappointment to him,' and he clasped his face in his hands.

Jamuga thought, the snivelling idiot was going to start crying, but when Senggum looked up again, he had brought himself under control.

'To save your inheritance and to save your life, your father has to die,' Jamuga finally said what they had both been thinking.

Senggum looked at Jamuga with shock etched on his face, his mouth open, and his eyes wide with horror. 'He is my father, I cannot kill my own father, what do you take me for?'

'I will kill him,' Jamuga said quietly.

'You are his anda brother, are you not also family?'

'Not any more Senggum. If your father's stupidity is allowed to continue, he will get us all killed.'

'I cannot sanction the murder of my father, it would be wrong and...'. Sweat ran down his face, and his hands were suddenly clammy.

'And what Senggum?' Jamuga shouted, losing his patience now. 'You know it is the only way. Are you just going to sit in here hiding, while your father disinherits you, and Temujin is given permission to cut off your head?'

'I cannot have this conversation, Jamuga. Leave me out of it.'

'Don't worry, I will do the deed, and then you will be Khan of the Kereit. You will thank me afterwards, my friend.'

Senggum covered his ears, and closed his eyes like a small boy pretending not to hear, or see Jamuga.

Jamuga left Senggum's tent, having got what he came for. Senggum is weak and insecure, he thought, I can understand why Wang Khan, prefers Temujin as his successor. Under Senggum the Kereit would fall to ruin one way or another. That is why it is important that I am here to guide and influence him. Then later, I will be proclaimed Khan, even if I have to kill Senggum to achieve it. Jamuga went straight to find Altan,

Naigun and Daritai to discuss with them, how they might accomplish the murder of Wang Khan.



‘My lord,’ the envoy addressed Wang Khan, ‘Temujin has asked me to convey these words to you: *My father, your words are the honey of the bees, and when the spring comes, we should renew our old relationship. I honour you, my father, and bear no ill will towards you or my brother Senggum, even though he still wishes me dead. I fear that your two sons can never be reconciled, although I wish it were not so. Those, whom you have given sanctuary, work against me out of envy and hatred. Jamuga, and my three relatives speak poison to Senggum day and night, how can you and I hope to be father and son, as we once were, when I am in fear of my life at the hands of Senggum, your son. You must speak to him, and convince him I am truly his brother, and am no threat to him.*

Wang Khan shook his head in sadness. He had spoken to Senggum until his tongue was raw, but to no effect. He realised that if he was to bring about the reconciliation he so desperately wanted between Temujin and himself, then he must cast out Senggum, together with those parasites who feed him their lies. Temujin was the son he wanted and should have had, together they could have ruled over all the tribes. Although he loved Senggum, as a father should love his son, he was a disappointment to him in many ways. I have to think of the tribe that has been strong for many years under Khans of courage and valour, he thought. If I let Senggum succeed me, the Kereit will be scattered across the steppe within a year. Many of the clan leaders would not follow him; they consider him to be too weak, to be indecisive, and when he does make decisions they are usually wrong. They would leave and join other tribes, probably the Borjigin, because they see Temujin as a strong leader, and they are used to fighting side by side with his warriors. As much as it hurts me, I must make Temujin my heir. He turned to the envoy, who stood in the opulence of Wang Khan’s tent waiting patiently, ‘Tell Temujin, that I will meet him in the spring to renew our relationship as father and son.’



The envoy bowed to Wang Khan and left. As he rode out of the camp he was stopped by two Kereit warriors, who introduced themselves as Kishlik and Badai, two of Chimbai's spies. 'Tell Temujin that Jamuga and Temujin's three relatives are plotting to assassinate Wang Khan, and this murder has been sanctioned by Senggum. We need to know what to do. Ride fast my friend, and return quickly with an answer.'

Three days later, the envoy reported to Temujin. He had ridden non-stop, because he felt that what Kishlik and Badai had told him was of grave importance. He quickly gave Temujin, Wang Khan's message and then told him what the two spies had said.

'We cannot let Jamuga assassinate Wang Khan,' Bogorju said. 'If he does he will effectively be Khan of the Kereit, through his control of Senggum.'

Temujin turned to Subadai, 'This envoy has clearly been riding for many days and needs rest, bring Jebe to me. Jebe was summoned and Temujin said, 'You must ride to the Kereit camp like the wind to stop a disaster from occurring. Tell Wang Khan: *My father, I have received news through Altan's relatives, who reside with me that he, Jamuga, and my two uncles, are planning to assassinate you. I have no other details of this plot, but believe this, if you believe nothing else. Do not dismiss it as a lie straight away, but find out the truth of the plot from your son, who has knowledge of it.*



Jamuga and the other three conspirators had spent many days discussing ways in which they might bring about the death of Wang Khan, and they still had not made a decision.

'I think the main problem with each of the methods we have discussed my friends,' Naigun said, 'is that we get caught and executed after we have killed Wang Khan, which defeats our objective. We need to employ someone else to do the job,

and then afterwards, get to him first, and kill him, so that he can't betray us. We will then be heroes.'

Altan said, 'I like that idea, but who could we possibly persuade to kill their Khan?'

'I think I might know someone,' Daritai said. 'One of the warriors I gamble with has lost everything, including his wives and children who now live with me. One of his young wives has a certain beauty, and is very skilful with her hands and mouth, she can keep me up for hours. I am like a stallion in my prime.'

'What's that got to do with anything?' Altan asked, echoing everyone's confusion.

'Nothing at all,' Daritai said with a grin, 'I just thought it was worth mentioning. Anyway, we could offer to return to him everything he has lost, plus seventy-five horses.'

'That's a bit excessive,' Jamuga said. 'He's only killing a Khan, not a whole army.'

'Let's not forge that we really aren't going to pay him afterwards,' Altan reminded Jamuga.

'What if he refuses to do it, and then goes and tells Wang Khan what you'd asked him to do?' Naigun asked.

'If he refuses,' Daritai said, 'I will kill him where he stands.'

'If he agrees, how will he do it?' Jamuga asked, and they all went quiet.

'The best time is just before first light, when Wang Khan's two bodyguards are dozing outside his tent,' Altan said. 'The man can cut an entry through the felt at the rear of the tent, climb in, and stab him through the heart.'

'He will probably be sleeping with one of his wives,' Daritai said, 'what about her?'

'Well, if she wakes up, he'll have to kill her as well,' Altan said matter of factly.

'We can't all rush in to kill the assassin at that time of morning, as if we were just out for a stroll,' Naigun observed.

Again, they all went quiet, trying to visualise the unfamiliar situation in their heads, and then Jamuga said, 'Only one of us will be necessary to kill the warrior. They will go with

him, and wait outside while he kills Wang Khan then, as he climbs out the way he entered, chop his head off.’

‘That sounds reasonable,’ Altan said smiling. ‘Which one of us goes with the warrior, and kills him?’

They all looked at each other, but no one offered to be the one. ‘It can’t be me,’ Jamuga said. ‘If I am connected with this in any way, people will immediately suspect I put him up to it and have my head.’

‘Doesn’t that go for all of us?’ Daritai said. ‘We are seen together often,’ and Altan and Naigun both nodded their heads in agreement.

‘We have to make sure Senggum, is there to protect us should anything go wrong,’ Naigun said, ‘or some of the clan leaders might get suspicious and start asking questions.’

‘Senggum does not want to be a party to it,’ Jamuga reminded them.

‘Then you need to persuade him otherwise,’ Naigun forced the issue. ‘We are doing this for him, after all, and he needs to get his hands dirty. After Wang Khan is dead he will be Khan, and be in a position to deflect any questions or suspicions directed at us. We need him to take some responsibility after the murder. Why should we risk our lives otherwise?’

‘You know that we will all be rewarded like Princes when Senggum is Khan,’ Jamuga said.

‘I do not want to be looking down at my Prince’s reward from Eternal Heaven,’ Naigun said. ‘You must go to Senggum and tell him that unless he plays his part in the assassination, then we will leave him to his fate.’

Jamuga sighed, he knew Naigun was right, but he didn’t relish the task of trying to persuade Senggum to come out from beneath his blanket. ‘All right,’ he said, ‘I agree with you. I will speak to Senggum once Daritai has enlisted the help of the warrior, and we have decided when it should take place.’



‘I will do as you ask if I get a hundred horses on top of what I lost gambling,’ the warrior said to Daritai.

Daritai knew that the warrior was never going to get paid for his work, so was willing to promise him anything, but he didn't want to plant any seeds of suspicion in him that this might be the case, so he bartered. 'Fifty horses?'

'Ninety?'

'Sixty?'

'Eighty-five?'

'Sixty-five?'

'Eighty?'

'Seventy-five,' Daritai said, 'and that's my final offer.'

'Agreed,' said the warrior.

'You drive a hard bargain,' Daritai flattered the warrior.

'It is a dangerous thing you want me to do,' the warrior said. 'I am more likely to end up sleeping with Tengri, than my youngest wife who shares your bed at the moment.'

'And very lovely she is as well, my friend. Did you teach her how to use her hands and mouth like she does?'

'No, it was her mother, who was also a beauty and famous in the Kereit for bringing enjoyment to many men in her time. Sadly, she is dead and no longer spreads her joy.'

'Well,' Daritai said, with mock sadness masking his impatience to conclude their business. 'I will be sad to part with her, but a bargain is a bargain.'

'When do you want me to do it?'

'In two days time. You will not be alone though, I will accompany you, but I will wait outside whilst you complete the task, to make sure you are not seen. Wang Khan will probably have one of his wives with him, so you might have to kill her too if she wakes up. I don't need to stress, that you should be as quiet as possible, because any noise will bring Wang Khan's bodyguards immediately.'

'Don't worry, my friend; it's not the first time I've done this type of work, although I don't go around bragging about it, you understand. I'll be in and out in no time, it will be as if a spirit had done it.'

'Meet me two hours before first light the day after tomorrow, and together we will make Senggum the Khan of the Kereit.'



‘No, I can’t get involved,’ Senggum whined, ‘I keep telling you, he’s my father.’

‘Do you want to be Khan?’ Jamuga asked him again.

‘Of course I do.’

‘Then you must do something about it. Any day now, your father will name Temujin as his successor, and then you will be lost.’

Senggum paced around the tent smacking his forehead with the palm of his hand saying ‘no, no, no,’ under his breath.

‘I am only asking you to make sure you are awake, and in the vicinity of your father’s tent at first light the day after tomorrow.’

‘I told you I didn’t want to know anything about it, and now I know when you plan to do it. How can I sleep at night knowing this?’

‘How will you sleep at night, knowing you will never be Khan?’

‘Is this the only way, Jamuga?’

‘It is, my friend.’

Senggum stopped pacing. ‘I will be awake and dressed at that time, but don’t ask me to do anything else.’

‘When your father is found, you must take charge, and stop any fingers pointing in my direction. Someone needs to be blamed, so you have to say that the assassin must have been employed by Temujin. That will stop people thinking it was I, and we will also have an excuse to go to war with Temujin. You will be Khan after your father is killed, so you had better start acting like one.’

Senggum nodded, and looked at Jamuga, who slowly got up and left him to his guilt and agonising.



Shock appeared on Wang Khan's face as he heard what Jebe was saying to him. 'Is Temujin sure?' he asked Jebe, unable to believe that his own son was implicated in a plot to murder him.

'He is sure, my lord,' Jebe answered. 'All you need to do, to prove Temujin tells the truth, is to question your son, Senggum.'

Wang Khan knew that it was true, and that Jamuga was behind it. He shouted at one of his attendants: 'Go and tell Senggum to attend me immediately.'

Senggum came in shortly after, followed by the out-of-breath attendant. 'Why have you made me rush here, father?'

Wang Khan came straight to the point, his voice cold and his eyes piercing into Senggum's soul. 'Stop snivelling you wretched son, and tell me about the plot you have concocted with Jamuga to kill me?'

Senggum stood there open-mouthed, staring at his father.

'Speak, before I feed your entrails to my dogs.'

'I don't know what you're talking about, father,' Senggum's voice had turned to a high-pitched whine. 'I wouldn't...'

'Yes you would, and so would Jamuga. You want your inheritance, and Jamuga wants control of the Kereit through you, you spineless donkey. Tell me everything you know, or I'll cut your feet off at the ankles and let you bleed to death while I watch.'

Senggum had never seen his father so angry. 'It was Jamuga's idea, I promise I didn't want him to do it, but you're going to give my inheritance to Temujin, what was I to do?'

'Who else is involved besides you and Jamuga?'

Senggum hung his head in despair. He knew his life was worth nothing now. 'I am not involved father; I only know that they are doing it.'

'Don't call me father, anymore. You have no father, and I now only have one son, who lives far away. You're an imbecile, of course you're involved.'

'Altan, Naigun and Daritai are also involved.'

'Which one of them plans to kill me?'

‘I don’t know, I only know that it is planned for tomorrow morning, before first light.’

‘Then we will let them go through with it, so that we get all of the conspirators.’

‘You’re not going to let them kill you, are you father?’

‘Sometimes I despair of you, Senggum.’

‘What do you plan to do with me, father?’ Senggum knew that he had forfeited his inheritance and probably his life, and wished he had never listened to Jamuga.

‘When I have decided what to do with you, you will be the first to know, you sheep’s afterbirth. Guards,’ Wang Khan shouted, and his two bodyguards came rushing in. ‘Escort this poor excuse for a son to his tent, and keep him there until I say otherwise. No one is to speak to him, and he is not to speak to anyone. Take his weapons from him.’ The guards removed Senggum’s sword and knife and propelled him out of Wang Khan’s tent.



Wang Khan sat in his seat staring into the darkness. What shall I do with Senggum, he asked himself? I should really cut his head off and have done with it, but without Jamuga he is harmless, and I can’t do that to my own son. I could banish him, but then he might join with Jamuga and raise an army against me. I suppose I had better keep him close. Now that I’ve caught him in this plot, he will be more compliant to the idea of Temujin succeeding me.

Wang Khan’s attendant lit the lamps and put logs on the fire in the hearth, then shuffled around trying to look busy.

‘My bodyguards are guarding Senggum,’ he said to the attendant, ‘go and make sure that two others have replaced them outside, everything should appear normal. Tell my fourth wife, to come to me in two hours.’ The attendant rushed out to do his master’s bidding.

Gradually, the hours passed. Wang Khan’s fourth wife came in, a lovely girl of eighteen summers, whose name was

Tellik, and she began undressing as she walked through the door, but stopped when she saw Jebe in the shadows.

‘Lie down and go to sleep Tellik,’ Wang Khan said to her. ‘Tonight I am otherwise engaged.’ Tellik pulled her robe back on, and obeyed her husband.

The attendant dimmed the lights, and was dismissed. Jebe immediately began struggling to stay awake. He had ridden non-stop for two days and nights to get here, and now his head was nodding onto his chest and then jerking back up again. He stood up to stretch, and Wang Khan looked at him as if to say, ‘Keep still you idiot,’ so he sat back down again, and continued his nodding and jerking, until he thought that when he did get up again he would have a permanent neck injury.

Then he heard a soft tearing sound, as a long knife appeared through the felt, which covered a section at the rear of the tent, and started cutting a hole large enough for a man to climb through.

Wang Khan quickly lay down on his mattress, being careful not to wake Tellik, as he climbed in next to her and covered himself over with the blanket.

A man’s head appeared first, and seeing that everything was as it should be, he stepped through the opening in the felt, and crept towards the two sleeping figures on the mattress to his right.

‘Guards,’ Wang Khan shouted loudly, and his two bodyguards burst in through the door. The assassin stood there frozen, not knowing what to do, because when he looked behind him, a warrior was standing there with his sword drawn blocking his escape route. He dropped the knife; he knew he could not fight four of them with a knife. The guards closed in, and held the man tightly by the arms.

‘Who are you working for?’ Wang Khan asked him.

‘Daritai,’ the warrior answered, resigned to his fate and determined to take the man whom he felt had set him up, down with him. ‘He is waiting outside for me.’

Wang Khan looked at Jebe, who stepped out through the opening. He conducted a thorough search of the area surrounding the tent, but found no one. If Daritai had been there, he had probably bolted when he heard Wang Khan

shouting for the guards. Jebe returned through the opening, and shook his head in response to Wang Khan's questioning look.

'Raise all the guards and bring Jamuga, Altan, Daritai and Naigun to me,' Wang Khan said to one of the two bodyguards. 'Do not let them escape,' and the bodyguard rushed out. To the other bodyguard he said, 'Take this vermin outside, and separate him from his head.' The assassin was pushed outside and went to meet his fate meekly.

Four guards eventually came in, with Altan and Naigun between them, and one of them said, 'They were just about to escape my lord, Jamuga and Daritai managed to get away.'

'Imbeciles,' Wang Khan exploded, 'does no one know how to follow orders anymore? Have you sent anyone after them?'

'No, my lord, I thought...'

'You didn't think, and that's the problem. Go and find the guard commander, and tell him to take twenty men, and not to bother coming back without them.' The bodyguard rushed out.

'My lord,' Altan said, 'there has surely been some mistake. What are we accused of?'

'If I had the inclination,' Wang Khan replied, 'I might stand here and discuss with you how you have repaid my kindness with an attempt to murder me. I have no such inclination.' To the guards who were holding them he said, 'Take them outside, and remove their heads.'

Both Altan and Naigun could see the uselessness of their situation, and resigned themselves to their fate. They had been slow to respond to Daritai's warning, and were dragged from their horses, as they were about to make their escape. Daritai only just managed to evade capture by the guards, but there had been no sign of Jamuga.

Later the same day, Wang Khan said to Jebe, 'Tell my son Temujin that he has done me another great service, and again I am in his debt. I will repay his kindness, when we meet to renew our relationship in the spring.'

'What of Senggum, my lord?' Jebe asked. 'What will you do with him?'

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‘I will keep Senggum close, he will be no trouble now. His head hangs by a thread, and he knows it. If he so much as talks to me the wrong way, he will forfeit his life.’

