

The path was indeed narrow and steep, getting moreso toward its summit. Each side had agreed to bring only fifty men, who were strung out in a long line on each side of the apex. Before departing, Agapenor had spent much time conferring with his trusted circle of Arkadians, who had grown up in wild mountains and were happy to be back in a similar environment. However, when Agapenor took the lead followed by Diomedes and his orderly with Teukros not far back, there were no Arkadians included in the group.

Saba had never heard of envoys or both sides in battle agreeing to a truce. Diomedes patiently explained that sending envoys, heralds, or messengers from king to king even during a battle was an honourable tradition of war. Truces were considered sacrosanct. To break a truce was to insult the gods, especially Hermes the messenger god in the case of the Danaans, and their wrath was thought to soon follow. Diomedes told Saba how he himself had killed Pandaros after the Trojan bowman had broken a truce called for single combat by wounding the Akhaian combatant, King Menelaos, with an arrow. "My javelin went through his chest," Diomedes stated. But killing envoys and breaking truces had become a tradition of its own and was often part of the battle legends recited over the evening fire, mostly denigrated but not always.

The kings appeared in front of their troops, each side at the summit of the path, all leaders relinquishing their weapons. Old King Kush was over sixty and his beard and hair were white, but he had a noble visage with far-seeing eyes. He walked with a staff that Diomedes guessed was usually a spear. Colourful wool robes, tied at the waist were wrapped about him, but instead of a crown he had only a shepherd's felt cap with tassels on its edges.

Since Agapenor fancied himself a king he strode forward first, brushing passed Diomedes, removing his bronze-plated war helm. "Greetings, your Majesty. I am Agapenor of Arkadia. I am the king of this hoard of Akhaians."

King Kush looked beyond him to Diomedes, who, helmet under his arm, nodded a greeting. King Kush spoke loud in rough Danaan-Hellenic in a voice that carried to all: "To my people, I am King Kushmeshusha. I have been the King of Kyprios since I was just out of boyhood, but then we dwelt in Morphou and Enkomi. I was a brother of Great Kings from Hattusili III of the Hatti to the eternal Pharaoh Ramses II. Ugarit was my vassal-kingdom. Then others came, your people and the Syrians, merging amongst us. At last, the sea pirates arrived taking the lowlands from me by force and enslaving my people. Akhaians and Syrians saw the profit and joined them."

Agapenor abruptly stepped forward. "Great King, I send you to Hades!" he cried while a dagger he had hidden under his cape was suddenly in his right hand plunging toward the old king's neck. Too late to avoid it, King Kush put up his arm, partially catching the blade and deflecting it from his heart to his shoulder. He stumbled backward into the arms of his guards, still staying on his feet.

Before Diomedes could think, he leapt into action. He grabbed Agapenor by his shoulders and threw him from his feet back into the warriors. Agapenor rose to his feet with a lance someone had given him. "*Hades!*" he hissed. "It just came back to me. The word put into me by Myrrha that is my command to kill you." His eyes glittered malevolently as he lurched toward Diomedes. Everyone froze in the moment, even the Kypriots who weren't tending to their king.

But Saba did not. Unarmed, he threw himself before Agapenor and went into a fighting crouch. Agapenor barked a laugh and strode forward thrusting the spear with both hands into Saba's right midsection. He wrenched it out again to turn the gore-covered point toward Diomedes. But it was too late: Diomedes was upon him. In a rage he tore the spear from Agapenor's hands and struck him hard across the brow with the ashen shaft. As he fell dazed to his knees, Diomedes turned the weapon around and drove it deep into the solar plexus of his would-be killer's guts.

"Don't attack!" King Kush's voice carried through the silence stopping what would have otherwise occurred.

"Stand down!" Diomedes also ordered, only then noticing the troop of Arkadians that had come up the steep mountainside at Agapenor's orders to ambush their own allies if they had attacked Agapenor for killing Diomedes. The Arkadians saw their leader badly wounded, looked at the enraged warrior with the bloody spear, and put away their weapons, too. In an instant, everything had changed.

Seeing everything stood in suspense and battle had not erupted, Diomedes went to his valet and friend, Sa-ba-as-se the Hurrian, whose glazed eyes and gurgled breaths meant he did not have long to live. The blood from his seeping wound was nearly black, indicating his liver had been punctured. He held the boy's head, wiping the tears running from his eyes, and huskily whispered, "Saba, my dear friend, thank you for once again saving my life."

Saba saw who it was and his eyes lit up one final time. "Am I not a warrior, O Diomedes?"

"That you are, comrade," Diomedes assured him. "The gods are witness to your courage. Better than killing a sentry is saving your lord."

With that, Saba released a long sigh and, with a smile flickering on his lips, died.