

## Herald 261

### Chapter 261 Judging The Kingpins

Early next morning was a joyous day for the people of Zanzan.

Because the criminals that had killed the priests had been found.

"So, quick! Our pasha is truly blessed," A few of the moles in the crowd hired by Alexander stirred up the crowd, pointing to the rows and rows of soldiers at the entrance of the temple that held the criminals, in front of whom stood their sovereign.

"Greetings my people," Alexander loudly addressed the sea of devotees below, surprised by the sheer number of them that were there even when dawn was still waking her from her slumber.

"Citizens and slaves," Alexander began with a loud booming voice, "as you know, yesterday was a tragic event for us all." "When I heard the news, I doubted my ears at first. Because I did not believe such acts were possible by humans!" Alexander howled in fake agony as he played the supernatural card.

And then loudly proclaimed, "And I was right. Because right then the goddess sent me her revelations, saying that the battle between her and god Ramuh has weakened them both, allowing an evil power to infiltrate Zanzan."

Then gesturing towards the sixteen bound men behind him, held tightly by the soldiers, Alexander grandly claimed, "And these are the evil men, that the goddess pointed me to. They are devils in human forms, tempted by the ruinous powers and deserve to be burned."

"Burn"

"Burn"

"Burn"

The chant came.

The crime of blasphemy could only have one punishment- burning at the pyre.

Alexander knew that the people would not accept anything less.

But his speech was not yet done,

"These people will burn," Alexander assured, and then issued by raising his fist into the air, "But remember my people, these people are only minions of the true devil. One who now takes on the skin known as Pasha Muazz."

"Burn"

"Burn"

"Burn"

The chant was even louder and more enthusiastic.

If the people of Zanzan were to be asked who they wanted to burn more, the blasphemers who supposedly desecrated their temple or Pasha Muazz, most would choose the latter.

He was hated that much.

Alexander relished that the crowd simply took him at his word.

This would have never flown in his previous world.

Yes, Pasha Muazz was a hateful criminal, but even he was not the devil.

But here, people of authority could spew anything and people would buy it.

And that was the real allure of being a noble- the power to effortlessly convince others, the power to command others, and the power to use others to benefit oneself.

And that was why Alexander's ambition was the gathering of ever more power.

As Alexander reinforced these thoughts, he saw the crowd simmering and boiling with rage, and decided to add some seasonings.

"Here is a letter sent by Pasha Muazz we have retrieved from one to one these scoundrels." He took out a small rolled papyrus from his jacket pocket and showed it to the crowd.

"Here, let me read it aloud for you," Alexander offered.

"Leader Quagg,

I hope this letter finds you well. I'm vacationing in Ankoot for the moment and am well,"

Alexander then paused to comment with a smirk, "The fatso lost his city and province and says he is okay, hahaha."

This naturally caused the crowd to laugh with him.

After the crowd calmed a bit down, Alexander once again resumed, "I know that the city is in the hands of the great Pasha Alexander. But I'm convinced that your loyalty remains unshaken. After all, it was you who helped me bury all those slaves and citizens in my estate, whom I used for devil worship!"

This reveal predictably caused a considerable commotion.

"We had heard the rumors, but..."

"Burn him...burn him,"

"My child...he killed my child!"

"Devil...as the pasha said, he's the devil!"

"Death to Muazz, death to his family,"

The crowd seemed to reach an even higher frenzy.

And Alexander added even more fuel, "After interrogating Quagg, we have discovered several such mass graves in my lands, And in the temple, we have left three such corpses such that you may bear witness to the vile acts performed upon the people of this great city."

This got a huge, triumphant cheer from the crowd, who chanted,

"All hail the great pasha. All hail the righteous pasha,"

This drowned out the impassioned cries of one desperate man, the man being framed for all this.

"Lies...all lie..ughghh..." The man named Quaff, the same plump man that had called Alexander a Jakqum, tried to defend himself but got a square hit to his solar plex by the guards for his efforts, his cries falling to deaf ears.

Alexander waited again for the crowd to simmer down a bit and at last, finished the letter,

"Now, Quaff, I must hand you another task. You are to gather all the gangs of the city and kill the priests of Ramuh. And then frame it on the great pasha. So, when the people oust that great leader, we can start killing those fools again, hahaha.

Regards,

Your master and eternal lord- Pasha Muazz."

The end of the letter predictably made the crowd swear and curse the man and soon, under the urging of a select few suspiciously eager men, began to chant,

"Only Pasha Alexander can save us."

"Pasha Alexander is our savior,"

"Great leader Alexander, fight the devil"

"The ruler of Zanzan- Pasha Alexander,"

Alexander watched the crowd dance like a puppet to his tune and the power felt intoxicating.

'Haha, fools. If you call the power that killed your priests the devil, then he is standing right in front of you,' Alexander darkly chuckled.

He did have some reservations when he forged that ridiculous letter, but it seems that he was giving these peasants too much credit.

Even when in that letter the so-called pasha Muazz neatly and so conveniently confessed to all his crimes and worse, always referred to Alexander as great, not a trace of doubt crept up in the hearts of the general people.

They simply blindly believed it because their lord had said so.

Thus it was only today that Alexander understood why the nobles held such disdain for the common masses.

Because they really had little capacity for thought.

With the exception of a few bright ones, most were little different from sheep, requiring others to dictate orders for them to accomplish anything.

