

# *ASSAULT ON THE EMPEROR*

The Personal Journal of Mohark

*A companion story for **Changeable Worlds: Deliverance** by Bart King*  
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## *Introduction*

During the Fourth Era, the war between the exiled, militaristic Kaidis and the turbulent, intelligent Shaler is in full swing. This fight has been on-going for over a hundred years and seems to be unending. But even though the Shaler isolate themselves inside their vast, sprawling and heavily defended city known as Thoridon, their position in the war is slowly diminishing.

The Kaidis have eroded their high walls, reduced the numbers of their Synth-powered Warlock Council, and plunged the city into terror, fearful that it is only a matter of time before the walls eventually fall.

Emperor Vimlor leads the Shaler with a wife known as Avornia at his side. The problem is that while Vimlor deplores the Kaidis — who at the beginning of the Era were Shaler themselves — he is now passive to the situation and well-liked by the community. Recently fathering a son, known as Solus, this infant is now his pride and joy.

But when King General Xarash III of the Kaidis heard this news, he believes that this would be an excellent time to strike the Shaler — and strike them hard. Creating a small team from a few of the best warriors from the First Division and Xarash IV, the king's own son, he knows that if the popular figure of Vimlor is removed from the picture, the Kaidis would have significant advantage over their despised former people.

Mohark, one of the best swordsmen in the First Division, was given the uncomfortable task of keeping a journal about the entire assault. All Kaidis suffer from an affliction known as the Bloodrage, which increases their strength and size when compared to the Shaler. But his hands are inflated because of it and this makes the simple task of holding a pen frustrating for him. Nonetheless, Mohark is known for a good eye and tongue. His words and actions will go down in both Kaidis and Shaler history.

## *Day 142 of year 103/4E*

I've been given this stupid task of writing about what we do in our new mission. The lieutenant told me that I should do it. He said it was for the good of the Kaidis and that I should just write about what we are going to do and what we did. Just holding this dumb pen in my hand is hard enough. We are to make history or something. I don't know what that means.

So, three of us from the First Division have been grouped together to undertake a completely mad idea. We are Xarash IV, Stomar and I. Xarash is probably going to be the King General someday, Stomar keeps himself to himself, and me — best swordsman in the Division!

The mission sounds simple: to plan, perform and return from killing Emperor Vimlor of the Shaler.

What makes the Stronghold think we can do this? Maybe it's the fact that the king's son is on the team. Some kind of test, I don't know. We don't really know much about each other. The lieutenant says we are an unstoppable force and will prove ourselves victorious.

If he's so sure, why doesn't he come along as well?

## *Day 145, 103/4E*

Almost forgot about this, but the lieutenant decided to shove his sword into my armour saying he'll press harder if I forget again. Cheeky bastard, he wouldn't dare. I don't think he will even read this, but those in the Doctor's Division do like their stories, and that's who I've been told to write this for.

Who knows what they're planning in that well-guarded wooden building in the courtyard, just outside of the Stronghold? I know the grunts in the Second Division are keen to slam their blades against them for their strange ways. But those of us in the First Division really don't care what they do. They are not

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fighters; they do not see the war against the Shaler like us. Despite all of this, the King General believes in them. At least the strange disappearances of grunts have stopped.

Anyway, this morning Stomar and Xarash were discussing what the plan should be in the courtyard. I just waited, passing the time watching others or over-polishing my sword as my input wasn't required. It seems those two have some kind of existing relationship, but I don't know what or how.

They chatted for a few hours and eventually called me over. Xarash seems to be aware of my skills as he was asking about all kinds of tactics. The plan is loosely based on the idea that we should break into Thoridon when it is night. Unlike at the Stronghold, the Shaler city is much further north meaning the sky falls pitch black and we should be able to use that to our advantage.

But I was quick to point out that none of us have any idea about Thoridon itself. Sure, we've seen it from a distance, or even gutted a few of the Shaler at the walls, but we haven't actually been inside. Even if we did get in, we wouldn't have any idea where to go.

Xarash also completely overlooked the Warlock Council — he underestimated their capability, saying that they were no match for a swung axe. While this is true, I reminded him that he would need to get close enough in the first place. They're Synth-powered ability to blow the very wind back in your face or set fire to the ground around you makes that difficult.

If you want my opinion, the whole mission is a joke. I really don't believe that we can do this — three of us to take on the Warlock Council and whatever stands between us and the emperor? No fucking chance. One sight of us and they would raise the alarm so fast we would hardly get inside the gates.

