

The play is set in the Persian capital. The elders from the Persian council await news from the war with the Greeks. Xerxes, the King of Persia, has rallied his troops and gone to conquer all of Greece. He's set to avenge Athens at whose hands his father Darius suffered a cruel defeat at Marathon. A messenger arrives at the Persian court with news of the Greek victory. He recounts what he observed. Athens is evacuated ahead of the Persians arriving and Xerxes is tricked into naval battle in the narrows of the Athens held island of Salamis. Xerxes fleet is defeated.

And on land the Persian troops are slaughtered by the Greeks. Xerxes retreats with what remains of his army. The Persians cannot believe that they have been defeated and they fall to pieces. In their misery, they summon the ghost of the previous king Darius for advice. The ghost of Darius tells the Persians that they themselves are to blame for their defeat, because their pride and their ambition has lead them to disregard the gods. The voiceless heaps of slaughtered corpses shall eloquently show that no one human should puff up inflated thoughts. You see how insolence once opened into flower produces fields ripe with calamity and reaps a harvest home of sorrow.