No wonder in his previous life the era of nobility only ended after the advent of the printing press, because it made it much easier for knowledge to spread.

And no wonder the people of the hermit kingdom still haven't revolted.

Information control was paramount.

"Well, let's see them burn then," Seeing the crowd had reached its peak, Alexander decided to push them over the edge and ordered the finale to begin.

And thus very soon the sixteen men were thrown into the huge makeshift pyre, and lit, causing all the men to writhe and howl in agony.

"Arghhhh," They sang with pained cries, feeling the flames lick off their skin and char the fats underneath, giving the air a bad, smoky smell.

And very much contrary to the agonizing screams of these sixteen men, the crowd only laughed and danced and cheered.

"Look...look! Look how the devils burn,"

"Haha...fire...only fire can kill them,"

"Burn! Burn to a crisp!"

The people below found the act of burning sixteen people alive hilarious and entertaining.

'These barbaric, human-skinned animals will do the same to me if they get the chance,' Alexander held no illusions that these people would bend the way the wind blew, throwing the fact that he had given them free food, housing, and medicine worth hundreds of millions of ropals to the wind like a fart to save their hide if the situation ever rose.

There have been many precedents in history both in his world and this world and Alexander had no reason to think he would be any different.

Alexander silently watched the men suffer in the flames, their screams filling the skies every passing moment, causing the crowd to cheer even louder, noticing that people of all ages and cultures had a weird fascination with fire and the people here were no different.

It was not like as if Alexander had no pity for the dying men.

They might have been criminals and scums who caused misery to thousands, if not tens of thousands of people, but still, if Alexander had a choice, he would not have burnt these people, but simply beheaded them.

Because it was said being burnt to death was the most painful way to die.

Some even posited that that's why people will be burnt in hell.

And in some religions, it was forbidden to kill others by burning because such a punishment was reserved for only God.

But Alexander knew that if he did not show such a strong response, these people might throw him to the pyre.

And so these criminals had to die in his stead and so they did, their cries roaring even higher with the passage of time.

Chapter 262 Twins In Action

"The lesser devils are dead!" Alexander loudly claimed as the fires slowly simmered down to flickering embers, getting a huge cheer from the crowd.

"Hahaha, the evil has been vanquished."

"God Ramuh has triumphed."

"Safe! We are safe!"

"Praise the goddess!"

The men, women, and children all breathed a sigh of relief.

Looking at the jubilant crowd, Alexander still had a hard time connecting the happy, radiant atmosphere to the thing they were celebrating over - the charred remains of the sixteen bodies that had melted and fused together to form a grotesque lump of human bones and flesh.

Even someone with a very strong stomach such as Alexander felt the sight hard to digest, even when the people there were no good gang leaders with the blood and tears of tens of thousands on their hands.

But these people did not seem to mind it one bit, treating it as just an apt punishment.

And these were the same people bawling their eyes out just three weeks ago over the sickness and death of their loved ones.

Alexander had noticed this before too, the cultural disconnect he had with the people of this time and it would always intrigue him.

He had acutely felt that the people of this time were very close to their kin but also strangely apathetic to others.

After the burning had concluded, the crowd started to get restless and many attempted to disperse now that the entertainment had ended.

This made Alexander quickly snap out of this remuneration.

He did not have the luxury of getting all sentimental.

For he still had an opera to conduct.

"My citizen," He again pronounced which made all the murmuring crowd go silent and all wondering eyes re-focused their attention to the man dressed in shiny armor.

"I'm aware that though the criminals have paid the ultimate price, many of your's heart still burns will pain and fury," Alexander said this while hugging his arms together as a sign of empathy.

"Many of you worry that such a tragedy will repeat itself."

"Many of you worry that the temple might be shut down."

"Many of you worry that without the priests you will lose your way."

"Many of you worry that you will have no one to lead you now."

"But fear not," Alexander claimed by raising his hands to the sky, "Because Ramuh and Gaia had foreseen this and thus sent with me their chosen champions to lead you lost sheep."

"Now, bow! Bow to the twin saintesses from Adhan."

With this grand declaration, Alexander exaggeratedly gestured to Azira and Azura, who in synchronized steps made their way to the front of Alexander and revealed themselves to the crowd.

As the crowd laid their eyes upon the twin obsidian princesses. for a brief moment, the low buzzing undercurrent of muttering completely disappeared as all the men, women and children looked up at the two goddesses in human form in reverence and awe.

They were stunned at the twins' beauty and, more importantly, at how similar the two girls looked, making many ask themselves whether their eyes were playing tricks on them and making them see two.

To the people, it felt like they were looking at the mirror reflection of a single person as if the gods had split a single girl into a pair to represent both of them.

Azira and Azura stood next to each other shoulder to shoulder and wore an identical golden gown that looked very similar to the Persian Qashqai, and was decorated to represent the highest height of opulence.

Bright, red rubies were studded on the neck collar to display the twin's beautiful slender neck and the heavy decorations trailed down with a cascading pattern all the way to their midriff, showing off their magnificent figure.

Clear, blue sapphires lined the sleeves and cuffs of the dress to accentuate the girls' flawless, chocolate hands, and green, verdant emeralds embroidered around the hemline as if the gemstones were bowing in surrender to the women's dainty, exquisite feet.

Their slender waist was guarded by a procession of thin stands of immaculate golden chains and the skirt of the gown was gloriously lined with various colored gemstones, all shining and glittering under the dawn's gentle golden sunshine.