Stomar has revealed a background of working in the Engineers Division and has a few favours to take advantage. He has a theory involving the black Luvolic rock that they are constantly mining from the volcano that the Stronghold is built into. He didn't tell me what exactly. As I write this, there is a lot of nodding heads as they are currently talking about something. Suppose I'll find out soon enough.

### *Day 146*

We're still very much into the planning phase of everything. But Stomar has revealed what he was discussing with those Engineers. By crafting a specific kind of armour, made from thin plates of the Luvolic rock affixed to some cloth, we can use this to make us practically invisible in the darkness. Keeping to the shadows, the unpolished rock shouldn't draw our attention to any Shaler.

It's pretty risky though, and still doesn't solve the problem of getting inside Thoridon. Even if we make it to the outer walls, they're not exactly just going to open the gates and let us walk in. Also, my problem with what's been decided so far is that we can't take our usual weapons. I mean, what if we're spotted? Some idiot Shaler will yell to the walls and we would be defenceless.

There's also the other detail about knowing where Emperor Vimlor will be. Xarash has suggested that I head out north across the deserts to Outpost Ora. He reckoned that if I speak with Captain Selak there, he'll be able to provide vital information. He wouldn't explain why he thought this, but I'm in no position to argue with Xarash — his father might gut me with that huge axe of his — so I'll head out after some rest.

### *Day 147*

I took a ride up here to Ora on the back of a Knoria that delivered half of its water shipment to the Stronghold before turning north to the outpost. The driver of the wind-blown vehicle was strangely excited that I did so — he revealed to have a great admiration for the First Division. He kept asking all kinds of stupid questions; the answers I didn't give. I just stared out over the swirling sands of the deserts.

But that was pretty much the highlight of this visit so far. It's so boring here. There are no parading fighters up and down the courtyard, no hammers banging against anvils, no constant shouting. The only sound over the wind whistling through my armour is mallets hitting posts — four Engineers seem to move windbreakers every time a bit of sand flies in to the outpost's barracks.

Upon my arrival, I met Captain Selak. He is the only representative of the First Division stationed here. It always struck me to be strange that hardly any warriors are available and the barracks are mostly empty. Selak tells me that it is because the Shaler don't care that Ora is positioned on the border of their land. In the few years he has been in charge, not one curious Warlock or lost Shaler from Thoridon has approached.

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I asked him various questions: what inner Thoridon was like; if he knew the movements of Emperor Vimlor; how strong a resistance the Warlock Council would be at night. The answers I got were disappointing — I don't know what Xarash was thinking, he doesn't really know anything.

He said that he had the pleasure of entering Thoridon via the eastern gate with his time in the Second Division. But it was a short visit because his captain called for retreat. What he describes were rows of living accommodations with weird colourful plants outside; a large, dominating presence of the Temple of Ramor at the centre; and a “fearful” sight of a row of black-cloaked Warlocks heading for their position.

No wonder he is reduced to sorting papers and other remedial tasks out here. That kind of attitude is not what makes the Kaidis the dominating force we are!

As I turned to leave the barracks, he said he anticipated a visitor later in the day. His tone of voice suggested that I should probably meet him, even though he didn't specifically say so. I'm not sure what that means or what really goes on out here. I'll wait and see.

### *Day 147, evening*

It seems this was the visitor I needed to meet. What I don't understand is how Xarash knew to find something interesting at this place?

Not long after I wrote my last entry, there was a heavy rumbling noise with thundering footsteps approaching from behind the wide and sturdy gates that lead into Shaler territory. Upon hearing this, I immediately thought that this was the time the Shaler decided to attack the outpost. Readying my sword and just about to command the Engineers to open the gates, Selak held me back.

“Don't,” he said. “This is our visitor.”

As he and I stepped outside of the barracks, I saw the Engineers calmly opening the gates without needing any instruction. It was as if everyone here knew.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Two enormous, white, furry creatures came into the outpost; one was pulling a waggon with all kinds of junk on the back. I've never seen anything like them before. But the captain knew who (and what) they were.

Selak proceeded to welcome these guests to the outpost and seemed incredibly friendly to them. Any other Kaidis and it would have been seen as an attack. I don't know if I should be angry or agreeable.

Regardless, Selak proceeded to introduce me to them. They are known as the Matoh and the taller of the two with black spots on his hairy shoulders was called Toraq. If seeing these creatures wasn't fucked up enough, Selak then suggests I ask Toraq the same questions that I asked him. I was a little hesitant at first but as soon as Toraq spoke in a slow, deep voice my opinion changed of him and I just listened to what he had to say. His choice of words seemed extremely refined.