‘Do you expect your men to catch Jamuga and Daritai?’

‘I would be surprised if they can outwit Jamuga, he would have planned his escape months ago. He will go to the Naiman, it is the only place left to him.’

Jebe took his leave and returned home.

12

February – May 1204

Spring was eagerly anticipated as the snow began to melt and the temperature gradually tempted people from their warm blankets and roaring fires, and they began to venture out onto the steppe again.

Senggum was sweating with the exertion of moving his horses from one pasture to another, where the grass had started to show its lush greenness through the thawing snow. The two guards, like unwelcome shadows, followed Senggum at a short distance. They were not there to help him in his tasks, and he had no power to order them to, even if he had they would have ignored him. His father had appointed a detachment of guards whose task it was to guard him day and night, not to protect him, but to make sure he wasn't plotting anything else against his father. It had been like this ever since the assassination attempt and he was sick of it. His father had spoken to him only once, and that was to tell him he had decided not to kill him, but that he would be guarded at all times to make sure he caused no more trouble. He was also informed that he should not consider himself the son of Wang Khan anymore, but to think of himself only as a lowly warrior and herder. His father had not even provided him with slaves or attendants; he had to do everything himself, the cooking, the milking, and all the fetching and carrying. He felt like a slave, himself. He had lost all right to his inheritance, and if he caused any more trouble he would also lose his head. I may as well be dead, he thought, instead of living this tedious existence. I am my father's rightful heir, and he denies me this. Instead, he gives my future to Temujin, who will get everything that is mine. I wish the assassination had been successful.

He still had some friends within the tribe though, and they had brought him news that his father was planning a great feast, which would take place in two months time. He knew that this was to give his inheritance to Temujin. My father has made sure I am powerless to do anything about it, he said to himself,

frustrated by his father's blindness to Temujin's ambition. 'I'll show him,' he hissed, and then looked around guiltily, to make sure the guards hadn't heard him.



Temujin and the remnants of his army had returned to the Borjigin camp on the banks of the Onon River. He was now sat in his tent with his two senior counsellors, and Borte was busy in the shadows, 'We will attack the Kereit at the first opportunity,' he said, eager to obtain vengeance for the loss of so many of his men.

Bogorju and Jelme looked at him and Jelme said, 'Our understanding, from Jebe's report on his return, and all the other communications we are getting from our spies in the Kereit camp, is that Wang Khan is preparing a feast at which he will name you as his successor. Why take them by force, when it will all be yours soon?'

'Now that Senggum has been disinherited,' Temujin replied. 'He has no one left to leave the tribe to but me. He and his brother Jabango hate each other, so he is unlikely to make him his successor.'

'So if you are certain to inherit, why bother attacking?' Jelme asked again.

Temujin had known that these two would raise some opposition to his plan. 'Inheriting the Kereit, does not get me what I want. Wang Khan might name me as his successor, but then I will have to wait until he dies of old age. There is also Senggum and Jabango, both of whom will oppose the succession when Wang Khan dies. The Kereit will also want to remain independent of the Borjigin, and because of this they will always be a threat. We have to vanquish them, and then integrate what is left into the Borjigin.'

'You have obviously thought this through, my lord,' Bogorju said.

'You know I have, what surprises me, is that you two haven't.'

‘Oh we have,’ Bogorju said smiling. ‘We talked at great length about this situation over the winter months, and we agree that the Kereit need to be overcome in battle.’

‘Then why do you oppose me now?’

‘We offer no opposition, my lord. We just wondered whether you had reached the same conclusion by the same route.’

‘We have obviously been together for far too long,’ Temujin said, feigning seriousness. ‘Maybe I should demote you both to commanders of one hundred, if you are now second-guessing me, which might instil some respect in you.’

‘Being a commander of one hundred, mmm,’ Jelme rubbed his chin, as if thinking about the offer. ‘That sounds like hard work to me, what do you think Bogorju?’ and they all burst out laughing.

‘The feast might be the ideal opportunity to attack,’ Bogorju said, wiping the tears from his eyes. ‘Wang Khan will not expect you to attack, and take by force, something he is about to give you.’

‘You are right, Bogorju,’ Temujin agreed with him. ‘The Kereit will be totally unprepared for an attack, when they are sitting down to feast, and awaiting my peaceful arrival. This is what we will do, but we must keep it secret between us until we are ready to attack.’

The conversation turned to other matters, and Borte served them mutton broth and airag. They talked, laughed and drank until they found it hard to focus on each other or sit up, and eventually they fell over drunk. Borte left them to sleep where they fell, and retired to her bed.

Wang Khan’s envoy arrived three weeks later, and was ushered into Temujin’s tent: ‘My lord, Wang Khan has asked me to convey these words to you: *My son, you are invited to a feast one month from today, at which we will renew our relationship as father and son. I will formally acknowledge you as my heir. No expense will be spared in showing you the honour in which I now hold you.*

Temujin smiled, ‘Tell Wang Khan to expect me in one month,’ he said to the envoy. In the envoy’s wake, he sent two men to reconnoitre the road to the Kereit camp.



Wang Khan was excited. He couldn't remember being this excited for a number of years. He hadn't seen Temujin for a long time, although their armies had met in battle at Kalanchin, they had not seen each other during the fighting, but that was a mistake, he thought, it is now in the past, and I refuse to let the past spoil my enjoyment. Senggum was safely guarded, Jamuga and his cronies were with the Naiman, and nothing could blight his plans for the feast.

He had ordered a golden tent to be built especially for the feast. It would be twice the size of an average tent, and he now stood waiting for it to be unloaded from the cart and erected. He was impatient to see it reflected in the sun, and he called to the man he was paying a thousand horses for building it, 'How long will it take?'

'It has taken me three months already, my lord.'

'To erect you imbecile,' Wang Khan said impatiently.

'Another couple of hours should not make that much difference to you, my lord,' he said, ignoring the insult, and instructing his men to carefully lift the gold felt from the cart.

As the man had said, it took two hours to erect the tent, and Wang Khan paced around it giving orders, and threatening decapitation, torture and other horrific punishments, if the tent wasn't right, if it was damaged, or if a rope was out of alignment.

'My lord,' the tent builder said to Wang Khan, calmly, 'the tent would go up that much quicker, if you did not interfere. You are paying me well to do this, so you do not need to do it yourself.'

Wang Khan huffed, and moved a short distance away, but was soon back shouting, pointing and gesticulating. The tent builder told his workers to ignore Wang Khan.

Eventually, the tent was erected on a small hill. The opening would overlook the sweeping plain, where the Kereit and Borjigin warriors would sit with their wives and families. The tent shone in the sun like a beacon, a symbol of hope for

the future, Wang Khan thought. It hurt his eyes when he looked directly at it, but he was very pleased with the finished article, and gave the man an extra hundred horses for his excellent workmanship.

There were only three days to go before the feast, and so much to do. Wang Khan had commissioned a gold carpet to be made especially made for the floor inside the golden tent, all of the plates, dishes and drinking vessels were made of gold, and the tables and chairs were inlaid with gold. The cooks were busy preparing a hundred varieties of meat, and other succulent dishes. He had tasked two of them to search the steppe and beyond for exotic food, spices and herbs that would make the feast one which would long live in people's memories. Enough airag and rice wine had been produced for ten armies. It was to be a feast to remember for all time, not least because he would publicly recognize Temujin as his son and legitimate heir.



Senggum, through one of his friends, had managed to get a message to Daritai, who was, he had learned, like Jamuga, living with the Naiman: *Daritai, my friend, greetings. Wang Khan prepares a magnificent feast to announce to all that Temujin will be his legitimate heir. Temujin has been invited, and because he will be given by my father, what he has always sought, he has agreed to attend. The feast will take place in one month, and will be on the open plain. Both, my father and Temujin would be good targets for well-aimed arrows. Our plans did not work before, because spies reporting to Temujin, who warned Wang Khan, betrayed us. Your relatives, as you will know, were caught and beheaded, but this would be an ideal and risk-free opportunity for revenge. I am guarded day and night, and cannot assist any attack on my father, but I live in hope that you will come to my assistance.*

‘What do you think Jamuga?’ Daritai asked him, after Senggum’s messenger had left.

‘Assisting Senggum does not interest me, but killing Wang Khan and Temujin does,’ Jamuga said in response. ‘You could take a small force two days before the feast, and conceal

yourselves in an advantageous position, until the feast is in progress, you should then be able to kill them easily.'

'What do you mean, I can?' Daritai asked suspiciously. 'What are you going to do?'

'Senggum has addressed his message to you. You have lost your relatives, and if I came along, I would be a liability. Wang Khan will no doubt have guards out, and I am too easily recognizable, whereas it is unlikely you will be recognized.'

'What about you, Begter?' Daritai asked Temujin's half-brother. 'You have long sought revenge over Temujin.'

Begter had been with the Naiman for many years, and was now considered to be a member of the tribe. He was the most hated tuman commander in Taiyang's army, and had the highest loss of men through executions, which he carried out personally. Taiyang though, welcomed his discipline and his counsel. Since losing the army's senior commanders to his brother, Buyruk, Begter had proved himself to be invaluable, and provided sound counsel.

'Taiyang would never permit me to leave my tuman to seek personal revenge,' Begter replied, wiping the dribble from his mouth with his heavily stained sleeve. 'I have already had my revenge, anyway. Each day, Temujin stares my revenge in the face. He will never be sure whether I am Jochi's father, or not, and this must continually tear at his gut.'

Daritai knew that, Begter spoke the truth; Taiyang would never let him leave. Jamuga though is different, he wants Temujin dead, yet he doesn't want to risk his own life to kill him, but he is happy to risk other people's lives, and he was the same when we tried to murder Wang Khan. He had already made good his escape to the Naiman in case something went wrong, which it did. He is right though, I am the one who wants revenge for the murder of Altan and Naigun. 'Alright,' Daritai said, 'I will go. There seems to be little danger in killing both of them from a distance, but I want the best archers in the Naiman army.'

'I will speak to Taiyang,' Jamuga said magnanimously, 'and persuade him that it would be to his advantage to dispose of Temujin, before he turns his attention this way. There will be no risk to him in providing archers for this task, I am sure he

will agree. Once Temujin is Khan of the Kereit, there will only be the Naiman, and a few scattered tribes, standing in the way of his complete dominion of the steppe.'



At midday, the day before Wang Khan's feast, a war council was held, and all the tuman commanders attended.

'We march to the Kereit camp tonight,' Temujin said. The tuman commanders looked at each other, and Churchadai asked, 'What of the feast my lord?' They had all heard about the golden feast Wang Khan was preparing in Temujin's honour.

'There will be no feast, only war,' Temujin responded, and looked into their eyes one by one.

'Why brother?' Qasar asked. 'Wang Khan offers you peace, and you repay his kindness with war. What treachery is this?'

They were all stunned by Qasar's outburst. 'You of all people Qasar, know my ambition to unite the Mongols, under one Khan. To do this it is necessary to destroy all independent tribes, so that they cannot stand against us in the future. Being the successor of Wang Khan, will serve only to maintain the independence of the Kereit, and this would be unacceptable, we must destroy them in battle, and integrate those warriors who live into the Borjigin.'

'I am not convinced that war is necessary, brother,' Qasar said more softly. 'Is there not some other way you can achieve this, without betraying the man who has been your father for many years?'

'There is no other way Qasar you will have to take my word for it. Have you so easily forgotten the ninety thousand who died at the hands of the Kereit? Have you forgotten Huildar, my brother? If you feel that you cannot do what is asked of you, speak up now, and I will replace you.' Everyone turned to look at Qasar, in anticipation of his answer.

'I have not forgotten those that have died in your service, brother,' Qasar said, and lowered his eyes. 'I will do as you ask.'

‘Once we have reached the Kereit camp,’ Temujin continued, ‘we will surround them and attack at first light. Initially, we will take them by surprise and kill many of them, but this will not be an easy battle. They have superior numbers, have fought with us many times, and they know how we fight. Don’t think it will be over in the first few hours, it will not. They will soon organise themselves, and put up great resistance. I do not want units to rush in and then be cut off, all tumans are to keep in line and we will slowly crush them in an ever-decreasing circle. This strategy will take longer than usual, probably days, but none will escape if there are no gaps. Where gaps appear, they are to be closed immediately. Are there any questions?’

‘We will be stretched a bit thin, the Kereit camp is large, and we haven’t got the numbers of warriors we used to have,’ Belgutei said, referring to the losses at Kalanchin.

‘Initially, we will be,’ Temujin said, ignoring the reference to Kalanchin, ‘but it will only be temporary. As we close the circle, we will become tighter, but then you must be wary of bunching up, and presenting an easy target for their archers. I have also called on the forty thousand Unggirat warriors to fight, and they will be joining us later today.’

‘The Kereit will need to fight on foot if we force them into a confined space,’ Qachi’un said.

‘At the start, and probably at the end, but I expect mounted warriors to band together and try to create gaps in our line, through which they can escape. These attempts must be repulsed, no one is to escape, otherwise this battle will not be the end of it.’

‘What do we do if it takes longer than the first day?’ Jebe asked.

‘You will camp where you are. Close any gaps, post guards, light fires, and continue at first light the following day.’

The Unggirat warriors arrived towards evening, and Temujin briefed Mongo, their chief, and the four tuman commanders.

Using the two men he had sent to reconnoitre the road to the Kereit camp as guides, the army was force marched overnight, arriving at the Kereit camp two hours before first light the following morning. Slowly and quietly, each tuman

moved to their assigned position. Just before first light, a detachment from Temuge's tuman rode up to Temujin, dragging eleven warriors on foot, with a rope around each of their necks.

'My lord,' the detachment commander said, 'Temuge sends you these men, which we found hiding in bushes a short distance away from the Kereit camp, they refuse to talk.'

Temujin recognized his uncle, 'Daritai,' he said jovially, 'what brings you out on such a lovely brisk morning?'

'My own death, it would seem,' Daritai said sardonically.

'Who are these warriors that accompany you, uncle?'

'Naiman archers,' Daritai responded. 'We planned to kill you and Wang Khan, whilst you were feasting, but again you have outwitted me, and I have no doubt that Tengri has already ordered the gates of Eternal Heaven to be opened to welcome me.'

'I am sure that will be the case, uncle. Is Jamuga not here with you?'

'Jamuga seems to have the second sight of a shaman when it concerns his life. He avoids death like a spirit, and remains with the Naiman.'

'Unfortunately, I have no time to sit here and talk over old times with you.' Temujin turned to the detachment commander, 'Execute them.' He then turned his horse away to concentrate on the attack, and did not give Daritai a second look.

At first light, the Borjigin warriors moved slowly forward, and took their time killing all the males caught outside with well-aimed arrows. It was not necessary to fight with sword, axe or lance; they used their long-range bows exclusively. As the line was seen moving slowly forwards, the Kereit warriors, the women, and the children, ran towards the centre of the camp. The males were shot in the back as they ran, some tried to stand and fight, but were killed easily by the mounted warriors. A few were able to evade the arrows for some time with jinking runs, but these generated bets among the Borjigin, and they became moving targets for the very best archers. As they passed each tent, it was set alight, to flush out anyone that might be hiding in them and protect their rear.

As Temujin had said, it was as easy as killing animals in the hunt, but the farther they travelled towards the centre, the more resistance they encountered. Some Kereit were mounted, but many preferred to fight in groups on foot. They quickly saw that riding towards the oncoming army was a certain way to Eternal Heaven. The Kereit warriors fired volleys of arrows, from behind barricades of carts, and then fell back to new positions. This was an effective strategy for the Kereit, which resulted in the death of many Borjigin warriors and horses, but they also lost many men, as they exposed themselves moving from one position to another.

By the end of the first day, Temujin's forces had moved three miles from their original position. As the light faded, he ordered units to halt where they were. Camps were set up, and fires lit, although there were still many tents still burning behind them. Temujin called all of his tuman commanders to a war council.

'How many have we lost Bogorju?'

'Only two thousand warriors have been lost, my lord. Some tumans have lost more than others. I estimate that we have killed ten thousand Kereit.'

'Are there any problems?' and he addressed this to everyone.

They shook their heads. 'It has been as you said it would be, my lord,' Churchadai said. 'They were completely surprised, and have as yet, put up little resistance.'

'Tomorrow will be different,' Temujin warned them. 'They will be more organised and will fight to the death for their Khan, their families and their possessions.'

At first light, the following morning they maintained the same strategy, until the Kereit had nowhere left to fall back to, and were crushed together in the centre of the camp. Temujin ordered archers to put up a sustained fire into the mass of people throughout the day, and this strategy killed thousands of men, women and children. It became clear that the Kereit had run out of arrows near midday, when they started firing the Borjigin arrows back at them.

That night the Borjigin set up camp again, and another war council was held.

‘What are our losses?’ Temujin asked Bogorju again.

‘Considerably more than they were last night, my lord, we have lost around seven thousand. The Kereit, as you anticipated, are putting up heavy resistance. They are using their defences well, and making us struggle for every inch of ground. I estimate that they have lost around thirty thousand.’

‘What of Wang Khan, or Senggum, has anyone seen them joining battle?’ Everyone looked around at each other, but no one answered. ‘Once Wang Khan sees that the battle is lost, I expect him to try to escape. Tell your guards to watch out for him. If those two escape, they could cause trouble for us in the future.’

At first light on the third day, Temujin ordered his men to charge, with Muqali and Churchadai in the vanguard. This was the type of fighting they were used to and enjoyed, hacking off heads with their swords, splitting skulls with their axes and piercing hearts with their lances. The Kereit fought bravely, and tried to organise a defence, but they were now outnumbered and on foot, against twice their number of mounted warriors. At midday, Hadak, the senior Kereit commander left alive, surrendered.



‘I could not let you kill my Khan,’ Hadak said standing proud and looking Temujin directly in the eyes. ‘I fought long past when I should have surrendered, to give Wang Khan and Senggum time to save themselves. If you command I shall die, but if you give life, I will serve you faithfully.’