Azira and Azura had done their makeup identically- with lightly powdered faces, a thin mascara dashed along the eye-lashed and a touch of red dye as lipstick, all completed by a glorious hairstyle, where their silky, silvery curls were tied up in a bun upwards using thin chains of diamonds, giving the exquisite hair an otherworldly sparkle that made it look the gods had placed the clouds as their locks.

They were so beautiful that the crowd had forgotten to bow.

"Ahem! Bow." Alexander again ordered with a light cough.

And as soon as he said such, almost as if the entire crowd's string had been cut, the crowd lost all their strength on their legs and plopped down to the ground in supplication.

"Greetings, Your Sacred Saintess," They cried in a unified chant.

Azira and Azura's title of saintess was a singular, unique title, meaning every single Ramuh believer had, if not seen them, then at least heard of them.

And though the saintess was always a singular post, with their grandfather, the previous king very much doting on the girls, this unconventional appointment was made.

And thus the twins were even more famous than all their predecessors.

As the crowd bowed and expressed their reverence, a myriad of thoughts ran through each of them.

'To think that our lord pasha would be able to get even the twin saintess from the Grand Temple! His powers are truly boundless.'

'Hahaha, with the twin saintesses here, all devils will be smitten.'

'Oh Ramuh! To think this poor soul would have the luck to witness the sacred saintesses with her own eyes. Blessed. We are blessed.'

"Rise, lost sheep," The twin's voices were unlike anything Alexander had heard from them before, deep and imperious, they excluded authority and divinity.

This was the umpteenth time Azira and Azura had done this and in front of a crowd, in public, they were nothing like the pure, innocent girls Alexander had come to know.

Being royalty and according to them, of divine blood, they always appeared dignified and inviolable to the mass and radiated confidence and sacredness.

Most people did not dare meet their eyes and any lecherous thoughts would be wiped out even before its creation, their hearts shivering in fright at the mere thought of such, as the twin's figure only demanded respect and reverence, and to soil them with such filthy thoughts would be blasphemy.

"Flock of the faithful, these sixteen lesser devils that you saw were only the vanguards that the great devil Muazz had sent us," Azira claimed loudly, reading the script provided by Alexander.

This was one of the conditions Alexander had put forth towards the twins in exchange for convincing Ptolomy.

"And a thousand smaller devils lay captive with us, who by the joint order of god Ramuh and goddess Gaia will be sent to the mines for eternity!" Azura joined her sister.

"Praise Ramuh!"

"Glory to Her Excellence Goddess Gaia,"

The former chant was much louder and naturally came from the natives, while the latter was from the Thesian immigrants.

Though many in the crowds wanted the thousand to also burn, hearing that it was an instruction directly from the gods and dictated by the saintesses themselves, all such reluctance naturally washed away.

Azira spoke afterward, "As the pasha has said, this tragedy was caused because an evil power had managed to infiltrate Zanzan."

"But why did it infiltrate now? Why could it infiltrate now?" Azura picked up her sister's words.

"It was because these priests did not follow the king's orders!" Azira answered.

"Yes, that's right!" Azura nodded in approval, saying, "Our Lord Ramuh has joined forces with the goddess Gaia to protect us from the ruinous powers."

"But these priests in their arrogance did not call upon the goddess Gaia's protection." Azira claimed.

"The ruinous powers have recently become stronger, causing even our Lord to form an alliance with the second strongest god, Gaia " Azura very cleverly dressed Alexander's claim, hiding his popular rhetoric of Ramuh being beaten and weakened, to instead claiming that the evil power had become stronger.

'These girls...,' Alexander was not told about this change and honestly, he was impressed by the girls' story.

'They might be totally inept in their everyday lives, but when it comes to religious matters, they are surprisingly shrewd,' Alexander felt he got to know something new about the twins today.

Azira then finished the speech by saying, "And that's why from today onwards, the temple of Ramuh in Zanzan will have a second, subordinate, lesser statue of the goddess Gaia to help bolster the thaumaturgical defense of the city."

As she finished saying so, the twins then raised their hands to the sky and chanted, "May the gods witness our resolve."

"May the gods witness our resolve." The crowd chanted back.

#### Chapter 263 Twins Appointment

Alexander watched with muted awe as Azira and Azura steered the crowd like a skilled oarsman steers a boat.

He had always assumed that the twins had gotten the job by relying on their father, but it seems he was wrong, the girls did have some substance to them.

They might be totally inept in day-to-day life, but when it came to matters of religion and the temple, they were surprisingly very skilled, as evidenced by how they had managed to sugarcoat the matter regarding the addition of Gaia to the temple of Ramuh on their own.

Perhaps that's why they missed working at the temple so much, because they were good at it.

The roar of the crowd by the twins caused a few other thoughts to form in Alexander's head.

He could have written it in blood that if he had said the same thing, if he, as an outsider had proposed that the natives worship a Thesian god along with Ramuh, there would not have been an insignificant chance of rebellion among these people of the city who were ardent believers of Ramuh.

And though it might seem that Alexander had managed to get away with killing the priests and looting the temple scot-free, it was in fact really an intricate dance that required exquisite placement of the pieces.

If he had failed to take rapid, decisive action, if he had not managed to capture a large number of suspects, if those suspects had not been known criminals, and if Alexander did not have a very popular, almost singular entity of Ramuh's faith on hand to bolster his claim, if he had not managed to gain any one of these things, or if something unforeseen had happened in the meantime, things could have gotten very ugly.