Interestingly, he said he had come down from Thoridon to do some kind of trade with Selak (I don't want to know what that was all about). So I asked him how well he knew Thoridon. It turns out the Shaler fall to their knees over him. Some priest at the Temple of Ramor is apparently really friendly with him.

Based on this response, I demanded to know where the emperor would be at night. This seemed like a straight-forward request, but this beast gave me a stare that felt like it cut through my head. I don't know what that meant, so I drew my sword and roared at him. Selak then swung himself onto me to prevent whatever I was going to do next and I hit the ground.

Toraq came over and offered to pull me up from the sand, outstretching a hairy hand. I was a little suspicious, but since he does seem to pose little threat, I reached out, accepting his offer. I am no means light, with my heavy Luvolic armour, sword and muscled frame, but he pulled me up without effort.

He and Selak retired to the barracks with Toraq assuring me he would speak to me again afterwards. I didn't follow — I don't want to know what those two are up to.

If the lieutenant is reading this, you should do something about the captain. He is clearly mad.

### *Day 148*

The outpost is weird. It almost got dark in the evening which made it difficult for me to get some rest. I'm too used to the deep rumble from the molten core of the volcano at the Stronghold. Selak and the other Engineers obviously don't have a problem, but for me it seems to be too close to Shaler life — very uncomfortable.

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Anyway, Toraq and the smaller one (who won't speak at all) are still here, but as I write this, appear to be getting ready to leave the outpost. I don't like Selak, especially after interfering with my will yesterday but he probably outranks me in the First Division. Maybe that's why I don't like him.

I don't know where the Matoh are going but the waggon has been turned around, meaning they are either heading into the forests of Mistwood or going back to Thoridon. I'm tempted to jump on the back as they leave, just to find out, but that's probably not going to be any use.

Toraq did allow for me to continue my conversation, however. He was extremely interested in why I was asking those questions. I refused to answer his curiosity, and he was adamant, but gave up insisting when I reached for my sword. His eventual answers, though, did prove useful.

He explained that the emperor would be found at night in his private residence, located just off the central area of the city known as the Quadrangle. In regards to the Warlocks that patrol the walls, he said they are limited in numbers at night, and only rally to increased numbers when the shouts of alarm and bells ring around the city.

Perhaps this information will be useful, but there is no way to confirm these details so he could be telling me lies. True or not, it is at least something to go on.

### *Day 148, evening*

I'm now back at the Stronghold as a Knoria came to the outpost delivering water and have been able to meet up with my brothers. Xarash smiled at me as I told him about the Matoh arriving at Ora. I couldn't believe that he knew that they would come. This made me frustrated because I had the impression he was aware about other details and wasn't going to tell me.

So I sit here outside in the courtyard with a Divisional lieutenant looking at me from the other side of the table, watching me write. I don't think he'll read this. Punishment for having a brawl with Xarash, I guess, which probably wasn't smart — picking a fight with the heir to the throne. Fuck it.

Before all this, Stomar said that he has a team of Engineers working on that dark armour the three of us will be wearing. I'm still confused about what we do for weapons if we're attacked and no answers were coming. To be honest, this is starting to sound like there is no exit plan.

At least it's not getting dark.

### *Day 149*

Stomar has given us the armours. The Luvolic rock when cut into small plates is really light, I'm quite surprised. Each plate is fixed onto some black-dyed cloth and it allows us to move around in relative silence. He was quick to point out a failure — going against what he was originally saying, the rock is not dulled. So if it happens to get near a torch, he said it would reflect the strong light and make us instantly visible.

The plan so far is this: when the time is right, we shall use the darkness that descends over Thoridon to our advantage. Wearing this armour, sticking to shadows and moving slowly should make us hard to see. Then we'll find the emperor, kill him and flee as fast as possible.

It sounds great, although Xarash has been thinking. He said none of us knew anything about the inside of Thoridon in the light, let alone the darkness, nor how to get in or out. Based on what Toraq told me, I have drawn a crude map.

Basically, we just need to approach from the Flatlands and across the open plain to the south of Thoridon. While Toraq wasn't especially specific about how to get inside, he kept mentioning the walls themselves, so my thinking is that they are not as well-defended as possible. Once inside, we just need to head towards the Temple of Ramor. It's tall and white — impossible to miss. This will lead directly to the Quadrangle, and from there we look for a way towards the emperor's residence.