‘A man who fought as you did to save his lord, is a hero,’ Temujin said. ‘I gladly give you your life, and make you commander of one hundred. If you are faithful and true to your word, you will rise quickly in my service. Also, I give you to Huildar’s widow who, because Huildar planted my standard on Gubtan and fought with such valour at Kalanchin, his wife and descendants receive for all time, rewards assigned to widows and orphans.’

‘Thank you, my lord,’ Hadak said, visibly relieved that his life had been spared.

‘What of Wang Khan and Senggum, Hadak, which way did they go?’

‘If I knew, my lord, I would tell you, but he didn’t tell me, and I didn’t ask. I was more interested in keeping the truth of his cowardice from my men, because they would have refused to fight had they known their Khan had deserted them.’

‘You are probably right, Hadak,’ Temujin said, thinking that it was likely that Wang Khan and his son had made their way to Taiyang of the Naiman for sanctuary.

The Kereit warriors who still lived were divided among the Borjigin tumans, and like other vanquished tribes, ceased to exist independently. However, Temujin allowed Jaganbo, and a small number of Kereit who had not been involved in the fighting, because they lived some distance away, to remain as an independent tuman under the command of Jaganbo, but within the Borjigin army. For this favour, Jaganbo had to surrender two of his beautiful daughters, Sorqaqtani, the younger of the two women, Temujin presented to his youngest son, Tolui, and the elder daughter, Ibaqa Beki, to Churchadai, who had been particularly valiant against the Kereit.

Kishlik and Badai, Temujin’s two spies in the Kereit camp were summoned. ‘You two men saved my life when Senggum and his father attacked me, and gave me time to move to Kalanchin. By Heaven’s help and protection I have now crushed all the Kereit forces, and won my dominion. Let my descendants remember the measure of this service. My enemies, not knowing Heaven’s will, wished to kill me when you brought warning of their treachery, you were in that hour Heaven’s envoy, I therefore give to you, Wang Khan’s golden tent, with all the golden dishes, plates and drinking cups set out in it. You with your children and grandchildren will also henceforth, keep everything won by you in battle, and all the game taken in hunting.’ Everyone in the tent was stunned at the extraordinary wealth, equivalent to a Prince’s ransom, given to these two spies.



‘You’re an old fool, father,’ Senggum said disrespectfully to Wang Khan. He knew that his father had nothing now to hold over him. ‘I kept telling you that Temujin was a liar. Why did you not listen to me?’

‘I suppose I am an old fool, Senggum.’ Wang Khan, agreed with his son. ‘You are right to berate me. I just don’t understand why Temujin would attack, when I was going to make him my heir anyway.’

‘He did not want to wait for you to die, he wanted revenge for Kalanchin. Once we attacked him at that place, your relationship with him ended; do you still not see that? Because of your foolishness, we have lost everything.’

‘Yes, I suppose you are right, but we have not lost everything,’ he chortled, and patted the two sacks attached to his saddle.

Father and son had escaped through a gap in the Borjigin lines late on the second night, when it was clear to Wang Khan that the battle was lost. He had called Hadak, the only senior commander left alive, and said, ‘My son and I plan to escape through the Borjigin lines, fight on as long as you can, Hadak, so that we can get clear.’

Hadak saluted his Khan, ‘I will do my duty, my lord.’ With that, he went back to his men. He would not tell them that their Khan and his son were running away like filthy cowards in the night, they would refuse to fight on. Better that the men believe they are still fighting for their lord, he thought.

‘What are we to do now, father?’ Senggum asked. ‘Have you got a plan, or do we just wander the steppe aimlessly, waiting for death?’

‘We will ride to the Naiman,’ Wang Khan said, ‘Taiyang will welcome us with honour, and we will ask his help to reclaim our people back. I will then make you my heir, as I should have done a long time ago.’

‘It is too late now to talk of what you should have done, father.’ Senggum was seething. He was now the heir to nothing,

what a cruel joke, his father had played on him. ‘Why would Taiyang help us, we have previously attacked his brother? And don’t forget, Jamuga is there, and he tried to assassinate you.’

‘Where else can we go? All other tribes are allied to Temujin. Anyone that took us in would fear his wrath, that is why we go to the Naiman; they are the only tribe that can stand against him.’

They rode on in silence. Neither had anything worthwhile to say, each was deep in thought about what had happened, and what might have been. They stopped and camped each night, and after five weeks they reached the Naiman territory where they were intercepted by a group of Naiman warriors.

‘Well, what have we here?’ their leader asked.

‘I am Wang Khan, Chief of the Kereit, and this is Senggum, my son. We are here to seek sanctuary with Taiyang.’

‘I’m sure you are, but first let us look in those felt sacks you have tied to your saddle.’

‘If you do,’ Wang Khan said, clutching the sacks to his chest, ‘when I speak to your Khan, he will have your heads.’

‘If I don’t, you will lose yours now.’ The leader signalled, and his men moved and surrounded them. They took the four bags from Wang Khan, and handed them to the leader who opened one, and put his hand in. ‘Now this is a Khan’s ransom,’ he said, pulling out a fistful of gold and silver jewelry.

‘I order you to take me to Taiyang,’ Wang Khan shouted at the leader, panic evident in his voice.

‘I’m afraid that won’t be possible now,’ the leader said to them with a smirk. ‘You have just made me and my men very wealthy, and if, as you say, you are Wang Khan Chief of the Kereit, then I will definitely lose my head.’

‘You’re going to kill us aren’t you,’ Senggum asked in a high-pitched whine, as he realised his fate.

‘You’re smart you are, but an ugly bastard, and a bit whiney for my liking. Yes, I’m afraid it’s the only thing I can do, and remain wealthy, with my head on my shoulders. It was nice meeting you two fine Kereit warriors, but...’ he nodded to his men, who dragged Wang Khan and Senggum from their horses, forced them to kneel, and sent their heads rolling in the grass.

‘Strip them, and take their heads,’ their leader said. ‘We’ll dispose of them somewhere else. We don’t want their deaths traced back to us.’

‘This was a lucky encounter,’ one of his men said.

‘It certainly was,’ he replied.

13

June - July 1204

Temujin realised that, once again, he needed to reorganize both the camp and the army. With the losses and additions, confusion reigned and resulted in many disciplinary problems. Mongo, the chief of the Unggirat was ordered to bring his tribe closer to the Borjigin lands to enable easy communication and access to their warriors. Temujin met with Bogorju and Jelme and gave them the task of carrying out a census of men, women, children, livestock and horses, together with the arbun, jagan, minghan and tuman each warrior currently belonged to and their rank. To help, he gave them two Chinese scribes, captured from the Kereit, who could record every detail on a thing called parchment, which would make the task easier and quicker, and not reliant on memory.

Using an army of helpers, they completed the task in the first three weeks of June. In the final week, they took the census to Temujin and together they sat down with the scribe, and moved men in and out of units, which meant that each warrior that was moved, was responsible for re-locating their homes, their families and their livestock. Promotions were agreed on, and unmarried women, widows and orphans were allocated to warriors who either had no wife or child, or had only one or two of each. The elite guard was increased to ten thousand, and as well as guarding Temujin and his family, they would also act as a reserve tuman in battle. Each tuman was also to appoint a standard bearer to carry Temujin's standard, which would be edged in the tuman's own colour. The standard bearer was to ride with the tuman commander and this would enable Temujin, to see where the tuman commander was at any time during a battle.

After a further two weeks, movement of men and their possessions ceased, and the camp finally reflected the organization of the army. It was a sprawling metropolis, which covered hundreds of miles. Each tuman was like a self-contained unit, with the tuman commander's tent being the

focal point for discipline, arbitration of squabbles, allocation of punishment, and the conduct of tuman business. Each had its own thriving noisy market, where horses, livestock, food, and a cornucopia of other goods were bartered daily. The myriads of children, the future warriors and childbearers, helped with the chores, were taught horseriding, fought play battles, caused trouble, and were disciplined. Whilst the men carried out their army duties, the women were milking the mares and livestock, making clothes, boots, tents and other items needed for their husbands and children. Each tuman was an agglomeration of human toiling, thoughts and desires.

Once the reorganization had finished, Temujin ordered Bogorju and Jelme to ensure that each tuman conducted intensive individual, and unit training, during the remainder of July. This training would culminate on the last day of the month, in a competition between the best ten warriors from each of the thirty tumans. The ten warriors put forward, would represent their tuman, and the winning tuman would have their robes edged in a new colour, obtained from Chinese traders, called purple, and they would be in the vanguard of any battle for a year. Ten of the elite guard would also take part, but only to prove to everyone that they were the best. The winning tuman would be the one that came second, or first, if they beat the elite guard.

As soon as the men were told of the training and the competition, the whole camp became a hive of activity and excitement. It had been a long time since there had been anything to look forward to other than war.

The training began with each arban commander training his ten warriors in the individual skills of short and long-range bow, sword, axe, lance, horse-riding and survival on the steppe. Next, the jagun commanders were responsible for conducting the training of their one hundred warriors. Then it was the turn of the minghan commanders, and their thousand warriors and finally, the tuman commanders trained their ten thousand in battle strategy and tactics.

‘Warriors,’ Temujin shouted, as he stood on the wooden platform that had been specially constructed for this occasion, ‘the training was evidently a success, and I congratulate you on

your hard work and your skills.’ He took a deep breath, and a drink of qumys whilst waiting for the cheers to die down. ‘Look around you,’ and he paused whilst they obeyed, ‘you are masters of the eastern steppe. We are now bound together as one people under one Khan.’ The warriors cheered and banged their swords or lances on their shields for a long time. At last it was quiet enough for him to continue, ‘I am looking forward to this demonstration of your skills. You are the finest warriors there has ever been on the steppe, and no one can stand against you. Let the contest begin.’

There were ten skills and one man from each tuman was entered in each, which meant that there were twenty-five contestants for each skill. All of the skills were organised so that a warrior could score between zero and ten points. In horse riding, they had to hit the centre of a ten-ring target with the lance, the axe and then the short-range bow, from both the standing and sitting positions at the gallop. They then had to cut an upright pole in half at the gallop with their axe and sword, the centre having been marked with a line and five other lines above and below this line, indicating the point score. A timed obstacle course, with ten obstacles was the ninth task in which they had to manoeuvre their horses, using only their backside and knees to control the horse. The final task, which was also a timed event, was to pick up ten items between two points whilst remaining on the horse, one of these items being a sheep.

Each event took most of the day and all events occurred simultaneously and because of this, no one really knew which tuman was winning or losing until all of the events had finished. Those commanders who had been controlling the events took the results to Bogorju and Jelme, who produced the final tally, which they took to Temujin.

Everyone waited expectantly for Temujin to announce the winners. At last he stood up, and silence descended on the crowd. Even the horses seemed to know that they should be quiet.

‘I have never witnessed such skill. You are each worth three of any other warriors, and I am proud to be your Khan.’ He paused, but there was no cheering. It was clear that they just wanted to know who had won. ‘In all skills except two, the elite

guard came first. In the short and long-range archery, Jebe represented his own tuman and as expected, he beat the warriors in the elite guard, but not by much. In third place,' he said, finally getting to the reason they were all gathered, and what they all wanted to hear, 'was Chagadai's tuman, with ninety-five points,' loud cheering and banging followed this announcement. 'In second place, was Temuge's tuman, with ninety-seven points,' again loud cheers and banging followed. 'The winner, was Jebe's tuman, with the maximum one hundred points.' The cheers and banging reached deafening proportions, and Jebe made his way up the steps of the wooden platform to be given his purple-edged robe by Temujin.

Jebe was a shy, quiet man, who abhorred public speaking. He would rather face a thousand warriors on his own without weapons, than speak in public. A great hush fell on the assembly of warriors, because they all knew that he spoke quietly.

'It was a bit close, wasn't it?' he said, and they all laughed. 'Eternal Heaven must have been watching over my men and I today. Any one of the thirty tumans could have won on another day. Be sure though, that we will wear our color with pride, and fight to the death in the vanguard of the army.' Jebe smiled awkwardly, and walked off the platform to loud cheering and banging of swords on shields.



Sharia was heavily pregnant with their first child, and the birth was expected within the next few days. Although she was proud of Jebe's achievement, she was also worried.

'If you are in the vanguard of the army,' she said to him that night when he came home, 'you will be the first into battle, and the first to be killed.'

'Yes, I will be the first into battle, it is an honour few have, but I will not be killed, either first or last. I have too much to live for,' and he touched her stomach with his hand. The baby moved inside her, as if it knew, and he felt the rippling movement of her taught skin.

‘You are just saying that, so I won’t worry,’ she said, close to tears. She had become very emotional lately. ‘You can’t know whether you will be killed or not.’

‘Have faith in my skills,’ he said gently, enveloping her in his arms. ‘Have I not always been a great warrior?’

It was true, she thought, he excelled in all of the warrior’s skills, and she knew that the men under him valued his leadership, and would protect him. He expected discipline, but he was not too harsh on the men, and they respected him for that. She said, ‘Promise me you won’t be reckless, that you won’t put your life at risk unnecessarily. If you die, they will give me to another warrior, and I couldn’t bear that.’

‘I promise you, my love, that I will live so long, you will be praying for Eternal Heaven to take me, so that you can have some peace.’ He put his hand under her chin, lifted it up, and kissed her softly.

‘Don’t joke about such things. You know I would never do that.’

He smiled. She always took things so seriously. It was still early, but he pulled her towards the bed.

‘I am fat and ugly,’ she said laughing. ‘How can you still want me?’

‘That is all in your mind. To me you are the most beautiful girl on the steppe. I am not worried by a few lumps and bumps that have appeared since you agreed to be my wife, I am sure they will go with time.’

She grabbed a cushion and hit him on the shoulder with it, but allowed herself to be taken to the bed. She could see he was eager, as he lay her down gently on her side, and lifted her skirts. She turned away embarrassed, because it was still light and she was ashamed of how she looked. He entered her from behind, it was the only way she could accommodate him now. How can I still enjoy it when I am soon to give birth, she thought. Enjoy it she did though, as he pushed deeply and slowly into her, and at the same time, unbuttoned her jacket and kneaded her swollen breasts.

‘My love,’ she whispered to him later, as they held each other close, ‘never leave me.’

‘I will never leave you, Sharia, my sweet,’ he soothed, ‘believe me, if you believe nothing else I have to say.’



The following day, Alaqash Tegin, the chief of the Ongut tribe, rode into Temujin’s camp with ten of his warriors. He was expected, as he had previously sent word that he was coming with important news. The remainder of his tribe he had left some distance away to await further orders.

‘They’re a scruffy lot, these Ongut,’ Bogorju whispered to Jelme, at the sight of the dishevelled chief and his warriors. They were unwashed, had on clothes that were torn and threadbare, and straggly hair hung unplaited down past their shoulders.

‘They keep themselves to themselves,’ Jelme whispered back. ‘I’ve heard of them, they live south of the Gobi desert, but I can’t say I’ve seen any of them until now, nor do I know much about them.’

The Ongut warriors stayed on their horses, staring sullenly at those that gazed at them. Tegin dismounted and approached Temujin, who was sat in front of his tent flanked by Bogorju and Jelme, and a hundred elite guards.

‘Welcome Alaqash Tegin,’ Temujin said, using his full name, and signalling for him to sit. ‘What important news do you bring?’

‘I have come to join you, and proclaim you Khan over the Ongut,’ he said, and threw himself at Temujin’s feet. ‘I swear loyalty, as do my warriors, and we will excel in your service.’

‘I am pleased to welcome you and your warriors,’ Temujin replied, indicating he should get up off the ground and sit again. ‘You will not be sorry that you have, but what has prompted you to come to me now?’

‘Taiyang of the Naiman has sent messengers to me many times, urging me to join him against you, but I feel that it would be madness to allign myself with him, when I live here on the eastern steppe.’

‘As you have joined me willingly, I shall keep your tribe intact’ Temujin told him, as attendant’s offered him qumys and food. ‘You will submit to my rules, and your warriors will undergo training to integrate them into my army.’

‘I accept these conditions, my lord,’ Tegin responded, ‘but you should know that many other tribes have joined Taiyang, such as the Oirat, and what is left of the Merkit, and they are planning to attack you soon.’

‘How soon?’

‘This, I don’t know, I only know that the attack from the west will come before winter.’

‘Thank you for this valuable information Tegin,’ Temujin said. ‘Bogorju, one of my senior counsellors, will show you where to site your tribe and you will soon be informed of the training, which will take place tomorrow.’ Bogorju escorted Tegin, and his ten warriors followed them.

Temujin had already acquired intelligence through his spies, with both the Naiman, and the residue of the Merkit tribe, that Taiyang was planning an attack within the month, and Tegin’s information merely confirmed this.

‘Inform all the commanders there will be a war council tomorrow morning, Tegin should also be invited to attend,’ Temujin said to Jelme. ‘We must decide what to do.’



‘We should attack them on their own territory,’ Temuge said, as they all sat outside Temujin’s tent at the war council. ‘It would be foolish to sit and wait for the Naiman to attack us here.’

‘I agree, my lord,’ Belgutei said, supporting his brother’s advice. ‘We should take the battle to them, and choose our own battleground.’

‘It will take us six weeks to travel such a distance,’ Churchadai said. ‘By the time we get there, the horses will be tired, not to mention the men.’

‘If we wait for them here,’ Jebe said, ‘we put our women and children in danger.’ His first child had been born the day

before, and he doted on his new daughter. All the commanders laughed, and those nearest to him slapped him on the back.

‘A father now, I hear?’ Temujin said to him smiling, as if he had just remembered. He signalled Borte, who came out of the tent with an attendant who carried something heavy, wrapped in silk. The attendant handed the gift to Jebe, and Borte said, ‘Congratulations on the birth of your new daughter. What have you named her?’