And if this was a real case, where Alexander certainly could not have responded so quickly, it also would have been very troublesome to handle.

Thus Alexander believed that he had managed to hoodwink the public only with the help of Azira and Azura's fame and by presenting the people with the culprits within twenty-four hours of the crime, hence managing to assail the perilous waters of potential revolt.

Finished with their speech, Azira and Azura stepped back, letting Alexander once again take the help.

"Citizens," Alexander again addressed the crowd.

"We are aware that though it was the evil powers that caused this tragedy, some responsibility cannot escape the people that were appointed to ensure the peace and order of the city."

Then with a bit of a pause, Alexander said. "I am of course referring to the city guard. It was due to the negligence of a few errant guards that evil could spread so quickly."

This produced a hubbub of muttering and buzzing as many talked among themselves to evaluate the pasha's words but was soon drowned out by Alexander's announcement.

"And hence I decided to replace the leader of the city guards with my wife, Cambyses." Alexander swung his arm behind, gesturing to the chestnut-haired armored lady.

As Cambyses heroically strode to Alexander's side, a few loud voices echoed out of the crowd,

"Oh! That's Lady Cambyses."

"Yeah! I saw Lady Cambyses leading the guards yesterday."

"That's right, that's right, I saw her too. She was the one who brought the guards to the temple."

"She also promised us that the culprits would be caught by today."

"I personally saw her capture Quaff, the head devil."

"I heard she single-handedly killed ten of the smaller devils yesterday. I saw the Jaynim street colored red under her blade."

"Good then! Very good,"

Some of these came from people on Alexander's payroll, while most of the outlandish claims were from the real public.

"Most of you should know my lady by now, but for those who do not, she is Cambyses and she was the one who led the capture of the criminals."

"And she personally found the letter Muazz had written to Quaff, hidden under a false floor in his house."

As Alexander introduced the girl to the public, under the direction of the few moles in the crowds, all the people joined in the chant, "Glory to the new head guard. Glory to her and Pasha Alexander."

Alexander was glad to see that Cambyses's appointment had gone without much trouble, though he suspected it was likely due to the perceived notion that she had shown hyper-competency in catching the criminals and also because she was being endorsed by Alexander, a man.

After the crowd had some time to calm down, Alexander said his penultimate piece, "And as compensation for the killings, all affected families of the priests and priestesses will get a lump sum of fifteen hundred (1,500) ropals."

"Glory to the pasha."

"All hail the magnanimous lord."

"Alexander the Great."

This time, Alexander's mole found themselves to be redundant.

Because the people had spontaneously burst into this cheer.

And such was quite natural for the time, as anything related to money would get the public pretty riled up and happy.

'Haha, what are you so happy about? That money will come from your pocket,' Alexander ominously chuckled at the jubilant faces.

This was so as Alexander intended to use the money he looted from the temple to fuel this expense.

And then, at last, Alexander finished his speech, "As your lord, I am also aware of your need for guidance in divine matters. And we are aware of the perilous road ahead of you."

"Hence from today onward, the two saintesses of Adhan will lead the Temple of Zanzan!"

As soon as he finished, Alexander's proposal got a huge cheer from the crowd, much bigger than the few previous ones, as they talked among themselves,

"Haha, to think we get to be led by the saintesses themselves."

"Providence! This is Ramuh's providence."

"Ramuh looks after us after all."

And with this, Alexander dismissed the crowd, with the words, "Now, that the criminals have been dealt with and your priestesses' chosen, please return to work."

"Word hard to make Zanzan great again." Alexander then said the catchphrase he had shamelessly reaped off.

"Yes, my lord," The crowd replied with a synchronized bow, and soon the temple premises were vacated, save for the soldiers and Alexander's guests.

While the soldiers got to work quickly dismantling the makeshift pyre and burying the leftover human bits, Alexander invited the royal guests inside the temple for some light refreshments.

"Pasha Alexander's oratory skills are truly divine," The Queen mother Seelima opened the dialogue as she made herself comfortable in one of the private rooms upstairs.

The fact that this room had been the location of a grizzly murder just yesterday seemed not to even enter the royal's consideration.

Though it was very normal as the palace she lived in was perhaps the single greatest murder house in Adhania, racking up kills in the thousands, if not tens of thousands.

And it had to be also remembered that Seelima herself was a proficient murderer, with the blood of even a king and queen in her hands, not to mention who knows how many maids and various concubines.

So in fact, for the Queen mother, she felt right at home.

"And you said it all in Azhak. Very impressive," Mikaya chimed in.

She was truly impressed by how Alexander had played the crowd and his particular attention to detail.

For example, given how naturally resistant to outsiders the people of Adhania were, she was sure the speech would have been taken much differently if Alexander had said it in Thesian.

"Haha, where, where!" Alexander politely replied, and then quickly diverted, "I think the most impressive people today were the twin princesses. I was truly impressed by Your Highnesses eloquence, marvelous!"

This frank admiration produced a touch of embarrassment from the girls who quickly

countered, "Hmmp, of course. Don't underestimate this princess."

"That's right. That's right. We are saintesses after all."

The two ladies puffed up their chests in pride.

"Haha, of course, of course. This lord was foolish, very foolish." Alexander gladly played along, finding their natural reaction cute.

Alexander had always indulged the twins and such an action had been noticed by Mikaya multiple times.