I'm sure it'll be a lot more obvious once we get inside. I suppose we'll just have to resort to instinct when we have to leave. Pretty sure there will be a lot of noise once the deed is done.

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### *Day 150, daylight*

It has been decided — we leave to Thoridon shortly. Since we have the heir to the throne on the team, a lieutenant from the Division wanted to know what we were doing. Some kind of assurance, I guess. But before we got the approval, a little detail that was left out — how do we actually kill the emperor?

This was easily answered by me — each of us will take a small dagger which will tuck neatly into the belts on our light armour. A good soldier is never without a knife to finish off the enemy and so these are in ready supply — my favourite for those personal victories. Once inside Vimlor's residence, a silent slice to the side makes for a slow and agonising death.

As I write this, the lieutenant is preparing a Knoria to take us to Ora where we shall continue to Thoridon on foot. Xarash is standing alongside his father in the courtyard who is giving a stirring speech to everyone. The way he speaks is like we've already returned victorious. I can't imagine what the response would be if we are.

### *Day 150, darkness*

The three of us are now sat around a campfire on the edge of Mistwood, deep in Shaler territory. Well, Stomar has actually fallen asleep — he may have the brains but he doesn't have the stamina; probably spent too long with those Engineers. Xarash is gazing up into the night sky, but I don't see anything worth looking at.

This fire is nice and warm — Shaler lands are really cold compared to back home. I hate it out here. It's just so quiet, worse than Ora. I can't see anything past our immediate area. This darkness means I am constantly on edge. I guess I'm just not used to it.

We began our journey just as it started to get dark. Selak smiled at me as we passed through the gates at the outpost. Not sure what that meant. Walking the road that leads to the Crossroads on the western edge of the forest, it became apparent that Stomar's armour design has made us a lot more nimble. Our normal armour does well to protect and threaten, but this armour allows us to run much faster without being weighed down — and in near silence.

Neither of us has said much up until this point. The quietness is perhaps warranted — based on what Xarash's father was shouting at the Stronghold, it is a lot for us to live up to, and we simply don't know enough about whether or not we will succeed.

There is something in those woods. I don't know what or who it is. Xarash confirmed what I thought — I heard rustling amongst the bushes and also muted laughter. Readying daggers just in case, he and I went to the edge of the light given by the fire before we could see nothing. But there really was nothing.

I shouted for whoever it was to accept my challenge. But the cowards didn't and the rustling just stopped. This awoke Stomar who wondered what I was yelling at. Xarash tried to explain to him that we thought there was something out there, but he just laughed at our suggestions.

But Xarash definitely heard it as well and he threatened Stomar: "Are you calling your future king a fucking liar?" Not wanting to get involved I stood back and decided to write this down. It seems those two are developing some kind of hostility to each other.

Are we getting paranoid already? I don't know what to think. All that I know is that it feels like we are being watched, and the sooner daylight returns, the better.

### *Day 151*

I guess the tensions have died down between the others as I write this from the Flatlands. We're hiding out behind a line of bushes on the water-soaked road that leads up and over a rise and down towards the south gate of Thoridon. Not a single Shaler has been sighted on our way here.

There was a group of scouts from the Second Division wondering along the edge of the nearby river, but they didn't even notice us — further proof that the Kingdom of the Kaidis really does rely on the First Division.

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We're waiting for the darkness before we move any closer. Xarash had a quick look over the edge of the rise and he could see several black-cloaked Shaler patrolling the tops of the city walls. In the bright light of now, it really would be suicide for us to approach.

Waiting here is annoying, though. The marshland around us smells funny. Still, when darkness falls, we shall be launching our attack.

### *Day 151, darkness*

I don't fucking believe it! Xarash has decided that we're not attacking now! The Bloodrage is charging through my veins, I am so angry by this decision. If it was someone else saying this, I would have gutted them by now.

Stomar just agreed without question. He is so soft — how he got in the First Division I will never know. He is no warrior. And Xarash is looking at me as I write this — bastard.

I can't write any more, my hands are shaking.

### *Day 152, daylight*

We've moved back to the edge of the forest. My shouting last night could probably have been heard right up to the gates of Thoridon itself. I was all ready to cut Xarash's throat and charge into the city, regardless of what could have happened. I now realise that I may not have been thinking straight; too concerned about the mission and none of us know how much of a success it will be. The anxiety is far too great.

But Xarash — as it turns out — is very patient. He has showed no anger towards me and just stood there as I hurled abuse at him. It was as if he expected me to react that way. I wonder if this was part of the test — how we work together for our goal.