‘Cheren,’ Jebe said, as he pulled the silk covering off the gift, the attendant had passed to him.

‘A beautiful name,’ Borte said smiling. ‘I hope she has a long and happy life, as her name suggests.’

Jebe sat open-mouthed at the gift, Borte had given him. It was a golden urn that stood twelve inches high and was encrusted with emeralds and rubies.

‘It is magnificent, my lord, how can I ever thank you, and Borte?’

‘Never mind thanking us,’ Temujin said, ‘take the top off.’

Jebe pulled the top off the urn, and looked inside. His eyes opened wide, it was filled to the brim with gold coins. This is beyond imagining, he thought, I could feed my family for a lifetime with this.

Those commanders, who had been with Temujin for many years, and whose wives had given birth in his service, were accustomed to receiving such gifts from their Khan and his wife.

‘To get back to the business at hand,’ Temujin said, as Borte returned to their tent. ‘We will take the battle to the Naiman. Waiting here for them to come is asking for trouble, because it passes the decision-making to Taiyang. I will decide when and where, not Taiyang. Brief your men, we leave in two days.’

Jebe took the gift back to Sharia who, although still sore from the birth, was already up and about, cleaning and preparing the midday meal.

‘This is a gift from Temujin and Borte,’ he said to her, placing the urn down on the richly embroidered carpet. He lifted the lid off and spilled the gold coins out.

‘My love,’ Sharia said to him full of emotion, and tears came to her eyes and ran down her cheeks. ‘This is a wonderful gift, but with or without it, we are the richest people on the steppe. We have Cheren, and that is enough for me. I must go and thank Borte when I am feeling better.’

‘You are right Sharia, we have Cheren, who is a gift from Heaven, but I am doubly blessed because I also have you, and you are my gift from Heaven.’ She went to him slowly, and held him tight, kissing him softly.

‘You’re just saying that because I am still fat, and my breasts are heavy and swollen,’ she said pouting.

‘You are still beautiful, and your body will return to how it was,’ and he held her face in his hands, and looked into her large, dark brown eyes. ‘My love for you is timeless, and we will have many more children.’

‘Don’t talk to me of more children now,’ she said, pressing her hand to her stomach. ‘I feel as if the Tartars have ripped my insides out.’

‘You will soon heal, my love, and you will have peace and quiet to do it. I leave in two days time to fight the Naiman.’

‘More war?’ she asked, looking up at him. ‘Will it ever stop?’

‘I think that once we defeat the Naiman, Temujin will be content. He will then have united the whole of the Mongol peoples under his leadership. There will be no one left to fight after that.’

‘I think Temujin will find someone else to fight. He will not be content until he is Khan of the whole world.’

‘If that is true, then I will be with him at every battle, fighting at his side.’

She knew that she could not change the way things were. ‘I will be glad when you can stay at home, and I don’t spend my days afraid that you will never return. I couldn’t live knowing that I would never see you, touch you and feel you inside me again.’

‘I promise you,’ he said, holding her tight, ‘I will always come back to you,’ and he kissed her as she clung to him. ‘I must leave now my love, and brief my commanders. I will be back for the evening meal.’

She knew that he could never promise her that, the loss of her family and her tribe had shown her how brief life was on the steppe. She released him, and reluctantly let him go to fulfil his duties.



‘Do you think that, Jebe was happy with the gift we gave him?’ Borte asked Temujin that evening.

‘Who wouldn’t be happy with that much gold? It was a gift fit for a Khan and as usual, you surpassed yourself.’

‘So, you are leaving again tomorrow, my love?’ she asked him, already knowing the answer.

‘You know I must,’ Temujin said, as he grabbed her round the waist to stop her busying herself with minor tasks, and sat her on his lap. He knew that when she was worried, she found things to keep herself occupied.

She giggled and slapped his hands away as he groped for her breasts. ‘I should be used to you leaving, but I’m not,’ she said quietly, and put her hands over his in her lap. She looked down at their hands, anywhere, but at him, because she knew that if she looked in his eyes, she would not be able to hold back the tears.

He picked her up easily and carried her to the bed. ‘What about the evening meal,’ she said with a scowl on her face.

‘The evening meal can wait, I cannot.’ He knelt above her and undressed her slowly, kissing her softly, as each morsel of her skin was revealed. Gradually, she began to respond, and they fell together as they had done so many times before. Their love for each other was undiminished by the ravages of time, and they held each other whilst the broth she had prepared for their meal bubbled on the fire.

‘Eternal Heaven has looked favourably on us,’ he said, stroking her hair. ‘Many have not had what we have had, nor for so long.’

She knew that he was right, but knowing that did not make it any easier. Tears welled in her eyes, and she wept

quietly. She had always felt a force within him, and she knew that she could never stop it. Bogorju and Jelme, she knew also felt it, and followed him unquestioningly. The fire in his eyes, was the manifestation of the driving ambition within him, and she knew he would never stop. The Naiman were the last obstacle to him uniting the Mongols, but he would not stop there. There would be many other battles, where and with whom she did not yet know, but it was inevitable. It was as if he was following a path that only he could see, and others trusted him to lead them down that path.

‘It is Bogorju, my lord,’ the guard shouted through the tent flap.

‘Tell him to go away, and come back with Borte’s two sisters and Jelme,’ he shouted back. He pushed himself up and got dressed again. ‘Come on woman, get your clothes on to receive your guests,’ he said smiling. ‘Anyone would think you had nothing better to do than lie in bed naked all day.’ She threw a cushion at him, and he dodged out of the way.



‘The men are mounted and ready to march, my lord,’ Bogorju informed Temujin, who was still saying his goodbye to Borte. He still felt the effects of the copious amounts of airag they had all drank the night before.

‘What of Tegin and the Ongut,’ he asked, as he put his foot into the stirrup and lifted himself into the saddle.

‘Training was carried out yesterday; they have armour and know their position within the army.’

‘Jebe is in the vanguard?’

‘Yes, my lord, and Qubilai acts as reconnaissance. He left yesterday, as he was ordered to.’

Three hundred thousand men, a million horses, and thousands of supply carts and livestock for food began to move towards Naiman territory at the foot of the Tein Shan Mountain range. They would have to cross the Kerulen, Tula, and Selenga Rivers, to reach the western limits of the steppe, where many of them had never been before.

Jebe rode at the head of the army, in front of his tuman with their purple-edged robes. Behind his men were Temujin, Bogorju and Jelme, with the elite guard in their gold-edged armour. Five tumans in line and five deep, followed them, all with different colors on their standards, which matched their robes. Another three tumans under Temuge, each with armour in a different color, brought up the rear. Temuge was responsible for the reserve horses, the livestock, and other supplies.



There was a gentle breeze blowing, enough to move the standards on the poles held by the standard bearers. It was not enough to cool the uncomfortable warriors in their armour and helmets. Jebe looked over his shoulder at the slowly moving army and thought, no one can stand against us; we are invincible. His standard bearer rode just behind him with his purple standard, and he knew he would never again feel as proud as he did today.

Towards the end of the second week, dust was seen five miles away, a lone rider approached. Jebe sent a detachment out to escort the rider in. It was a messenger from Qubilai, and he galloped past Jebe, and reported in to Temujin. The army was then ordered to halt and make camp and a war council was called.

‘Qubilai has made contact with the advance forces of the Naiman on the western foothills of the Hentey Mountains,’ Temujin informed them all. ‘They know we are coming, and are waiting there for us. This means that we set out just in time. We should reach their position in about ten days. They have over four hundred thousand warriors, which is considerably more than our forces. When we arrive, they will be watching us, so we will move into the camp at last light, and I want each tabun to light two fires instead of one, this will make the enemy think we have many more men than we have.’

Jebe was impressed with Temujin's method of confusing the enemy. With so many fires, he thought, the Naiman will have great difficulty estimating our numbers.

The war council ended quickly, and he went back to his own camp, where his commanders were waiting to be briefed.

The next day was slow and hot. They crossed the Kerulen River, which was low and the men and horses were thankful for the brief relief offered by the cool running waters. Two days after that, they reached the Tula River, and rested for a day. Taiyang, crossing the Salenga River, and moving his army to the western Hentey Mountains had cut two weeks off their march, and they could now afford to rest.

The following morning, as they forded the Tula, the men's spirits were high after a day spent in relaxation. The Tula, like the Kerulen, was a babbling stream, instead of a fast-flowing river. There had been no rain for a month, and the steppe was beginning to look like the desert.

They arrived late in the day at the end of the fourth week after setting out, and halted on the plain called Qaraqurum, where Qubilai was waiting for them.

'The Naiman are beyond that hill, my lord,' and he indicated a long hill, thirty feet high across its whole length, which they could just make out in the fading light. 'They have been awaiting your arrival.'

'Well, they need wait no longer, I have arrived,' he said jovially. 'Do you want to go and tell them, or shall I?'

'I am sure they know already, my lord,' and he pointed to three dark figures atop the hill.

'Tell the commanders there will be a war council in one hour,' he said to Bogorju, 'and tell them to post advance guards, we don't want to be surprised as we are setting up camp.'

At the war council, Temujin outlined how he wanted the army to line up in the morning. Subadai and the elite guard would be kept in reserve.

'Chimbai, what news is there from our spies in the Naiman camp?'

'It is as Qubilai has already informed you, my lord, they have four hundred thousand warriors, but they lack our discipline. Taiyang is weak, and his son, Kuchlug, is headstrong.'

His second in command, Korisu Beshi, provides him with sound counsel, but Begter, your half-brother, who is now a tuman commander, has his ear.

‘And what is Begter whispering in Taiyang’s ear?’

‘Korisu Beshi, Kuchlug and Begter, are likeminded in their advice to Taiyang. They want to stand and fight you, and put an end to the threat you pose to the Naiman.’

‘Good. We did not come all this way to have them run away. What of Wang Khan and Senggum?’

‘There is no word of them, my lord. If they were seeking refuge with Taiyang, they never made it.’

‘If he didn’t come here, I wonder where he went,’ he said aloud. ‘One day we might find out.’

For the remainder of the meeting, Temujin discussed strategy and tactics, upon which they all finally agreed. They left the war council knowing that this would be the battle that determined the future of the Mongols. It was all or nothing and they waited nervously for the morning.

14

August – September 1204

Taiyang was a small, squat man in his late thirties. He was slightly overweight from eating well, and not exercising. His given name was Taibuqa, but for as long as he could remember, people had called him Taiyang, which meant prince. He was the eldest of Inanche Bilge's two sons, and he knew that, had he been stronger, he would have killed his younger brother Buyruq, and kept the tribe together. His father's death was sudden and he had not named a successor. Everyone, including Inanche Bilge, thought he would live forever.

The same day that they had buried their father, Buyruq took the beautiful Maidar to his bed. They had both lusted after this young, beautiful girl of fifteen summers since their father had brought her back from a raid on a local tribe, and made her one of his wives. Maidar encouraged their lust, and took every opportunity to tease them with a leg here, a fleeting glimpse of ample breast there. She would look at them, and then quickly look away. Taiyang found it maddening, and realised that none of his other wives could hold a candle to this woman, and the burning desire she generated in him.

He was the eldest son and the natural successor to his father, he should have had the pick of his father's wives, but Buyruq had known that if he didn't take her first, then he would lose her. It was this that had led to the break up of the tribe. Buyruq had refused to give Maidar up, and he had taken those of the tribe who supported him to the mountainous regions to live. They had not spoken since, and now he didn't even know where his brother was.

After Buyruq's defeat by Temujin, he had disappeared. Those who supported his brother thought that Taiyang was too weak to lead them. Maybe they were right, he thought. I have had many opportunities to attack this upstart Temujin when he was weak, and to get revenge for my brother, but I haven't. I am only going to war now because everyone tells me that Temujin will attack me if I don't.

He looked down on the multitude of fires, which had sprouted up as far as the eye could see, and he began to think that he might have left it too late.

He walked slowly down the hill back to his camp, and called a war council. As well as his senior commanders, the chiefs from the other tribes who had joined him were present. There was Jamuga of the Jurait, Tukta Bijhi of the Merkit, and numerous other chiefs from the smaller tribes, such as the Durban, Katkin, and Uirat, who had come to him saying, "Please protect us against this Temujin. If you don't, we are all lost." There were also small numbers of those tribes who had been defeated by Temujin, the Kereit, Tartars and Saljut. His son, Kuchlug, was there, together with his second-in-command, Korisu Beshi, and Temujin's half-brother, Begter.

'I have just been to look at the enemy camp,' he told them. 'Temujin has a lot more warriors than we estimated. From what I could see by the number of fires they have lit, I would say, in the region of six hundred thousand.'

'It is a trick, my lord,' Jamuga said. 'He has only two hundred thousand warriors at most.'

'Then how do you account for the fires, Jamuga?' Taiyang asked him.

'He has learnt the trick from Wang Khan. When I persuaded Wang Khan to desert Temujin on the eve of battle with Sabraq, he left his camp fires burning bright so that Temujin would still think he was there. He would have got his men to light two fires instead of one, so that we would think he had more warriors than he has actually got.'

'What purpose would be served by such a tactic? Surely he would be found out as soon as battle was joined. No, I am not convinced by your argument, Jamuga. It would be a costly mistake if you were wrong.'

'I know Temujin, my lord, he uses every tactic to get the better of his enemies, and providing false information is something he has used many times before.'

'Still, many tribes have joined him, and we have no way of knowing their numbers. If he has six hundred thousand, we will be overwhelmed fighting in open battle on the steppe. What I propose is that we withdraw slowly to the Altai Mountains.'

Temujin has covered a great distance to get here, and his horses and men are tired. We can fight him on familiar terrain, and ambush his forces in the gorges and valleys.'

'Father,' Kuchlug said, 'that is a plan worthy of a coward.' Everyone turned to look at Taiyang to see his response to this insult from his son, who was young and reckless. 'We are not cowards, even if you are.'

'You go too far, Kuchlug,' Taiyang warned his son through tight lips. 'I will remove your head if you continue in this vein.'

'My lord,' Korisu Beshi, Taiyang's second-in-command, intervened. 'Kuchlug is right. We should mount a direct attack. Whether they have two or six hundred thousand, we are more than a match for them. Your father would not be stood here talking of withdrawal; he would be leading us into battle.'

'I am not my father,' Taiyang shouted. 'Inanche Bilge is dead. I wish he were not. I wish he were here, but he is not.'

'You have made it obvious you are not my grandfather,' Kuchlug said contemptuously. 'If you were, we would be talking of the battle order, tactics and strategy. No tribe is greater than the Naiman, with or without my grandfather. We have been the greatest tribe for many years, and this Temujin with his rag-tag army will not change that. We should ride down their throats at first light, and exit through their arses, having disembowled them along the way.'

'Bold and colourful words Kuchlug,' Jamuga said, 'but I would not underestimate Temujin. He has conquered all the other tribes on the steppe but this one, including the mighty Kereit, and he did not do that with a rag-tag army.'

'I agree with Jamuga,' Tukta Bijhi said. 'The Merkit were once as great as the Kereit and the Naiman, but Temujin has ruined us. He is a genius at strategy, and to underestimate him would be foolish. Look around you Kuchlug, here are the remains of many who have tried to defeat Temujin.'

'I look around and I see only defeat in your eyes. The Naiman will not be defeated. He will not do to the Naiman what he has done to other tribes.'

'Kuchlug, you are young and impetuous, you act before you think,' Taiyang said to his son. 'If you are so sure you can

defeat this Temujin, you can turn your words into deeds. You will lead the army into battle.'

'I will lead them to victory, father.'

'Then we are decided, Kuchlug will take the centre, with Korisu Beshi, and myself. Are there any questions?'

No one said anything. They were all shocked at how easily Taiyang had shifted his position, from withdrawal to full frontal attack, on the basis of Kuchlug's bravado.

Jamuga had the feeling of impending disaster. Even with twice their number, he thought the Naiman, led by Kuchlug, were no match for Temujin. He would join the battle with the Naiman, just in case they did overcome Temujin, but at the first sign of defeat, he would take his Jurait and flee. As he left the tent, he noticed Taiyang signal to that slimy bastard Begter, to join him.

'Begter,' Taiyang said, 'you know I value your counsel, yet you held your tongue at the meeting. What do you think?'

'I agree with Jamuga, lord,' Begter said softly, as the others were leaving Taiyang's tent. 'Temujin should not be underestimated. When we were young, he was a slipperly little shit. No matter what trouble he got himself in, he always came out of it smelling of airag.' Begter wiped the drool from his mouth gingerly. He had been afflicted lately with sores along the line of the saliva that poured from the left side of his mouth, and although the shaman had given him an herbal salve to apply, the sores had spread across his chin and down his neck. It wouldn't have been so bad, except for the constant itching, which was driving him mad.

'Then surely, we would be better withdrawing?'

'No, that is what Temujin wants you to do. Don't fall for his tricks, my lord. Without Temujin, his army is nothing. Tomorrow, when battle commences, I will seek him out and destroy him. Once he falls, his army will fall.'

'Yes, that is a good plan, Begter,' Taiyang said, feeling reassured and putting his hand on Begter's arm. Begter was a foot taller than him, and twice as wide, and although everyone disliked this big ugly monster, Taiyang valued his friendship and his counsel. He had been right many times, and he would be a

fool not to listen to him. ‘Kill this Temujin tomorrow, and I will be in your debt. I will raise you above all other men in my army.’

‘I will kill Temujin for both of us, my lord, and then I will hunt down his brother, Qasar. He is the one responsible for this,’ and he pointed to the drooping left side of his face.