'Could he be interested in my nieces?' Mikaya postulated.

'Interesting!', she then licked her lips at the potential fun thought,

But for now, she decided to just wait and see how things developed, hoping that an interesting would opportunity presented itself in the process.

Instead, she focused on what Alexander was saying, which was, "Your Twin Highnesses, as you know that our temple of Gaia is due to open soon. And I was hoping you would lend your vast experience in helping us get off the feet."

Alexander said this because he wanted to avoid any immediate clash between the two faiths.

"Hmmm," Under normal, Azira would have thrown back the words Alexander said to his face.

But after yesterday, she began to understand that an absolute 'no' was not possible.

And so, learning from Alexander, chose a diplomatic approach.

Chapter 264 Shordar Cambyses

Azira diplomatically replied to Alexander, "As the pasha said himself, both the temple of Ramuh and the temple of Gaia want the same thing: peace, and prosperity for Zanzan. And thus, though we are currently understaffed, we will try to do our level best."

This was a politician's way of saying, 'We don't want to help you, and this is our excuse.'

Because the excuse of being understaffed was moot as the temple of Ramuh could just let the priests of Gaia watch their day to day to observation.

It was not like the Gaia priests had to be sat down and taught in a seminar.

Alexander was impressed by this very professional answer.

It was much better than the simple 'no' or 'never' he had expected.

'Hmmm, looks like these two are capable of learning,' Alexander could easily tell that Azira had picked this up from copying him.

"That's good, that's good." Alexander showed a very happy, content countenance to the twins' answer, appearing to buy their excuse.

And then, after a bit of banter congratulating the twins for their reinstatement to the temple and urging them to uphold the values of the faith of Ramuh, Alexander excused himself to attend the council meeting.

But this time he was not alone, because he intended to introduce a new member to the council, the first-ever female member, the chief of the police, Alexander's wife- Cambyses.

"Anything I need to know beforehand?" Cambyses asked inside the carriage as they rapidly made the short journey to their house.

"No, not really. Only that I will announce you as a shordar (Baroness)," Alexander lightly replied.

The out-of-the-blue bombastic news naturally shocked Cambyses.

And then, instead of being overjoyed, strangely she began to feel a bit irked.

She was of course not irked by her peerage, she was in fact very happy about the acquisition of a noble title.

But what had irked her was Alexander's habit of dropping blustering news very casually, in a light breezy tone.

"And you only remembered to tell me this now?" Cambyses asked in a slightly frustrated voice.

"Hahaha," Alexander only chuckled, only finding his wife's reaction funny.

"You...." Cambyses playfully kicked Alexander's ankle with her shoes, understanding that he had done this just as a bit of fun and to see her reaction.

"Why do I need a peerage anyway?" She then off-handedly asked, adding, "It's not like I'm gonna leave you to manage some unknown lands," while she gazed out of the window.

She asked this because as Alexander's main wife, legally, it would be Cambyses's children who would inherit his position, and in the event that Alexander died prematurely before his children came of age, it would be Cambyses who would rule as regent, making her a kind of a lesser pasha right now, just below Alexander and above all others.

And so Cambyses could see little use for her lands as a shordar (baroness).

The land would likely be managed by Alexander's staff anyway, so what was the point?

"Firstly because it's very normal. How can the wife of a pasha be a regular woman with no land?" Alexander started his answer.

Cambyses immediately understood why Alexander would say that such would be too demeaning.

"Because in the eyes of the public, the Pasha's wife must be someone greater than them?" Cambyses answered by recalling the lessons Alexander had taught her just yesterday.

"Yes." Alexander nodded, explaining, " If the public thinks that even an ordinary woman can become the pasha's wife, then not only they might not see revere us, it could also make the more ambitious ones start buzzing around me."

"Oh? So it's for you?" Cambyses sent a teasing smirk, causing Alexander to give a wry smile.

"There's also the second reason," Alexander did not bite into Cambyses's trap and moved on, saying, "When I go on expeditions it will be you who I will leave in charge. It will be you who will lead the council in my absence, it will be you who will deal with the day-to-day running of the lands and it will be you who will deal with any and all emergencies."

"And to do that, to command all the lords under me effectively without my presence, you will need a noble title... even if it's in name only." Alexander reasoned.

Cambyses had not thought about it this way and so hearing Alexander's reasoning nodded lightly.

Alexander then gave his last reason, "And thirdly, both Gelene and Ophenia have been promised peerage, so it would look too bad if I did not give one too."

It had to be said that Cambyses did not covet the fact that Gelene and Ophenia had been promised lands.

Because neither of the women's children had any claim to Alexander's position and so giving their mother's inheritable land was one way for Alexander to favor his own children.

"I see." Cambyses smiled and then breezily assented, "Then I will not be polite and accept."

By the time, the couple had finished this exchange, the carriage was already parking itself in the walkway, signaling they had arrived at their destination.

"Darn we're late," Alexander muttered when he saw the few carriages parked on his walkway.

While all his retainers had immediately made their way here after Alexander's speech had ended, the latter's little discussion with the royals had made him late.

"Hmmp, let them wait," Cambyses felt her husband was being too pedantic with time.

In her eyes, it was very normal for retainers to wait upon their master, as opposed to what Alexander usually did, which was usually waiting for the others to come.

This viewpoint was very different from Alexander who, due to the influence of his previous life was always very punctual.