Now that he has seen I am calm, he proceeded to explain why he took the decision. He wanted more time to observe what the Shaler do. "If my father taught me one thing, it was never to rush anything," he said. The fighter inside me disagrees, but I can see his point. Battles against the Shaler do seem increasingly to be won by knowledge and less by the sword.

The Doctor's Division constantly talk about tactics and the King General seems to listen more and more to this advice. Perhaps Xarash IV is also listening and maybe he is right.

Darkness is falling as I write this, and Xarash with Stomar have gone ahead to watch the walls of Thoridon. I shall go catch up and maybe now we shall launch our attack.

### *Day 153*

I can hear the bells in Thoridon from where Xarash and I are hiding in Mistwood. A great victory for the Kaidis! We actually did it.

Vimlor is dead. The mission has been a success.

With darkness apparent, we carefully made our way up towards the southern gate. They have bright torches at either side of the gate, but the walls otherwise are shadowed. I saw why Toraq was keen to talk about the walls when we got close — the stones are not even and in our light armour surprisingly easy to climb. We were able to drop down on the other side in near silence and into the shadows.

From there, we could weave between the various small buildings that each Shaler lives in. Many dark paths made this task simple. Following the direction of the white Temple of Ramor we came up to another wall. Decayed and seemingly disused, we scaled this one with no trouble. Luck was with us as it became apparent that this was the Quadrangle — a large, rectangular open area with the Temple to the east, the Senate House in the west and the Synth Institute to the north. This would be the centre of Thoridon. We had so many options for what to do next but Vimlor was our big prize.

Down a side path we saw a building surrounded by strange plants and colours. This was much larger than any of the other buildings we had seen before. Taking our chances, we silently opened a door inside. It was so quiet. I saw strange paintings on the walls, and an array of swords in a different room, but the reduced light made the details disappear.

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The soft floor made our light footsteps make no sound as the three of us approached some stairs leading up. They were quite narrow, but as we listened a noise came from above. I couldn't see anything, but instinct was telling me to see what it was.

Stomar waved his hands at me as I climbed. I don't think he thought it was a good idea. Maybe it was too risky for him, but fear in these circumstances just leads to mistakes. It seemed Xarash had no issue as he followed me.

Reaching the top, I heard a rattle in a slightly illuminated room to the left. Peering around the corner, I saw an infant child, asleep but fidgeting. The room was decorated with many strange trinkets and elaborate artwork of the sun painted on the walls. In the flickering torchlight, I saw what appeared to be a small crown.

Xarash tapped me on the shoulder at this point, a grin on his face as he hastened past me and into the next room. It took me a while to realise that this was where the emperor lived. The child was the son of the emperor. But it was over the course of these mere moments of thought that the panic set in.

An agonised yell echoed around accompanied with the laughter of Xarash. Hysterical shrieking followed from a woman. The child I was looking at awoke and started to scream. This woman immediately began shouting strange words. I couldn't understand them — it wasn't Shaler speak.

It was then that Xarash flew around the corner yelling for us to retreat. The room behind him became filled with unusual lights before I turned to run down the stairs and outside along with Stomar.

As we turned into the Quadrangle, it became apparent that our presence was obvious, with alarm bells ringing and Warlocks getting into position around the city walls. All three of us with daggers in hand didn't stop running.

We ran past the Temple and out an opened gate, but this was where we met the resistance of the Shaler. It was a trap — they were waiting for us on the other side. Xarash was fast and ripped through one of the Warlocks and I followed close behind.

Stomar didn't make it — I suppose his lack of strength showed and he fell to a Warlock's power. As I was able to escape around a corner in the narrow roads of the city, I saw Stomar disappear into the air; incinerated, as if he was taken by the volcano back home.

But our luck continued as we reached the edge of the city and fled down an eastern road out of Thoridon which later turned out to lead straight into Mistwood, where I write this now. Both Xarash and I are exhausted. We have never run so hard and so fast before.

### *Day 154*

The King General just congratulated us both. He had nothing to say for Stomar. I don't know what the future holds now, but a number of Doctor's are asking to see me and discuss the situation at Thoridon, and also what I saw. Some kind of strategy, but they're not telling me what.

My lieutenant is waiting for me to hand over this account. I'm pleased that I did write this and I no longer see it as stupid. Never really saw the value of all this paperwork before, but in the years to come, I'm sure it'll be useful.

I just overheard that the King General is looking to lead an army against Thoridon, saying that the Shaler are weakened. It seems that he is extremely serious.

Perhaps I will go polish my sword in anticipation.