At first light, Taiyang looked down from the top of the hill he had stood on last night, and was amazed at what he saw. Temujin’s forces covered the steppe before him. Jamuga was right, he thought, this is no rag-tag army, but a disciplined force of well-trained warriors. They were mounted and in line, in tens, hundreds, thousands and ten thousands. Each tuman had a commander, and a standard bearer in front of it. How wonderful to be Khan of such an army, he thought. He turned and looked at his own army behind the hill. They were undisciplined, but brave and eager for battle, they will ride headlong into the enemy and it will be a free-for-all. We are more like the rag-tag army in comparison to Temujin’s warriors. He began to feel disheartened, and knew that he should have been stronger at the war council. We are on the brink of ruin because I am not strong enough. I should have cut Kuchlug’s head off, and withdrawn to the Altai. Oh well, he sighed, it is too late now. He walked down the hill, and mounted his horse.



Jebe saw the Naiman ride over the crest of the hill shouting and screaming, and loosing a hail of arrows, most of which fell short because they were still too far away.

‘They couldn’t hit a whore lying on her back, with her legs open,’ he shouted to his men, who laughed nervously.

As the enemy came closer, his men remained in formation, and began returning fire. They used their long-range

bows, and as one arrow was in the air they were already selecting another. He had trained them well.

Thousands of Naiman lost their lives in the initial headlong rush, as all along the line Jebe could see that each of the tumans adopted the strategy Temujin had ordered them to. The next two lines of tumans were also firing their long-range bows and the sky was black, with a streaming hail of death loosed at the enemy. The Naiman were now at two hundred yards and the front line changed from their long-range to their short-range bows. Instead of firing the arrows upwards to fall on the enemy, they now fired directly at the onrushing horsemen and the Naiman first line was decimated again and again, before the two forces clashed.

The Naiman rushed onwards, and some fought the warriors at the front, whilst others carried on through the gaps between each of the tumans in the front line, and crashed into the tuman behind. Temujin had staggered the lines, so that the front tumans did not get the full force of the enemy attack. Space was left around each tuman to the front, back and sides, so that men had freedom to fight, and were not crushed together, which would prevent them from swinging their swords or axes. Only the first three lines of tumans were engaged in the battle, the back two lines began to move left and right around the sides of the clashing forces, and then faced inwards and began attacking the enemy flanks.

After his initial nervousness, Jebe was enjoying himself. He was locked in a world, which consisted of two people, himself and his opponent. He could barely hear the screams, the shouting and the clash of weapons. His whole world was focused on killing the man in front of him. He swung his sword and took off the man's arm just above the elbow, and it fell on the ground, still gripping the sword. The warrior still came at him, trying to impale him on his lance, even though he was spurting blood from his severed arm over Jebe and others close by, and was rapidly bleeding to death. Jebe slashed at him again and cut a gaping wound in his neck, and still the warrior came at him, but Jebe could see the light in his eyes fading, and the warrior suddenly slumped onto the neck of his horse. Someone else took his place, and a sword whooshed close to Jebe's face.

He stabbed the warrior under the arm, piercing his heart. He wanted to look around to see how his men were doing, but he knew that if he did, it would probably be his last action. A lance nicked his forearm, and he grabbed it, pulled and slashed the warrior's throat.

They kept coming and he kept killing. How long had he been fighting? How many had he killed? He was, all of a sudden, conscious of his sweat-drenched clothes beneath his armour, and the dryness of his mouth, which was filled with a large swollen tongue. Then he forgot his thirst as another warrior came at him: parry, slash, parry, and slash. His horse was snorting and struggling to breathe, and then it fell sideways as it succumbed to the lance protruding from its neck. Jebe was thrown to the ground, and quickly gained his feet. He knew that he was an easy target on the ground. A warrior came at him, and he twisted from the lance thrust, grabbed the man's arm and dragged him to the ground crushing his neck with his boot, and then jumped on the riderless horse. He wheeled and slashed as he felt a presence close behind him, and took the top off a man's head. Brains splattered in his face, and ran down into his mouth. He tried to spit them out, but he couldn't generate any saliva. No time to think: parry, slash; parry, and slash. They kept coming, he kept killing, and he knew his strength was waning.



Begter was in the first wave of Naiman. He led his men through a gap between two tumans, and smashed into another one behind them. He was immediately swallowed up in the fighting. He had no fear; he carried no shield, a sword in his right hand, and an axe in his left. He slashed and hacked, taking two at a time, death was his friend, his constant companion. Temujin had made sure of that, the bastard, where is he? He cut and chopped, looking, looking for the nine-tailed gold standard. Then he saw it, to his left and two tumans back. He fought with renewed energy; two at a time fell before him, his chosen men following in his wake. Chosen for their skill, their ruthlessness. Their willingness to obey him without question, to do whatever

he asked of them, regardless of the consequences. Death rode before him, and death followed behind him. At last, he had cut a gap through which he rode, towards that gold standard, towards Temujin of the Borjigin.

‘Temujin,’ he called. It was as if only the two of them existed on the battlefield. They were boys again. In training, but this time, there would be no holding back.

‘Begter.’

The half-brothers clashed. Sword against shield, axe against sword. Temujin’s guard met Begter’s chosen men. The two enemies were surrounded by a thousand desperate individual battles to the death.

‘How’s my son Jochi, chief?’

He parried and slashed.

‘That bitch Borte was a good shag, chief, once I’d beaten her into submission.’

He hacked and parried. His sword slashing Temujin’s unprotected thigh. He saw the blood gush from the wound, and he smiled his ghastly smile. Drool dripped onto his jacket and sprayed in the air around him as he fought. Soon, he thought, I’ll stop taunting the bastard and finish him off, but not just yet.

‘Liked it up the arse as well you know, chief. Used to squeal with delight when two of us took her.’

‘You bastard,’ Temujin hissed, through gritted teeth and lunged, then fiented, slashing Begter’s right forearm. ‘I should have killed you when I had the chance.’

‘Yes, you should have done, chief,’ Begter spat, ‘because now I’m going to kill you. And when we’ve won the battle, I’m going to find Borte and give her one last taste of pleasure before I kill her.’ He blocked a jarring blow from Temujin’s sword, and his axe blow smashed into Temujin’s shield. ‘Then I’ll start on your sons and your other wives, no one will remember you by the time I’ve finished.’

‘You are finished, you ugly bastard,’ and Temujin pushed forwards, stabbing, slashing and hacking with renewed energy.

His chosen men were being decimated. Temujin was not the useless shit he used to be. A lance pierced his shoulder; he was being pushed back into the broil of the fighting. That bastard has eluded me again. He released his hold on the axe,

and let it dangle from the wrist strap, then reached up and pulled out the lance. Searing pain. Yes, he was still alive. Blood oozed from the wound. He ducked a sword blow, and drove the lance into a warrior's gut, feeling it exit through the man's back. Time to go. We are losing. He began to fight his way out, the few chosen men left following in his wake. There will be another time, and another place, he told himself.



It was late afternoon, and Jamuga saw Taiyang fall from his horse, badly wounded. He knew it was time to go. The Naiman were being routed. Temujin was slowly closing the circle about them, and if he didn't go now, he would be trapped. He had no idea where his men were, they were scattered and were either still fighting, or dead. He knew that he couldn't round them up or wait for them, he had to extricate himself from the fighting. Slowly, he began to force his horse backwards, until Naiman warriors closed the gap in front of him. He then turned and rode away from the battle.



Korisu Beshi went to his Khan's aid when he saw him fall. He ordered those warriors nearest to him to create a protective barrier around them both. Taiyang had a large gash to his left side and his insides were spilling out onto the ground.

'Hold on, my lord,' Korisu urged Taiyang over the din of the battle raging around them. 'I will get you to a place of safety.'

'Leave me Korisu, my friend,' Taiyang said with difficulty. 'I am done for, save yourself.'

Korisu could see that Taiyang was deathly pale as he lifted him onto his own horse, then jumped up behind him. He signalled his warriors to fall back with him, and they rode free of the battle. He took Taiyang behind the hill they had attacked over, to the army's rear, and gently laid Taiyang on the ground.

Korisu could see his Khan was dying, his breathing was labored and he had slipped into unconsciousness.

The Naiman warriors that had fallen back with Korisu to protect him and their Khan, sat on their horses watching Taiyang die, and wondered whether they should return to the battle, which they were obviously losing, or flee.

Korisu decided that he no longer wished to live without his Khan, with the shame of defeat. He now realised that Taiyang's strategy to withdraw to the Altai had been a sound one. If only he had been a stronger Khan, and had forced us to accept his plan, he thought. He stood up, got back on his horse, drew his sword and galloped back to the battle, and to death.

'Well, I'm not following him,' the leader of the five warriors said. 'Any of you lot want to go with him?'

'You're a fool if you think any of us want to follow him,' one of the warriors responded.

'Keep your voice down, the Khan might hear you,' another said.

'Whatever he hears now, he'll be telling Tengri,' the leader said. 'Strip him of everything of value. He won't need it where he's going.'

His men looked at him aghast, as if he had asked them to kill a water spirit.

'Come on don't just sit there like old women,' the leader encouraged them. 'He's a dying Khan with some valuables, the same as that Wang Khan and his son from the Kereit, only someone else has killed this one.'

'What if someone comes?' one of his men asked.

'Then we'll kill them, and take their valuables as well,' the leader told them. 'Jump to it, otherwise someone will come.'

The five warriors quickly jumped off their horses, and began stripping Taiyang of his clothes, weapons and valuables.

'Now, I think we'll withdraw,' the leader said smiling. 'It seems like the sensible thing to do, tactically speaking of course.' His men laughed and got back on their horses.

'Where are we withdrawing to?' one of them asked, 'remember, we've still got that Wang Khan stuff buried at the camp.'

‘Which is where we’ll withdraw to, and retrieve it before Temujin’s army is all over us, dividing up the plunder. Then we’ll disappear. Are you with me men?’

They all nodded and followed their leader in the direction of the Naiman camp.



The Naiman had seen Taiyang fall, and now Korisu Beshi was dead. Kuchlug was still fighting somewhere, but they were being slaughtered, and had no effective leader. Fresh forces had been sent against them, and they realised the futility of fighting on. Small groups fought their way out of the encirclement to safety, but many just stopped fighting, and this spread across the battlefield. The Naiman surrendered as the light began to fade.

Just in time, Jebe thought, as his sword slithered from numb fingers, and stuck point down in the dirt. All around him the Naiman warriors were kneeling down and laying their weapons on the ground, the battle was over. He ordered his men to collect all the Naiman weapons and guard the captives until Temujin decided what to do with them.

‘Commander,’ one of the elite guard said, as he brought his horse to a halt, ‘the Khan asks that you attend the war council.’

Jebe prised his sword out of the ground wiped it, and put it back in his scabbard, then he followed the guard back to where the war council was being held. When he got to the meeting, he saw that they were all there, all alive, all the senior commanders, not one of them had been killed or injured.

‘Jebe,’ Temujin said. ‘Welcome, you look a bit the worse for wear.’

He looked around at the others covered in blood, bits of flesh and hair, with sweat streaked dirty faces and thought, I must look pretty bad if he has singled me out for comment.

‘I’m sorry my lord,’ he said smiling. ‘I thought I would come straight here, rather than wash first.’ They all fell about laughing.

‘A great victory,’ Temujin said, looking round at them. ‘Bogorju, have you had time to compile a report?’

‘A brief one only, my lord,’ Bogorju responded. ‘A more comprehensive report will have to wait until I have had time to properly assess the situation.’

‘What of Taiyang?’

‘He is dead, my lord. He was carried from the battlefield by his second-in-command, Korisu Beshi, who is also now dead.’

‘What about Kuchlug, his son?’

‘He was seen towards the end of the battle escaping, and about twenty thousand Naiman followed him.’

‘He will be trouble in the future, I am sure,’ Temujin mused. ‘Did anyone see Jamuga?’

‘He was spotted at some point during the battle, but again, no one has said that he is dead, and so I assume he has escaped.’

‘Knowing Jamuga as I do, he will have fled when he saw that the Naiman were being defeated. One of these days we will catch him. What of Tukta Bijhi, has he managed to slip through our lines again? That man has a thousand lives.’

‘Nothing to report on him, my lord, it might be that he is hiding amongst the captives, but until we deal with them, we won’t know.’

‘And what of Begter? I know he was wounded by a lance, but then we were separated, and I didn’t see him again.’

‘No news, my lord.’

‘What is the estimate for our losses?’

‘Surprisingly light, my lord, I would say about thirty thousand, compared to the hundred and twenty thousand the Naiman have lost. There are many injuries on both sides though, and a large number of these will die from their wounds.’

‘We will stay here for the time being. Qasar and Churchadai, ride to the Naiman camp with your men and collect up the plunder. Temuge and Chila’un, deal with the captives, and separate those who are willing to submit to me and those who aren’t. You know what to do with the last group. We will distribute those that submit among the tumans, once we have returned home, and have an accurate assessment of our losses

and the promotions necessary. Boroqul and Jochi attend to the dead and injured. Jebe, take your men and see who you can find within a ten mile radius. We will meet again when Qasar and Churchadai return with the plunder, which should take them about three weeks.'



Jebe had lost about eight hundred men. He left two hundred to guard the captives, and sent the other nine thousand out in thousands under their commanders in nine different directions, telling them to round up any that had escaped from the battle within a ten mile radius and then return to the camp. One of the minghan commanders had been killed, so Jebe promoted a man on the spot who he had been watching, and accompanied him to see how he performed in his first command of a minghan.

Within a mile, they came across a group of ten Naiman warriors, who thought that they were safe, had lit a fire and were busy getting drunk. They didn't put up a fight, and were stripped, tied up, and sent back to the camp with a ten-man guard. The main force carried on outwards and found a mix of two hundred Jurait, Merkit and Saljut warriors, who tried to make a run for it, but were caught easily. They were also stripped, tied up and sent back with a guard of fifty men. It was almost midnight when they thought they had come ten miles from the battlefield, and decided to return. They had rounded up a thousand seven hundred men with minimal resistance.

Jebe was glad to get back. He needed sleep badly. He felt as though he had been wrestling a wild boar, and the boar had won, he ached all over. He knew he would only get a few hours sleep before he had to get up again, but it was better than nothing. He waited until all of his men were back. In total, they had rounded up twelve thousand five hundred warriors who were handed over to Temuge and Chila'un to deal with. The two hundred he had left behind had built fires and prepared hot food. He hadn't realised how hungry he was until he smelt the stew cooking.



The weeks following the battle were spent carrying out the tasks Temujin had allocated to them. Qasar and Churchadai finally returned with the plunder from the Naiman camp. Behind them, were thousands of carts full to overloading, women of all ages, shapes and sizes, children, horses and livestock.

The war council got underway. ‘The greatest happiness,’ Temujin said to those gathered, ‘is to vanquish your enemies, to chase them before you, to rob them of their wealth, to see those dear to them bathed in tears and to take their wives and daughters to your bed.’ They all nodded in agreement, although Jebe secretly thought, that his greatest happiness would be to be at home with Sharia and Cheren.

‘You’ve been busy Qasar,’ Temujin said to him, as he got off his horse.

‘Very busy, my lord, the Naiman were a rich tribe and there is enough plunder for everyone. We have also brought you back two gifts.’ He signalled to his men and five Naiman warriors, who were bound and gagged, were dragged into the circle of senior commanders. The warriors had been badly beaten, and their faces and bodies were covered in blood from numerous wounds. ‘These five were caught digging up valuables,’ and he emptied a sack of gold and jewelry onto the ground in front of Temujin.

Temujin recognized some of the items immediately as belonging to Wang Khan. ‘How did they come to have these items?’

‘They told us a pack of lies at first, but we eventually managed to persuade them that it was in their best interests to tell us the truth. They came across Wang Khan and Senggum as they were fleeing to the Naiman, and they robbed and killed them. That’s not all though, we also found amongst their possessions, valuables that they admitted stripping from Taiyang, as he was lay there dying.’

There was a stunned silence from among the senior commanders as they all considered the gravity of the offences.

‘I have never heard of such a thing,’ Temujin said, shocked. ‘We need to make examples of these men, otherwise people might think that offences against a Khan are like any other offence. Take them away and guard them well, I will think of a suitable punishment for their crimes.’

The five warriors were dragged away to await their fate.

‘What is the second gift you have brought me Qasar, I hope it is more enjoyable than the last one?’

Qasar signalled his men again and a tall, fair-haired man was ushered forward.

‘This is...’ Qasar started, but the man cut him short.

‘My name is Tatanga, my lord,’ the man said, ‘I am an Uigur of learning, and I was keeper of the seal for Taiyang.’

‘Keeper of the seal, what is that exactly?’ Temujin asked, never having heard of the term before.

‘I kept records of all decisions made my Taiyang, and attached his seal to those records.’

‘Remain with me,’ Temujin asked Tatanga, ‘use the seal in my name, and teach my sons the language and lore of the wise Uigurs?’

‘I will do as you ask, my lord,’ Tatanga replied, happy that he was not going to be killed.

After the war council was over, Temujin told his senior commanders what he had decided the punishment of the five Naiman warriors was to be. ‘By the time I’ve finished, there will be no doubt how such crimes will be dealt with. The punishment will take place over three days.’ He had the five men brought out and tied to stakes driven into the ground, and ordered a fire to be built. Once the fire was burning fiercely, he told his warriors to hack off their hands and feet, whilst other warriors took red-hot sticks from the fire and cauterised the bleeding stumps. He did not want them to bleed to death. The five men were screaming, vomiting and pleading for mercy, which fell on deaf ears. The ten hands and feet were thrown in the fire, and crackled and sizzled in front of the warriors they belonged to for some time afterwards.

The next day, Temujin ordered their forearms and lower legs to be removed and thrown in the fire and the stumps were again cauterised. On the third day, the rest of their arms and legs

were removed. His men had great difficulty hacking the rest of these limbs from the large joints, and took a number of tries to prise the arms and legs away. Again the wounds were cauterised. The five men were in excruciating agony, but still very much alive, and Temujin ordered them to be cut down and left for the wolves and other predators to eat them alive.

15

September 1204 – November 1206

It was the beginning of September, and they were ready to leave the camp that had been set up beside the battlefield, and make the long trip home before the winter arrived. It would take them considerably longer to return home because of the large amounts of plunder acquired from the Naiman.