"Sorry, I'm late," Alexander casually apologized as he hurriedly entered the council room on the second floor and took his seat at the head of the table, surrounded by all his retainers.

And Cambyses who was trailing right behind took the empty seat right next to him.

"No, no, my lord, we just got here," Heliptos was the first to butter Alexander.

"Yes, yes, we have all heard the lord's speech and it was magnificent," Menicus was the second to join in.

"The way our lord so casually handled this crisis has been a true eye-opener," Melodias praised.

"Haha, those scheming rats must be pissing their pants after today, hahaha," Menes, the least educated of the bunch, showed his appreciation in his own, albeit a bit vulgar way.

Alexander let these empty talks enter through one ear and exit out the next, and instead introduced Cambyses by gesturing his palms toward her, "I'm sure many of you are already familiar with each other but as a formal introduction, she is Cambyses, my wife, and the police chief."

"It's a pleasure to meet you formally, My lady," Menicus as the de-facto leader of the council members lightly nodded, to which Cambyses flashed a polite smile, and said,

"The pleasure is all mine. We have seen each other a lot, but I'm glad we finally get the chance to properly talk."

This casual introduction happened with all the leaders, and though Cambyses knew all the military leaders, Alexander took the time to introduce the civilian ones:

Diaogosis who in charge of lumber and housing.

Uzak oversaw infrastructure such as roads and sewage.

Harun was the head of mining.

Jazum was charged with making the kilns.

And Krishok was the chief tanner, processing not only hide but also linen for cloth.

"Cambyses will be joining us from today on. I hope the senior members of the group can help her get used to things around here," Alexander lightly smiled as he said, to which came an overwhelmingly positive response, with each of the council members urging Cambyses to come to them for any problem related to their field of administration.

After Cambyses gave a polite reply to each of them, Alexander informed, "For the great achievement of catching a thousand criminals within just a day and preventing widespread chaos to the city, I have decided to reward Cambyses the title of shordar (baroness). What do you think?"

"Fantastic! That's fantastic my lord," Menicus being the most experienced of the group read the clues the fastest and with much alacrity supported Alexander.

This was because Menicus easily understood that Alexander was not asking for their permission, he was telling them.

And the others seeing Menicus naturally followed suit, with Melodias's praise being considered the best by Alexander, which was, "Lady Cambyses's ability to hunt down traitors to the land has made this poor man feel assured. With her at the helm of the city guards, Zanzan will become our fortress."

In this way, at least on the surface, all enthusiastically congratulated their mistress.

And the reason why no one objected even when they knew Cambyses's achievements were a sham was because granting peerage was a right of Alexander, and he needed no reason to do such.

Finally, after being done with all these distractions Alexander finally could start the morning's council.

Chapter 265 Legion's First Target [Bonus ]

The morning council proceeded without a hitch... until Alexander raised one new issue.

"It's been two weeks since we started giving out free food. And the news of it has likely reached the surrounding areas. What should we do?"

People from surrounding villages were bound to soon know that the plague had been dealt with, and food, the greatest commodity for them now, was being handed out for free.

This act of generosity was bound to attract a huge crowd and so Alexander was basically asking his council on how to deal with this impending refugee crisis.

"We should close the city gates," Heliptos, true to his nature, was the first to suggest to greedily hoard the food.

"These people belong to forces hostile to us. As such feeding them seems counterproductive." Melodias also expressed explicit support for this plan.

"I agree. Giving them anything will only be strengthening the enemy," The military man Menes saw was already viewing these men as potential enemy conscripts.

As such, it could be seen that Alexander's military commanders were very much in favor of denying these starving masses even a morsel of food.

Alexander listened to these logical points attentively and then keenly noticed that Menicus and Cambyse, the two smartest people had yet to answer.

And so he sent a curious gaze at the newcomer Cambyses to hear her thoughts.

"Ahem," Cambyses cleared her throat and drew attention to herself, postulating, "As the rulers of Zanzan, I believe it will reflect poorly on the lord if he were to deny his starving subjects access to food."

"I too agree with Lady Cambyses. These are not other noble's people, but ours. They just don't know it." Menicus in his distinctive gruff voice opinioned as everyone agreed as they knew that Alexander was destined to throw these nobles off their land.

"Mmmm, good. That's my thoughts too," Alexander supported, reasoning, "If we shut the doors in front of these destitute peasant's faces, they will have no choice but to join the nobles' side for survival."

"So, some of yours's argument that we should not feed them because it will just strengthen the enemy is not only moot, in fact, it is completely antithetical to our cause."

Alexander's reference to 'some of you' was naturally directed to the three military leaders, who only gave a look of understanding accompanied by a wry smile.

"So, we should let them just eat our food and leave just like that?" This was Grahtos, who had a very bitter tone to his voice.

And this sentiment was shared by many in the council who felt that Alexander was advocating too much in favor of these outsider peasants.

These people might be potential subjects of Alexander, but currently, they were squarely in the adversaries' quadrant, ready to take up arms if their lords commanded them to.

"Of course not." Alexander shook his head at the question, and then instructed, "And that's what I wanted to ask you to solve."

"..." A calm, stifling silence wrapped the room as all his advisors went into Zen concentration mode.

'This is a test,' They all understood.

Alexander had frequently done this and up until now, it was Alexander all, them nil.

So naturally, these much older men were eager to prove their worth to their much younger boss.

The silence lasted for some time, and it was so quiet that Alexander was able to appreciate the various ambient noises present all around him, which till now were drowned out by all the clatter of clamor and din bursting against his ears all day long.

Alexander picked up the subtle sound of a human inhaling and exhaling, the clock-like \*tap\*, \*tap\* of Melodias's fingertips against the hardwood, someone's foot tapping against the wooden floor, the slight rustling of the clothes as some people moved to make themselves comfortable, the different melodious songs of a number of exotic birds right outside the meeting hall, the gentle susurrantion of leaves slowly falling and the inexplicable sound of metal gears whirling that Alexander imagined he was hearing from all the people who were thinking.

"Okay, time's up. We don't have all day," Alexander finally announced, when seeing no one was willing to speak first, breaking everyone out of their rumination.

"Menicus, what's your solution?" Alexander then formally called his chief advisor to present his solution.

"That....hmmm, these people might not want to stay in a plague city, even if there is food," Menicus answered with a bit of doubt in his voice.

"Mmmm, you maybe right." Alexander nodded and then proposed, "But we cannot give them food for free. So will make them work."

"Does anyone else have a proposal that he feels is better?" Alexander then looked around, but no one provided an alternative.

"Good," He then attempted to move along when Menes opened up,

"My lord, I propose that we pressure the leaders around these settlements to submit to you or be removed."

He reasoned, "Clearly they are unable to take care of their populace, so what right do they have to lord over them?"

"Oh? Haha, Lord Menes speaks well," Alexander lightly smiled in approval, understanding that this might be his way of wanting to gain credit.

Alexander then casually looked around the table, glancing at the various faces and these men had been with Alexander long enough to know that this look meant that.

He was silently asking them if they had any objections or suggestions and this time, it was Theocles, who spoke for the first time, "Lord Menes's plan is very sound, but do we know who rules these parts?"

He then expounded, "The plague has sent most of the nobles nearby to us to the various large cities of the province like: Bashana, Kquem, Harki, and Jabel."

"Jabel, which is only 30 km from us, had a pre-drought population of only ten thousand (10,000) and is so small that before was almost an auxiliary to Zanzan."

"And the east of the city was supposed to be directly under Pasha Muazz's control and with him ousted, we do not know who rules these parts."

"So, what I'm saying is that these people are ruling without any authority. And so..."

Alexander gave a slight smile to Theocles's proposal, really not expecting that his archpriests, a man who was supposed to promote peace and harmony would be so bellicose.

Theocles was proposing a much simpler course of action than Cambyses- to simply take over the lands of the to-be refugees as their actual owners were absent.

"My archpriest does speak a lot of sense, haha" Alexander liked the plan, drawing a humble nod from Theocles.

"So we send the military?" Menes had sparkles in his eyes, eager for a fight.

"Well I was thinking of arming these people and then inciting them for rebellion. What do you think?" Alexander proposed.

But this drew a very scary look from Menicus as he warned, " My lord, you must not! If these regular people get a taste for rebellion, they will not stop at one."

"I too agree, with lord Menicus. These people might not be reliable." Menes naturally preferred to use the soldiers under him.

"It will take too long to train these peasants. And so it's likely the plans will easily leak," Grahtos chimed in.

"There will also certainly be turncoats among those peasants," At last it was Cambyses's turn to express her opinion.

"But attacking them so blatantly...." Only the cautious Melodias hesitated.

Seeing his retainers were mostly in favor of armed intervention as opposed to a covert infiltration, Alexander frowned.

But then as he thought more of it, he began to see that an armed conflict might not be too bad, especially if it was near enough and could be done quickly enough.

But the key was near enough because the cover-up might not work otherwise.

"Okay, then. We will use the military to take over the various scattered hamlets, villages, and small towns east of us. They are likely at best ruled by a Talukder (Viscount) and one or two Shordars (Baron) and they will provide good practice for our legion." He ominously laid out the basic plan.

And then asked Menes, "How goes the legion training?"

"We are still setting up the primary tactics my lord." Menes quickly replied, and then promised, "I can assure you that the formation will be ready for a mock battle by New year."

"Mmmm, good." Alexander lightly nodded.

And thus the date for the legion's first test was set.

Chapter 266 Legion Training Manual (Part-1)

Alexander originally planned to train his legion for a year before employing them on the battlefield.

And this was the order he gave at his first council meeting three days ago.

But, unfortunately, it was in the afternoon of the very same day that Camius had submitted his report on the temple and various gangs in the city, which led to him taking the drastic measures that led to the events of today and yesterday.

Hence, though before he wanted to pretend to get along with the lower peerages scattered around the city till his army was fully ready, now, with the destruction of Amenheraft's faith in Zanzan, these staunch fanatics were unlikely to be diplomatically coerced, leaving only military conquest as the only viable option.

Listening to Menes restricting his training period to only two months made Alexander subconsciously frown a bit.

He knew Menes likely said this due to the impatience Alexander had subconsciously displayed and he felt that getting the army fully ready might actually take double or even triple that amount.

After all, this was a completely new type of infantry formation for them and two months was definitely too short to develop any sort of tactics using the new battalion (600-men unit) military system.

After all, even the experienced Roman army needed four months to train a legionary.

Though in fairness this was for training raw recruits and not veteran soldiers like the former mercenaries under Alexander.

"Take your time. And don't be hasty. We can wait a few months if needed." Alexander advised Menes, wanting his general to iron out the details first before committing the new formation to battle.