As they started moving, three horsemen rode towards them, and as the riders came closer, they could see that one of the men was bound to his horse, and that it was Jamuga. The three horses were brought to a halt and one of the warriors addressed Temujin. 'My lord Temujin, I am Yeke, a senior commander with the Jurait, and I have brought you Jamuga, your enemy.'

Temujin looked at his old friend Jamuga, who averted his eyes, keeping his head lowered and stared at the back of his horse's neck.

'Isn't Jamuga also your Khan, and have you not sworn loyalty to him?' Temujin asked Yeke.

'Yes, my lord, but he deserted us in the battle.' Yeke said, now looking worried. 'We thought that capturing him and delivering him to you, would do you a great service, and you would reward us.'

'Then you thought wrong. You have betrayed your Khan, and the only reward for that is death.' He turned to Jelme, 'Take them away and execute them.' He then went to Jamuga, untied him and helped him down from the horse. 'My childhood friend,' he said, embracing him, 'what has become of us?' He led Jamuga away, so that they were alone together, and they both sat in the grass.

'We grew apart, Temujin,' Jamuga said, with tears in his eyes. 'We both wanted to be the one Khan on the steppe, and there can only be one Khan.'

‘We could have been as one, we would have been greater together than either one of us alone,’ Temujin said, holding back his tears. ‘Join me now, and share my greatness.’

‘If it were only possible, but you could never trust me now. You would be looking over your shoulder, thinking that I could never be satisfied with half, when I desire the whole, and you would be right to do so.’

‘My friend, it does not have to end this way. Just say the word, and it will be as it was when we were andas.’

‘It could never be the way it was, too much has happened to pretend that we could ever be friends again. We have tried to kill each other too many times, and I have learned to accept that you are the chosen one whereas I, I will not be remembered. You are the great leader of the Mongols, as it was foretold. I wish things had been different, and that we had never parted, but that is how it is. You must kill me and as a Khan, I wish a bloodless death in the custom of our people.’

‘Don’t ask me to kill you, Jamuga, I cannot,’ Temujin whispered, and the tears ran freely now as he held Jamuga close to him.

‘You must. You will be great for both of us. My time is now over. If you left me alive, I would want to be the one Khan, and I would kill you to achieve that. I would not be false and tell you lies now, merely because I face certain death. You must kill me because I would surely betray you.’

Temujin knew that he had no choice but to have Jamuga killed, yet he hesitated in giving the order. He wanted to spend time with him, just talking and enjoying each other’s company, as they once had when they were boys, but he knew there was nothing left to say. He got up and walked to where Bogorju stood with his horse. ‘Order warriors to bring large rocks,’ he told him. ‘Jamuga will not join us, he asks for death.’

Warriors scoured the steppe, and brought back over a hundred large rocks. Temujin ordered them to start piling the rocks on and around Jamuga, as he lay there in the grass. As the weight of the rocks crushed the living breath out of Jamuga, Temujin said quietly, ‘Goodbye, my friend. Find peace in Eternal Heaven. Sit with Tengri, and watch over me.’

The army set off again towards home, and Temujin rode ahead of the column alone on the first day. Bogorju and Jelme could see that he was grieving at the loss of his friend, although friend he had not been for many years. In the evening, he joined them at the campfire, and was his normal self.

‘The Naiman were the last tribe, my lord,’ Bogorju said, as they shared the hot mutton stew and qumys. ‘You have done what you set out to do, and what no other Khan has done for many years since Kabul Khan; you have united all the tribes.’

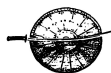
‘At a terrible price, my friends, and there are still some enemies to vanquish, such as the Kirghiz, and the Tumat.’

‘These are small tribes, and they will soon submit or die,’ Jelme said joining the conversation.

‘There are also Kuchlug, Tukta Bijhi, Buyruq, and Begter,’ Temujin reminded them absently. ‘There must be no one left to challenge me ever again.’

‘We will hunt them down when the spring comes,’ Bogorju said. ‘There is nowhere for them left to hide.’

They reached their camp in the middle of October, and the snows had already begun to fall. Bogorju had used the slow march back to obtain an accurate assessment of their losses, and the plunder acquired from the Naiman, which Temujin used to rebuild the army. The captives consisted of Naiman, Merkit, Unggirat, Saljut and Katakın, who had all submitted to Temujin’s sovereignty, and were distributed among the tumans and as such, ceased to exist as independent tribes. Training of the tumans was undertaken during November, which culminated in a massive hunt to put both the training into practice and obtain food to last them through the winter.



Subadai had become a monster of a man and his horses had great difficulty supporting him on long marches. Temujin ordered the blacksmith to construct a special cart, which was to be made of iron and would carry him and his tent long distances. When the blacksmith informed Temujin it was ready, he called Subadai to him.

‘Subadai, you are killing your horses, so I have made you this iron kibitka, to convey and protect you. You will ride to battle like a Khan in future.’

Subadai didn’t know whether to feel grateful or insulted, but decided that the former would be prudent. ‘I am grateful, my lord, are we going into battle again?’

‘We are not, but I have a task for you. When spring comes, I want you to seek out and kill my enemies Tukta Bijhi, Kuchlug, Buyruq, and Begter. You should also obtain the submission of the Kirghiz and Tumat, or kill them where they stand. I will send with you two tumans under Qasar and Temuge, but you will be supreme commander.’

‘I am honoured you have given me this command, my lord, I will not let you down.’

‘The task will take you many months, but though you will be far away, you will ever be near me. Heaven will keep you safe while travelling, and will give you assistance.’



‘My lord,’ Tatanga prostrated himself in front of Temujin. ‘I am at your service.’

‘Tatanga, you are a very important man.’

‘I am, my lord?’ he asked, surprised.

‘You are, because you are the instrument of my will. Heaven has appointed me to rule over all the tribes and clans, for hitherto there has been no order upon the steppe. I want to rule my dominion by fixed laws, so that peace and happiness shall prevail in the world. First, I want all my people to be able to read and write in the Uigur script and secondly, I want to introduce uniform laws, which must be written down. All of this is to be done in two years.’

‘How am I to do all this in the time you have allotted, my lord?’

‘Are there other Uigur men of learning such as yourself, who can read and write?’

‘All the Uigur people are taught to read and write from an early age, my lord.’

‘Then we will get you help. I will send an envoy to your chief, and ask him for the loan of some of his people, and I will reward them richly for their service. How many of your people would you need for such a task?’

Tatanga thought for some time, and calculated the number of people and how long it would take and eventually said, ‘I would need five hundred Uigurs, my lord.’

‘You will accompany my envoy, Chagadai. Speak directly to your chief and recruit the men you need. Do you see any problems with this plan?’

‘I have not been back to my homeland for many years, and I do not know how I will be received, my lord.’

‘I will send Chagadai with his tuman to accompany you, so you will not have any problems, you will leave tomorrow.’



Tatanga and Chagadai arrived in the main city of the Uigur, Bish Calik, late in November, and sought an audience with Bardjuk, the ruler of the Uigur.

‘I am overjoyed to welcome you to my humble city,’ Bardjuk said, showing Tatanga and Chagadai the highest honour, friendship and courtesy. ‘The fame of the world conquering sovereign has come to me. I was just preparing to send an envoy myself, to the all-conquering and mighty sovereign. While thinking over this, I beheld a blue Heaven through the clouds around me. I beheld a bright sun in the sky. I saw also, a blue shining river where just before, the ice had hidden everything. I was filled with delight to my innermost being. I yield to your sovereign the land of the Uigur. I myself, am the servant and son of Temujin the Immovable.’

Chagadai doubted Bardjuk’s sincerity when he spoke, and said to him, ‘My lord, if you truly yield to Temujin, then you should come back with us, and present him with what there is of greatest value in your treasure house in person.’

‘I will send my envoys with the best gold, silver, pearls and other precious objects from my treasure house, but I am unable to present myself to your sovereign at this time. There

are many engagements that have been planned, many duties I have to perform. I will come at a more convenient time.'

He makes excuses, Chagadai thought. If he had a mind to present himself to Temujin, he would. He is afraid he won't return, or that Temujin will not be Khan for long, and so he does not have to bother making the trip. I shall convey my thoughts to my father, when I return.

Tatanga explained to Bardjuk the reason for their visit, and he gave them leave to recruit as many men as they needed to take back with them for two years.

Tatanga selected the men personally, from the thousands that came forward with the promise of rich rewards. It took him a month to sift through the young, middle-aged and old, to find those whom he felt were up to the task. Chagadai was impatient to leave, but did not rush Tatanga, because he knew the importance his father attached to the mission.

They found they were unable to leave until the middle of February, due to the poor weather conditions, and Tatanga thought it an ideal opportunity to keep the men he had recruited busy, by teaching Chagadai and his tuman how to read and write the Uigur script. Chagadai welcomed the suggestion because his men were getting bored and would soon resort to drunkenness, womanising, and causing trouble in the Uigur City. Chagadai found, however, that asking active warriors to sit down for hours on end to read and write, caused its own problems. When one of his men threatened to kill an Uigur for correcting his writing, he realised that he had to limit the learning to mornings only, and institute warrior training in the afternoons. Chagadai put the man on guard duty for a week to cool him down. The learning progressed more calmly after the change, because the men were able to vent their frustrations by fighting each other.

They arrived back in mid-March and Temujin told Tatanga to allocate twenty warriors to each of the twenty-five tumans, two per minghan, and they were to set to work immediately. It would be the responsibility of the tuman commanders to make sure all of his people attended the learning and this included women, children and of course, the warriors.

The whole of Temujin's people were engaged in this mass learning, and Temujin knew that as well as making them literate, it would bond them together as a Mongol nation.



Subadai set out on his mission in late March, as the sun began to melt the snow and frozen rivers, and the green grass forced its way through into the warmer air. Everyone came to see the warriors off, and to look at Subadai's iron kubitka, being drawn by twenty oxen. Women and children clung to husbands and fathers, knowing that it would be a long time before they saw each other again, if at all. Most though, cheered and clapped at the spectacle of Subadai sat atop his iron wheeled fortress.

'It is time to start Tatanga,' Temujin said to the Uigur, the day following Subadai's departure. 'I will tell you my thoughts and you are to write them down exactly word for word.' Tatanga had been teaching Temujin, Borte, and the senior counsellors to read and write, and he knew that Temujin could probably write his own thoughts down, but he said nothing. Instead, he prepared his ink, quills and parchments.

'This is the Yasa, the law of the people,' Temujin began and Tatanga started writing. 'If the great, the military leaders, and the leaders of the many descendents of the ruler who will be born in the future, should not adhere strictly to the Yasa, then the power of the state will be shattered and come to an end, no matter how they then seek Genghis Khan, they shall not find him.'

Tatanga stopped writing, 'Genghis Khan, my lord, who is that?'

'When we have finished the Yasa, I will call a Quriltai and that is the name I shall take as Khan of the Mongol nation.'

Tatanga carried on, and wrote the characters quickly one beneath the other, scratching the parchment scroll with his quill and moving in columns from left to right.

Temujin knew that, unless he bound all the Mongols together by laws, and enforced those laws, they would revert back to their old ways. 'You must love one another,' he

continued. 'One must raise up and pay honour to the pure, the innocent, the righteous and to the learned, to whatever people they belong, and condemn the wicked and the men of iniquity.'

Tatanga liked that law, particularly the bit about paying honour to the learned.

'If a person is convicted of a crime warranting the death penalty, the entire family of the accused, including women and children, will be executed, as they will be considered accessories to the crime. The kidnapping of women, which has caused feuding among the Mongols,' and Temujin thought of how Borte, had been taken by the Merkit, 'is now a crime punishable by death. All children will be considered legitimate, whomever their mother. Women are not to be sold into marriage. Stealing animals is punishable by death. A lost animal is to be returned to its owner, the taking of lost property, as one's own, will be considered as theft and punishable by death. Hunting will be a winter activity, and hunting at any other time will be punishable by death. The death penalty will be awarded for blood feuds, adultery, without any regard as to whether they are married or not, theft, lying, betrayal, sorcery, disobedience and urinating, or doing laundry in running water. All adult males will serve in the army following warrior training until they are sixty years of age. Promotion in the army will be by merit and skill alone.'

Tatanga thought that having the death penalty for most crimes was a bit harsh, but he said nothing. He understood what Temujin was trying to achieve, and who was he to say what was right or wrong. He knew very little about his new Khan, except what others had told him.

'That is enough for today, Tatanga,' Temujin said. 'We will carry on tomorrow.' It was late afternoon, and both of them were weary.

Tatanga rolled up the scrolls and was about to take them with him, when Temujin said, 'No leave them here Tatanga, I wish to practice my reading, and consider what you have written.'

'My lord,' Tatanga said, bowed and departed.

The following day Temujin called Tatanga early, and as soon as he set out his writing materials he started.

‘No man is to eat in the presence of another, without inviting him to partake of food. No man is to eat more than his comrades. All religions are to be respected and no preference is to be shown to any of them. Whoever is guilty of sodomy is to be put to death. Whoever takes goods on credit and then cannot pay, is to be put to death after the third time. Whoever gives food or clothing to a captive without the permission of his captor, is to be put to death. Whoever finds a runaway slave or captive and does not return him to the person to whom he belongs, is to be put to death. When an animal is to be eaten, its feet must be tied, its belly ripped open and its heart squeezed in the hand until the animal dies, then its meat may be eaten, but if anyone slaughters an animal after the Mohammedan fashion, he is himself to be slaughtered. Clothes are not to be washed until they are completely worn out. No distinction is to be made between clean and unclean, all things are considered to be clean. All commanders in the army are to examine their troops and their armament before going into battle, and to supply the troops with everything they need for a campaign at their own expense. A warrior who lacks something will be punished. At the beginning of each year, all daughters are to be presented to the Khan that he might choose some of them for himself, and his children. That will be all for today Tatanga, leave the scrolls. The Yasa will always stay in here until a safe, secure place can be found for it, and I decide who will be responsible for its security. I will call you when I require you again.’

‘I understand my lord,’ and he bowed and left.

A week went by before Temujin called Tatanga again to add to the Yasa.

‘After the death of his father, a son may dispose of his father’s wives, all except his mother; he may marry them or give them in marriage to others. The distribution of property is to be carried out on the basis of the senior son receiving more than the junior, the younger son inheriting the household of the father. The seniority of children depends upon the rank of their mother; one of the wives must always be the senior, this being determined chiefly by the time of her marriage. All except the legal heirs are strictly forbidden to make use of any of the property of the deceased. If unable to abstain from drinking, a

man may get drunk three times a month; if he does it more than three times he is culpable. If he gets drunk twice a month it is better; if once a month this is still more laudable; and if one does not drink at all what can be better? But where can I find such a man? If such a man were found, he would be worthy of the highest esteem. That is all for today Tatanga.'

'My lord,' he said, whilst packing up his materials, 'do you feel the Yasa is going well?'

'I am pleased with the work you are doing, Tatanga. I feel that it is going as well as can be expected, but it will take many months to finish, if it will ever be finished in my lifetime. I must formulate what I want to say in my head, before I say it out loud, and you write it down.'

Tatanga left and was not called again to work on the Yasa for a number of months, and he was beginning to wonder whether Temujin was ever going to call him again. One day though, he was called, not to write, as he imagined, but to read a number of scrolls that Temujin had written. He found no mistakes in the script and told Temujin so. After that, he was not called again to write in the Yasa, and he assumed that Temujin was writing it himself.



In September, a messenger came from Subadai, and reported directly to Temujin.

'My lord, Subadai sends greetings. He hopes you are well and that Tengri is smiling upon you.' The messenger had been riding non-stop for seven days and was filthy, tired and hungry. 'He reports that Buyruq and a group of Naiman were caught near the Altai Mountains, and after a minor struggle they are all dead.'

'This is excellent news, I am very pleased.'

'Also, my lord, we have tracked Tikta Bijhi, and his brother Chiledu, together with a band of Merkit, to the fortress at Taikal, and Subadai was preparing to attack them when I left.'

'Subadai is moving faster than I anticipated. I shall write a message to him. Come back to me at first light tomorrow,

after you have seen your family, eaten and slept, and I will give you a scroll to take to Subadai.’

The messenger left, thankful he did not have to return immediately, and was looking forward to seeing and sleeping with his youngest wife. He had been chosen to bring the message to Temujin because Subadai had told them that the one who killed Buyruq, would return with a message for the Khan, and he had been fortunate enough to meet Buyruq face-to-face, and had cut his head off.

Temujin went in immediately to compose his message: *Subadai, your speedy and forceful pursuit of my enemies pleases me, and you will be rewarded for your loyalty. I hope your pursuit of my other enemies does not keep you from us for very long. In any case, plan to return for the Quriltai in April of next year. May Eternal Heaven guide you and keep you safe, Temujin.*

He used the new seal he had ordered to be made, which depicted Genghis Khan in the Uigur script, dipping it in the heated wax he had put at the bottom of the parchment.

The messenger reported to Temujin the following morning, and after being given the scroll, which he secured inside his coat, he galloped off to return to Subadai.

17

March – April 1206

Temujin sent word, during March, to all senior commanders, chiefs and highborn warriors, for them to attend a Quriltai on the last day of April. He then summoned Kokochu, the head shaman, to him.

‘Kokochu old friend, be seated,’ Temujin said, as the old man was guided to a seat by one of his apprentices, who then left and waited outside to be called. Kokochu’s eyesight had been failing for many years, his eyes were now clouded over, and he saw only vague shapes as he moved about.

‘My lord Temujin,’ Kokochu said in his high-pitched voice, ‘it has been months since we last spoke.’ Borte pressed a cup of warm milk into his hand, and then gave a cup to Temujin.

‘The son of Heaven does not need the counsel of a shaman, even one who is as old and venerable as you.’

‘It has been a long and tortuous journey, my lord. Did you ever doubt that one day you would unite the warring tribes under one Khan?’

‘There were dark times, when I felt that Eternal Heaven was testing my resolve, but I kept in mind always the prophecy, and the belief that I am destined to conquer the world.’

‘The world is a big place, my lord, and the steppe is only one small part of it.’

‘My father once described to me where we lived in relation to some of the other tribes, but even he didn’t know where the world began and ended. He spoke of the sea, which I will travel to look upon before I die.’

‘Your father was a great chief, and I was sad when the Merkit poisoned him. His death brought about many changes for the Borjigin, and started you on your journey. Now that you have conquered the steppe, and all people bow down to you, where will you aim your arrows next?’

‘The Jin Empire beckons me now, old friend, to avenge my great grandfather.’

‘Ah yes,’ the old man said, ‘the great Kabul Khan, who was tortured to death. That would be a good place to start your conquest of the world.’

‘As you have said Kokochu, the steppe is only a small part of my dominion. You know I have been sent by Tengri to rule the world, and if not me, then my sons and their sons, so there is still much to do old man, and in this you can assist me.’

‘How can I be of service to the son of Heaven?’

‘I have called a Quriltai for the last day of April, and I want you to address those present and inform them of my divine mission, and how Tengri has made me his representative on earth, you know the sort of thing. I want everyone to understand that my position as ruler over them is Tengri’s will, and as such, unasailable. Can you do this for me Kokochu?’

‘What you ask must be Tengri’s will, if you are his representative on earth, therefore I have no choice but to do as you ask of me, my lord.’

They sat for some time talking about Temujin’s childhood, before his father had been killed, and then Kokochu shouted for his apprentice. ‘I am tired, my lord, I must take my leave and seek Tengri’s guidance on my words for the Quriltai,’ and his apprentice led him out.

Temujin then summoned Shiqi Qutuqu, a Tartar, whom he had adopted as his son, when he was found in the Merkit camp, and given to Ho’elun to raise, before Jochi, his eldest son, had been born.

‘You have mastered the Uigur script, as if you had been reading and writing it all your life,’ Temujin said, surprising Qutuqu when he came before him.

‘How do you know this, my lord?’

‘Tatanga reports to me on the progress of my sons,’ he said smiling. ‘I am going to appoint you as the supreme officer of the law, which will involve you making, collecting and preserving all judicial decisions relating to those who break the law, as detailed in the Yasa. You are to oversee all trials of those charged with wrongdoing, and you will have the power to put people to death.’

‘What is the Yasa, my lord?’ Qutuqu asked, unfamiliar with this term.

Temujin led him to the rear of the tent, and revealed a stack of scrolls. ‘This is the Yasa,’ he said proudly. ‘It details all the laws of the new Mongol nation, and the punishments for breaking those laws.’

Qutuqu picked one of the scrolls up and read it. He read another, and then he sat down to carry on reading, and Temujin left him to it. After many hours, Qutuqu finished reading the scrolls, and went to where Temujin was sitting, having waited patiently for him to finish.

‘I notice that some of what has been written are laws, whereas some are sayings, advice and such like.’ Qutuqu said matter-of-factly. ‘We need to categorise what has been written so that the laws are in one section, sayings in another and so on. When we list the laws, they should start with the most serious and end in the trivial.’

‘I am happy for that to be done,’ Temujin responded.

‘So what you’re asking me to do, my lord,’ Qutuqu tried to clarify Temujin’s orders, ‘is to make decisions in accordance with those laws, that have already been written down. Decide whether something is a crime or not, and on the punishment of a crime, bearing in mind what has already been written down. Write down the details of all crimes and the decisions made, and maintain the legal part of the Yasa up to date, inserting new crimes and punishments, and sit in judgement over those charged with crimes?’

‘That about sums up my thoughts on the matter,’ Temujin said, smiling at the logical way Qutuqu’s mind worked.

‘I am pleased to do this for you, my father, and pleased also that you have confidence in my abilities. You know, of course, that sometimes I will not award the death penalty even though the Yasa states that death is the punishment. Other factors may have to be taken into consideration?’

‘I know you will not follow the law blindly, that is why I have chosen you for this position. The laws apply equally to all, and should be fair. Also, I want the Yasa to be kept in my tent, and access to it restricted to the immediate family, Bogorju and Jelme.’

‘How will the people know what the laws are, if you keep them hidden away, my lord?’

‘At the Quriltai, you will read the laws out, together with the punishment for each law. Tuman commanders will then communicate these laws to the people.’

‘Who have you appointed to enforce the laws?’

‘Everyone is responsible for enforcing the laws, but specifically, I will give Chagadai the task of law enforcement.’

‘Then I shall work with Tatanga to put the laws into order of severity so that when I do read them out at the Quriltai, they will be organised and easier to understand.’

Temujin next called Chagadai to him, and told him that he had appointed him to enforce the Yasa. Chagadai was a stubborn and ruthless supporter of his father and as such, Temujin considered him the ideal person to carry out this task.

‘As well as enforcing the Yasa,’ Temujin said to his son, ‘it should be kept intact and maintained after my death. Will you do this for me Chagadai?’

‘You know I will, father, that is why you chose me.’



Subadai returned three days before the Quriltai on his iron kubitka, which could be heard approaching from some distance away. People came out of their tents, and stopped working to welcome him home. Children ran beside the cart and were in danger of being crushed by the large iron wheels.

‘I welcome you back, my friend,’ Temujin said to Subadai, when he reported to him. ‘What news do you have for me?’

‘My lord, both Tukta Bijhi, and his son Chiledu, are dead. They had hidden themselves in the fortress at Taikal, when we caught up with them, and had only three thousand warriors, but they put up a good fight because they had left themselves no escape.’

‘He couldn’t outrun us forever. Sooner or later we were destined to catch up with him. My father can rest in peace now that his murderers are dead. Did you lose many men?’

‘Less than fifty, my lord, they were no match for us, they had been running and hiding for many months, and were dirty,

lice-infested and under-nourished. It took us four hours of sustained fighting, but they fought to the last man because they knew there would be no mercy.'

'What about the Kirghiz and the Tumat?'

'Both tribes submitted to you, my lord, and will be here before the Quriltai. They are not far behind me.'

'You have done well Subadai, I am very pleased, but what of Kuchlug and Begter?'

'They joined forces and have fled to the Kara Khitai, my lord. They are under the protection of the Gur Khan. The merchants I questioned, who travel through their land unimpeded, have told me he has given each a palace and both are betrothed to two of the Gur Khan's daughters. They have been allowed to keep the Naiman warriors as their personal army for protection. Do you still wish me to pursue them, my lord?'

'No Subadai, I have other things planned for you. We will catch up with Kuchlug and Begter eventually, and if we leave them there, it will provide us with a reason to attack the Kara Khitai in the future.'



The leaders of the Mongol nation gathered for the Quriltai, as Temujin had ordered them to. A great standard of nine white yak tails had been raised, which signified the joining together of the nine great tribes on the steppe. Tables and seats had been provided, and attendants moved amongst them dispensing food and drink. Temujin had not provided airag, because he knew it would be a long day, and he didn't want them to get drunk until later. There were over two hundred in attendance, and they talked among themselves whilst they waited for the Quriltai to begin.

Kokochu stood and raised his arms, and the assembly went quiet. He looked commanding, as he used to do in his youth. 'I am here to tell you of my vision, and even though I cannot see you now, in my visions I see as clearly as I used to do. In this particular vision, I rode to Heaven on a dapple-grey

horse, and spoke to Tengri.’ Those present hung on his every word. ‘He told me that Eternal Heaven had appointed the great Genghis Khan, as his representative on earth. Like you, I did not know who this Genghis Khan was, and you know me, I am not backwards in coming forwards,’ there was loud laughter from those who had known Kokochu for a long time. ‘I said to Tengri, lord of all things, who is this Genghis Khan you speak of?’ and he answered, “You know him as Temujin, but he will be known to the world as Genghis Khan. He has followed my orders and united the Mongols, but he has yet to unite the world, and this is his next task. When I call him to sit by my side, this legacy will pass to his sons, and their sons, for all time. They are to be known as the ‘Golden Family’, and their will is my will. Now return to earth on the horse I sent to bring you here, and tell all the people that Genghis Khan rules them as my representative, and his words are my words.” This is what Tengri told me. He has kept me alive so that I could tell you these words, now my time is over.’

His attendant came to lead him back to his seat. He had reverted to the frail old man of recent years, but no one at the Quriltai doubted that he had been to Heaven, that he had spoken to Tengri, and that the words he spoke were the truth. How else could Temujin have survived this long on the steppe? How else could he have united all the tribes together? Tengri must be watching over him, and protecting him. He must be Heaven’s chosen one, and therefore divine, there is no other explanation.

Genghis got to his feet. He was pleased with Kokochu’s introduction, and would suitably reward him later. If they believed that his authority came from Eternal Heaven, then it would make things that much easier. No one would dare go against him now. As he spoke, those present were in awe of the mighty Genghis Khan.

‘Heaven has elevated me, and ordained me to rule over all men,’ Genghis began, and a deathly silence hung over the assembly. ‘The protection and the help of Eternal Heaven has enabled me to destroy my enemies, and attain this high dignity. I take the name Genghis Khan, as the ruler over all tribes who live in felt tents. From this time, we will all now call ourselves

Mongols. Together we have created a Mongol nation, equal to any other and it will be called Great Mongolia. Already, envoys from hundreds of different tribes and lands make their way here to pay us homage. Traders have appeared like flies on a carcass.' There was loud laughter, because Genghis was right, the traders were everywhere seeking their fortunes. They were scattered throughout the camp peddling their wares, and generally making a nuisance of themselves. Genghis continued, 'My mother, who has always been wise, once told me that an arrow alone can easily be broken, but many arrows are indestructible. We must learn to be as many arrows, and help each other, instead of pursuing selfish goals, and in this way we will remain great. In the past, we have fought each other, stolen each other's women, property and valuables, and this has led to grudges, which have lasted for many years and been passed from father to son, and this has kept us from becoming one people. From this day, there will be laws to govern how the people act, and all are to know these laws and the punishments for breaking them. Never again must we be a divided people. I have appointed Shiqi Qutuqu, my adopted son, as the supreme officer of the law, and he will tell you what the laws of the people are.'

Qutuqu stood up and read the long list of laws out, together with the punishment for breaking each law, he then sat back down. No one asked any questions or objected to the severity of the punishments, they saw these laws as Heaven's will, and the natural extension of Genghis Khan's rule over them.

Genghis stood again. 'You will all communicate these laws to the people, and enforce them. I have appointed my son, Chagadai, to make sure these laws are enforced. Many have died along our journey here, and I am not unaware of this fact. I have had to be ruthless to unify our people, but now we are one people and can live together in peace.'

Genghis took a drink of qumys and continued, 'It is now time to reward those men who have helped me beyond all others to build my dominion, and I make them first in the order of men to sit with me and guide me. Munglig, my father-in-law, you have been to me a comrade and helped me often, but above all, when Senggum enticed me to a false feast to kill me, you

persuaded me not to go. I remember this service, and I will not let my descendents forget it,' he signalled Munglig to come and sit in one of the four empty seats on the platform. 'In my youth,' Genghis continued, 'thieves stole my eight horses and Bogorju joined me. Together we killed the thieves and retrieved the horses. Why did your rich father, who had only one son, let that one son be my comrade? I think that in you he saw evidence of high justice that would tame my wilder instincts. When I have called you, you have always been there. When the Merkit drove me into the forests of Mount Burhan you did not desert me, but shared my great suffering. It would not be possible to recount all the good deeds, which you have done since I saw you on that first day. You have advised me to that which was proper and stopped me on many occasions making a fool of myself. By following your advice, I have reached my high power and dominion. Sit now above all others by my side.' Bogorju stepped onto the platform and sat next to Munglig. Genghis now turned to Churchadai. 'Churchadai, thy greatest service was in that dreadful battle at Kalanchin against the Kereit. When Huildar said that he would seize and hold Gubtan, you took the vanguard. Success in that desperate encounter came from you beyond any man. You broke and hurled back the Jurkins, the strongest of the enemy and after them, came still others who broke the line of my own elite guard, who held the central position. You were the one that wounded Senggum in the cheek while he was making the last fearful charge. Had you not struck him then, it is unknown what would have followed, but we were close to defeat at that moment. You also are to sit by my side above all others.' Churchadai came up then and sat next to the other two. 'When I was born at the river Onun,' Genghis now said to Jelme, 'your father came from Mount Burhan with the bellows of a blacksmith on his shoulders, and brought a sable wrap to put around me. You were in swaddling clothes that day and he gave you to serve me for life, and thus we are inseperable. You have grown up with me and shown immense service. You saw me fall against the Tartars and saved my life when all others had forsaken me. Come now and sit beside me above all men. These four men are my eyes, my ears, my heart and my brain and you should venerate them as you do me.' He

then turned to Horchi of the Barin clan. 'You came to me with a prophecy, that I would become lord of dominion. At that time, I told you that when your prophecy came true, I would make you commander of ten thousand and let you choose thirty beautiful maidens as wives wherever you found them. You have shared with me since that time many toils, and have been a true comrade. Now that your words have come true, I give you what you asked for, I make you a commander of ten thousand, and I give you the right to choose for yourself thirty beautiful maidens among all conquered nations.'

It was evening before Genghis had finished showing his gratitude to the many that had served him in different ways during his rise to power. The men agreed that Genghis Khan was a magnificent leader and warrior whom Eternal Heaven must have appointed to unite and rule over them and make them into a great nation. When, finally, Genghis had finished, the whole assembly stood and made such a noise of appreciation it was deafening.

'I have ordered the airag to be brought out,' Genghis said, to loud cheers. A fire was lit and torches were placed around the assembly to light up the gathering. Genghis understood that, if he was to maintain the support from his people, he must continually prove himself with material successes. These successes would continue to legitimise and justify his rule and claim for Heaven-granted royal charisma. 'I am well aware, that it is not enough to live here in peaceful ignorance on the steppe. You want plunder, and I will give it to you. If I am to rule all men, then we must move beyond the steppe and conquer other nations, and other places. So, while you drink your airag and enjoy yourselves, I want you to think of what is to come. What we have done upto now was only the beginning, now we must conquer the world.'

Genghis went to thank Kokochu some time later, but found him dead, still sat in his seat on the wooden platform. He ordered attendants to take the shaman to his wives, he would organise his burial tomorrow. He spoke the truth about his life being over, Genghis thought. This will reinforce the truth of all he has said today.



When spring came, Genghis set off towards the east with a thousand of his elite guard. He had questioned whether he needed so many men to accompany him, because he had no enemies left on the steppe, but Bogorju and Jelme had insisted, and Borte had scolded him for even questioning their advice.

‘Remember,’ she had said, the night before he set off, as they lay in bed together, ‘you are the mighty Genghis Khan. Without you to guide this nation you have created, the people will quickly start fighting among themselves, and it will be as if you never were. You must not risk your life.’

‘Is that the only reason, I should not risk my life?’ he teased her.

‘What other reason could there be?’ she responded seriously, ignoring the real reason behind his question. ‘They need time to be what you want them to be, and until that time, you cannot die.’

‘And would you not miss me a little bit?’ he asked, playfully pinching the skin at her side.

‘I would not miss the great and mighty Genghis Khan, who seems incapable of having a serious conversation without thinking of raping his old and ugly wife.’ She tried to push his hands away from her breasts, and squirm out from under his grasp, half-heartedly kicking and wriggling until he had her pinned down by the arms. He manoeuvred himself between her legs, pressing her down so she couldn’t move. She was flushed and excited at the prospect of making love.

‘Old and ugly women, are what I dream of,’ and he slowly brought his head down to kiss her, but she moved her head from side to side, and wriggled some more, which just made them both more excited. He kissed her then, and they tore at each other’s clothes, making love as if it were for the first and the last time.

He held these thoughts and his love of Borte in his mind as he slowly followed the course of the Kerulen River, passing places he remembered from his youth. He reached Bayr Nor

after four weeks, and the nine neat piles of skulls were still as they had been left, but were becoming overgrown. He ordered his men to take them down and bury them. He then turned north, and followed the Khalkha River, arriving at his destination after a further two months. He stayed there for a month, rising early in the morning, and sat on a moss-covered rock that looked out onto the vastness of the sea, until the darkness prevented him from seeing anything, and then he slept. The sea was everything that he had imagined and more. He was content to simply sit and watch the waves lashing on the rocks below, at the sea birds diving into the water and re-appearing with strange-looking fish in their beaks. The weather was turning cold and the biting wind reminded him that he should return to the warmth of Borte, the friendship of Bogorju and Jelme, and the responsibilities of being Genghis Khan of the Mongols.

‘Father,’ Genghis spoke softly into the wind, ‘without knowing, you gave me dreams to follow, and these dreams have now come true. I wish you had been here to see all that I have accomplished. I hope I have made you proud of me? I know that you would now say that we should remain here on the steppe, that we should live our lives, as we always have, as nomads, but the world beckons me father, as the sea has called me for many years. I promise you, that we will live on the steppe in our tents, I shall not let the Mongols adopt the ways of the wooden door people, but we must venture out and conquer new lands, take plunder and make the new Mongol nation great. I will build an empire, like none have ever seen before, and the world will remember Genghis Khan and his father, Yesugei.’

The story of Temujin continues in Warrior: Curse of China.

If you liked this, please feel free to contact me and leave a message at: <http://www.freewebs.com/writersrest/>

HISTORICAL NOTE

I have plundered the few texts written on the life of Genghis Khan mercilessly, and I am indebted to those authors, particularly: Curtain, J., (1908) *The Mongols: A History*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo; De Hartog, L. (2004) *Genghis Khan: Conqueror of the World*. London: Tauris Parke; Mann, J. (2004) *Genghis Khan: Life, Death and Resurrection*. London: Bantam; Turnbull, S. (1980) *The Mongols*. London: Osprey; and Turnbull, S. (2003) *Mongol Warrior 1200 – 1350*. Oxford: Osprey.

Where possible, I have tried to structure the novel around what is known of Genghis Khan's life, and I used mainly De Hartog's text as the framework for the novel. Much of what has been written here, however, is pure invention and a few events have been moved in time to maintain the flow of the story. Dates for events differ in various texts, so I have not slavishly followed the timelines.

Particular mention should be made of Begter, Temujin's half-brother, who Temujin did actually kill when he was nine years old. I have kept Begter alive for selfish reasons. He appeared to be the ideal villain for Temujin.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Altan	Temujin's cousin, son of Katula who was the brother of Bartan, Yesugei's father.
Bartan	Yesugei's father. Married to Maral Kayak. Temujin's grandfather.
Begter	Son of Yesugei and Qo'aqchin, Yesugei's second wife and Temujin's half-brother. Temujin murders him at age nine.
Belgutei	Temujin's half-brother, son of Yesugei and Qo'aqchin, Yesugei's second wife. Brother to Begter.
Bogorju	Temujin's senior counsellor and friend.
Borte	Temujin's wife and daughter of Deisechen of the Unggirat tribe. Mother of Jochi, Chagadai, Ogodei, Tolui and Temulin.
Chagadai	Temujin's second son (1178-1242).
Chiledu	Younger brother of Tukta Bijhi, chief of the Merkit tribe.
Churchadai	Chief of the Uruts and one of Temujin's Tuman commanders, later senior counsellor.
Daritai	Yesugei's brother and Temujin's uncle.
Ho'elun	Yesugei's wife, stolen from Chiledu and Temujin's mother.
Jamuga	Chief of the Jurait tribe and Temujin's childhood friend, later to become his main enemy.
Jelme	Son of the blacksmith, Charchiutai and Temujin's senior counsellor and friend.
Jochi	Temujin's first son (1185-1226). However, due to Borte being kidnapped around the time of his birth, there is a question mark of his parentage.
Kabul Khan	Temujin's great grandfather. Father of Okin Barka, Bartan (Yesugei's father), Munlair, Katula and three other sons.

Kokochu	Shaman to the Borjigin tribe.
Munglig	Chief of the Kuanhota tribe and Yesugei's friend. Marries Temujin's mother, Ho'elun.
Naigun	Yesugei's brother and Temujin's uncle.
Ogodei	Temujin's third son (1180-1241).
Qachi'un	Temujin's brother, born in 1166.
Qasar	Temujin's brother, born in 1164.
Qo'aqchin	Yesugei's second wife. Mother of Begter and Belgutei.
Subadai	Jelme's younger brother and one of Temujin's tuman commanders.
Sachai Baiki	Chief of the Churkis tribe. Son of Okin Barka and relative of Temujin.
Senggum	Toghril's (Wang Khan) son.
Temuge	Temujin's brother, born in 1167.
Temujin	Son of Yesugei and Ho'elun, later to become Genghis Khan.
Temulin	Temujin's sister, born in 1169. Married to Podu, chief of the Kuralat tribe as part of an alliance.
Toghril	Khan of the Kereit (Wang Khan). Yesugei's sworn brother and Temujin's adopted father.
Tolui	Temujin's fourth son (1190-1232)
Tukta Bijhi	Chief of the Merkit tribe.
Yesugei	Temujin's father and chief of the Borjigin tribe.

WARRIOR

CURSE OF CHINA

T.S. ELLIS

The following pages contain the first chapter of the next novel
in T.S. Ellis' *Warrior* series.

1

April 1176 – March 1178

Children ran alongside the retinue of soldiers, camels, and oxen pulling hundreds of ornate carts and covered wagons. They had never seen such strange animals as the snorting one-humped camels on the steppe before. Dancing and laughing, they dared each other to touch the hairy beasts. They ogled the beautiful exotic women, the skilful jugglers, the wailing musicians, and the half-naked dancers.

‘It is the Prince of Wei for the annual tribute, my lord,’ Bogorju said, ducking through the opening into the Khan’s tent.

Genghis sat on a couch reading. ‘Tell him I’m busy. I will see him shortly. Have slaves remove the seating and cushions. Ask Vangura to bring trays of food and drink.’

Bogorju raised an eye, but went to do as he was ordered.

After an hour, Bogorju returned to see if Genghis was ready. He lay dozing on the couch, the parchment resting on his chest. ‘My lord, the Emissary is growing impatient.’

Genghis opened an eye. ‘Good. Tell him I am still busy. I will see him soon.’

Bogorju smiled and went out to tell Yun-chi what the Khan had said.

After two hours, a slave reported to Bogorju. ‘My lord, the Khan will see the Emissary now.’ He backed away, and Bogorju escorted the Emissary to see the Khan.

Bogorju ushered Yun-chi into the tent. ‘The Prince of Wei, my lord.’

Yun-chi bent slightly as he entered through the opening. He was a tall, thin man, dressed immaculately in a long red and gold embroidered robe that reached down to his feet. He had a short four-cornered hat in the same fabric, which covered his black knotted hair. On his feet he wore a pair of pointed slippers that matched his other clothes. His face was pale with long moustaches and a goatee beard.

‘Ja’utquri,’ Yun-chi said, calling Genghis by his appointed Chinese title, rather than as Khan of the Mongol

nation. 'You know that I represent the Jin Emperor, Zhangzong, and that I should be accorded the same respect and obedience, as if I were the Emperor himself.'

'You have been coming for the tribute for many years, Yun-chi,' Genghis said, breaking protocol by not addressing the Chinese official by his royal title. The couch had now been removed. Genghis sat in an elaborately decorated chair on a raised dais. A variety of meats and delicacies, together with skins of rice wine, qumys and airag, were laid out on coffers. Now forty-five years old, he still retained the physique of a man half his age. He wore his usual attire of felt boots, trousers and a fur-lined coat, gathered at the waist with a leather belt that held his scimitar sword and knife. Two of the elite guard stood in the shadows of the tent, a further ten were positioned outside. 'I have decided that I will no longer submit to the Jin Emperor. I will no longer pay the annual tribute, and I renounce the title Wang Kin once gave me, for which I have no further use.'

'This is a serious matter, Ja'utquri,' Yun-chi said, continuing to use the Chinese title. He looked around the tent for a seat so that he could sit down. He only stood in the presence of the Emperor.

'It *is* serious, Yun-chi,' Genghis replied, but it was clear from Genghis' grin and the sparkle in his eyes that he did not consider it serious at all. 'I have kept your northern border safe for many years. And I have paid the Emperor's tribute each year for this privilege.' He paused, taking a drink of qumys. He signaled a slave to bring him a tray of food from which he helped himself. He did not offer Yun-chi either food or drink as custom dictated. 'Your northern border is now no longer safe.'

'If you follow your words with actions, Ja'utquri, there will be dire consequences,' Yun-chi stated matter-of-factly. 'The Tartars also refused to pay their tribute. As you are well aware, we sent an army against them.'

'The Tartars were a small tribe, in comparison to the Mongol nation that now exists, Yun-chi. Do you think you have an army large enough to attack us and force the payment of a measly tribute?'

'You know I am sure, that payment of the tribute is not the issue here. It is your disobedience and lack of respect for

me, and as such, the Emperor. If we allow this insult to go unpunished, then all other vassals that pay tribute to the Emperor, may think they can insult him and refuse to pay, as you are doing.' Yun-chi shifted his weight from one leg to the other, and looked at the trays of food. 'It is, of course, the Emperor's decision, but I feel sure that he will want to make an example of you.'

'Tell Emperor Zhangzong, I look forward to seeing him,' Genghis said, the smile still lingering on his face, his eyes dark and piercing. 'You should remember, however, before you throw any more threats in my direction, that if we are now at war, then I could have you executed where you stand, and help myself to your valuables and the tributes you have already collected.'

'I shall take my leave then, if you have no objections?' Yun-chi asked.

Genghis slid a sliver of beef into his mouth and took a drink of qumys. He saw beads of sweat break out on Yun-chi's forehead, the small marmot-like eyes darted about the tent.

'I have no doubt, the Emperor will want to be at the head of his army, so I am sure I will see him soon on the battlefield,' Genghis said. Both he and Bogorju laughed out loud as Prince Wei turned, and hurriedly shuffled out of the tent.

'If we weren't at war with the Jin before, my lord,' Bogorju said. 'I am sure we are now. You could see the anger and embarrassment on his face, even though he tried hard to hide it. You humiliated him. He will now go back and persuade the Emperor to send an army against us.'

'And we will be waiting for them,' Genghis replied.



Genghis sat astride his horse about to inspect the camp with Bogorju and Jelme when an Ongut messenger, spraying dust everywhere, came to a halt in front of them. Looking filthy and tired, he jumped off his mount and prostrated himself on the ground.

'Speak,' Genghis said.

The messenger pushed himself up to a kneeling position. 'My lord, Tegin says that the Tangut Emperor, Huanzong, has been murdered. A new Emperor, Xiangzong has taken his place.' Genghis had permitted Alaqush Tegin to return with his tribe to the lands bordering the Jin territories and the Tangut in Xi Xia. His orders were to keep watch on the border and report anything unusual.

'When did this happen?' Genghis asked.

'The day before I left, my lord, I have travelled without rest. It has taken me ten days to get here.' The messenger's speech was slurred and he struggled to keep his eyes open.'

Genghis signalled a slave. 'You have done well. Now you need rest, food and drink before you return. This slave will see to your needs.' The slave led the messenger and his horse away.

He turned to Bogorju. 'Tell the other senior counsellors to meet me here tomorrow at first light,' Genghis said. 'We need to discuss the situation with the Jin and the Tangut.'

At first light the following day, Munglig, Churchadai, Bogorju and Jelme arrived. Genghis waited for them. He looked refreshed, but they all knew he had only had a few hours sleep.

'Welcome...'

Before he could say anything else, there was a commotion outside the tent and one of the guards came in. 'My lord, it is a messenger from the Ongut.'

'Another one,' Jelme said. 'Things must be happening down there on the border.'

'Bring him in,' Genghis told the guard.

The messenger was out of breath, tired and unkempt. He prostrated himself in front of Genghis. 'My lord, Tegin has been murdered by his brother, who has appointed himself chief of the Ongut.'

Genghis looked at his senior counsellors and said, 'I introduced the Yasa only last year to stop this from happening.' He turned back to the messenger. 'Are there any more details, other than what you've already told us?'

'I was given no other information, my lord,' the messenger said. Genghis dismissed him.

Genghis said to one of his attendants, 'Go and bring Shiqi Qutuqu to me.' The attendant rushed out to find Genghis' adopted son, the supreme officer of the law.

'This is the problem with keeping the tribes intact,' Genghis said. His eyes dark narrow slits. 'I allowed it, as you all know, because Tegin submitted to me voluntarily. They have now forfeited that privilege. I will distribute the Ongut warriors throughout the army. They still have tribal loyalties, which appear to be stronger than their loyalties to me.' He stood up and began pacing. To another attendant he said, 'Go and find Jebe and Boroqul. Ask them to come to me now.'

'Father,' Qutuqu said, hurrying into the tent. 'You wanted to see me?' Qutuqu was a Tartar, who had been found in the Merkit camp as a little boy.

'There has been a murder, Qutuqu,' Genghis said to him, as if he had never heard of such a thing. 'Apparently, Tegin, the chief of the Ongut, has been killed by his brother. I want you to go there and investigate this crime. Without pre-empting your investigation, if you find that the case is proven against the brother, I want him and his family executed, but of course, you know the punishment as well as I. Jebe and Boroqul will accompany you to ensure order.'

Jebe and Boroqul came in then, and Genghis switched his attention to them. 'I am sending Qutuqu to investigate the murder of the Ongut chief, and sentence the brother and his family to death if the case is proven. The two of you are to take your tumans and accompany him, carry out the executions and then Jebe, you are to bring the whole tribe back here as soon as possible. I will distribute the warriors throughout the army once they arrive. Boroqul, you will set up camp on the border and wait for us there. We will be attacking the Tangut as soon as Jebe brings the Ongut back here, but you are not to speak of this to anyone, not even your men. Send messengers if there is any Jin or Tangut activity.'

The three men saluted and left to carry out their orders. Genghis continued the meeting with his senior counsellors.

'As you heard me say, I have decided to attack the Tangut,' Genghis repeated.

‘Why the Tangut instead of the Jin?’ Bogorju asked. ‘We have just refused to pay the tribute and declared war on the Jin, won’t they now attack us?’ The other three looked at Genghis, surprise evident on their faces at this new information.

‘It will be many months before Prince Wei returns to Jin territory. He still has a number of tributes to collect. Also, the Jin are in no position to wage war on anyone. They have financial difficulties. The Yellow River has changed its direction to the sea, which has caused famine in many parts of their territory. The people are starving to death.’ Genghis noticed the surprised looks on their faces. ‘I said at the Quriltai last year, we must move beyond the steppe. The men are already bored with herding and milking. They want plunder, and Xi Xia is a rich country. The Tangut Emperor has been murdered. A man called Xiangzong, has taken his place. It is an ideal time to attack them.’ He paused, and a smile creased his face. ‘Whilst you were spending the winter keeping warm with your many wives, I have been gathering intelligence on both the Jin and the Tangut, and planning our next move.’

‘And very warm my many wives were too,’ Churchadai said to a roar of laughter.

‘If we attack the Jin,’ Genghis continued, ‘the Tangut may very well side with them against us. There is a peace treaty between them. They may think that they will be next. If we attack the Tangut, however, I don’t think the Jin will come to their assistance. They will be happy with a weakened Tangut. Also, we do not want the Tangut offering any threat to our rear and flanks when we attack the Jin, so we must first make the Tangut submit. They are the weakest of the three Chinese states. Lastly, we can call on their soldiers to fight the Jin.’

‘How do you know all of this, my lord?’ Munglig asked.

‘I have been acquiring intelligence on Xi Xia for many months.’ Genghis said. ‘Men from the Kereit, Ongut, Naiman and Uighur have all been questioned. They previously had relations with that kingdom. The Muslim merchants who travel through those territories are also a valuable source of new information. I have spoken with many of them at length. The murder of Tegin, means that we will now be delayed until Jebe returns with the Ongut.’

‘The Ongut warriors will be travelling the distance twice,’ Jelme pointed out. ‘It might have been better to leave the warriors where they were, and then collected them on the way.’

‘I gave that some thought,’ Genghis responded. ‘But then they would have remained in tribal formations during the Xi Xia campaign. I didn’t want that. The length of time between the murder and the punishment would have been too long. The fact that they are travelling twice the distance will give them some indication of my anger at this crime. They will be told when they arrive, that I expect no less of them than their comrades, regardless of the distance they have travelled. The tuman commanders will be ordered to punish them if they fall short of what we expect.’ He looked at Jelme, and said, ‘Let the tuman commanders know that there will be a war council in one month’s time at midday. Say nothing about our destination.’



Jebe hurried into his tent. Cheren, now nearly three years-old came running towards him. He scooped her up in his arms. ‘Hello princess, and what have you been doing this morning?’ he asked, kissing her on the forehead.

‘Helping mummy with the work, daddy,’ Cheren gurgled, wrapping her arms around his neck. Her dark plaited hair brushed his face. Jebe had never seen anyone with such big brown eyes. He knew that she would capture the hearts of many men as she grew to womanhood.

‘You’re a good girl,’ he said, putting her down. She scampered off to finish her chores.

‘Why have you returned so early, my love?’ Sharia asked him, busy brushing the carpet. Particles of dust danced in the shafts of sunlight that lanced through the doorway.

‘I am leaving,’ he said softly, moving close to her. ‘The men are assembling as we speak. I must join them soon.’

Putting the broom down, she looked up at him and said, ‘How long will it be this time?’

He drew her to him. 'I will be gone about six weeks. As soon as I return, I will be leaving again, probably for a year or more.'

'Why can't he be content with what he's got?' she said, tears welling in her eyes. 'Sometimes, I feel as though I'm not married at all.'

Jebe knew that she was emotional with her pregnancy. She was due to give birth in sixth month's time, and he would not be here. She will simply have to manage without me, he thought. 'We have talked about this many times, my love. I am a warrior. That takes me away from home. What would you have me do, volunteer to stay here and look after the camp whilst everyone else fights for the glory of the Mongols?'

'Yes,' she said. 'Let the others die, but not you. I wish you were a shaman so you could stay here with your ugly, fat, pregnant wife, and your beautiful daughter.' Jebe knew very well that Sharia was far from ugly. She still retained her slim sensuous figure, even though her stomach and breasts were now heavy and swollen. Many of his warriors would happily have changed places with him to possess his beautiful wife.

'If I was a shaman,' he challenged her, but he knew it was a pointless discussion, 'you and I would not be married. You want a warrior, someone who can protect you, someone who is strong and can father many children.'

'You say that as if you will be here to protect me, as if you will be here to father many children, but you won't.' She pushed him away and looked at the floor. 'You will be somewhere else, and I know what you'll be doing whilst you're away. Don't deny it. The other wives talk you know. I expect the steppe is littered with broken-hearted women and your many children. I know men have needs when they're away.'

He knew that she was lashing out at him as a defence against his leaving, knew that it was no good trying to console her whilst she was like this. Whatever he said would be wrong, she would twist his words to mean something other than he intended. 'You know that's not true, Sharia.' His words were soft, comforting. He drew her to him again, held her tight, and kissed her. She wrapped her arms about him, pressing her face against his chest.

Tim ELLIS

‘Be careful,’ she said, turning away to hide her tears. She grasped the broom stabbing it down on the carpet.

He bent and picked Cheren up again. Kissing her cheek he said, ‘Goodbye, beautiful.’

‘Goodbye, daddy.’ He put her down. ‘Be careful,’ she said, smiling her beautiful smile.

He chuckled at his precious daughter copying her mother. At how lucky he was. He ducked through the doorway with a heavy heart.