"Two months will be enough for the men. They don't need to be babied." Menes was confident about his men's capabilities.

"That's good then," Alexander gave a light smile and then brought out a piece of parchment from his breast pocket.

"I wrote the basic training plan for the legion, please have a look," Alexander passed the piece of animal hide to his general, while also giving several copies to others.

"Thank you, my lord," Menes quickly accepted and glanced down on the detailed writing there.

The parchment read:

Each recruit must undergo roughly four (4) months of training before being called a soldier or in our case a legionnaire.

The training for these four months will be broken down into the following three categories:

- \* Weapons training,

- \* Armor training and

- \* Marching and drills

1. The weapon training will include:

- i. Training with the sword, like how to thrust, parry, and riposte while also learning the basic footwork of swordsmanship.

- ii. Training to throw the new kind of javelin called the pilum.

- iii. Training how to hold and use a shield, both in individual combat like shield bash and parry and in various formations like the testudo.

- iv. Training on how to use the bow, especially the crossbow and instant bow, and by the end to be able to hit a target hundred meters (100m) away with a hundred-pound bow (100lb) at least five times out of ten.

The way this training will be done is to have the to-be soldiers equipped with a wooden shield, a wooden sword, and a blunt pilum that weighted twice as much as a real one and be made to memorize its usage.

They will be made to thrust their swords and throw their pila at a wooden dummy or stake, which will help them perform these moves without conscious thoughts by building up their muscle memory.

And every alternative day, the legionaries must practice shooting at least a hundred pound (100 lb) draw weight bow for two hours at a hundred and fifty meters (150m) target to hone their skills.

Soldiers must do this weapons training every day for at least two hours during the entire four months and though the hours can be much longer if the instructor deems it so, it must never be less.

\*The armor training

This will teach a soldier the basics of his armor. This will include:

i. How to properly equip armor- This will include how to properly and securely tie the various leather straps all around the armor, including the cuirass and the arm and leg greaves, and how to quickly wear and dislodge the armor.

ii. How to maintain armor- Each soldier will be responsible for maintaining his gear and this will be a soldier's most important task, just after fighting. The armor that will be given to the soldiers will be considered state property and hence any undue damage to it will be considered vandalism.

iii. Therefore a soldier must properly oil and polish his armor to make sure no rust grows on it, properly take care of the leather straps and buckles to ensure that the armor can be quickly and securely fastened together and in the case of damage due to training or during battle, must promptly inform his superior with details of how it happened and request for repair or if the damage is too severe, a replacement.

It will be up to the individual squad leader (10-man leader) to ensure that all the men under them have their armor in tip-top, pristine, condition and any lapses found will mean fifty (50) strong strikes with a wooden club for all both the soldier and the squad leader, issued by the sergeant (100-man leader).

This punishment will be carried out under Pasha Alexander's name and such severe consequences must exist for an army is only as strong as its weakest soldier.

Every soldier must be aware that a badly maintained armor will inevitably produce weak points along the metal piece, which might cause the death of its wearer, causing openings to appear in the tightly knit formation and putting the lives of adjacent soldiers and even the entire army's existence at risk.

Thus any soldier who does not properly look after his armor will show that he has no concern for his brother-in-arms and should be severely reprimanded.

And vice versa, a soldier who properly takes care of his armor should be seen as a role model who values the lives of the brothers in the army.

This specific training will last only one day, but recruits will be expected to properly wear and maintain their armor for the entire four months duration.

Note: No soldier will be punished if the damage to his armor is due to reasonable circumstances like training and fighting.

\*The Marching and Drilling

his part of the training will be responsible for turning an individual soldier into part of an army and will be divided into four (4) drills:

i. Mental Conditioning Drills

ii. Marching Drills

iii. Formation Drills

iv. And Mock Battle drills

i. Mental Conditioning drills- This is the very first step that a recruit must pass on his path to becoming a legionary. Because this is where the newbie's mindset will be molded from a civilian to a soldier.

In this stage, the citizen part of the recruit must be smashed and ground to dust, and replaced with the spirit of a soldier- that is, a man who follows orders without questions and marches to battle leaving his wives, children, and wealth behind, just for his land and lord.

Thus passing this training step means that he is no longer a man, but a warrior, a fearless being who is no longer beholden to the fear the grim reaper casts.

He must become like a force of nature, capable of withstanding all that the enemy is capable of throwing, from arrows to javelins to cavalry charges and still keep fighting regardless.

And for this transformation to happen, the soldier must be strictly disciplined by his instructors, all individuality must be stripped out until the soldier replaces "I" with "Us". Because that's what an army is, a coherent fighting force made of "I"s that combine to form an "Us".

The time period of this training will be for the entire duration of the training, i.e- four months, during which the instructor will constantly make sure the recruit obeys the rules and discipline of the army while cracking down on any unruly behavior.

ii. Marching Drills- The soldiers of Zanzan must develop the skill to rapidly move from one point to another, in formation and with all the needed equipment.

To be able to achieve this, an individual soldier will be required to be able to march thirty-two (32) kilometers in under eight (8) hours while carrying a 30 to 35 kg equipment load.

Individually he must be physically fit enough to run 5km in less than 18 minutes, do 100 sit-ups in two minutes, and perform 20 pull-ups in 3 minutes.

Such strict requirements are needed because this mobility will be the core strategy of the Zanzan army, to be able to outflank and outmaneuver its opponent and thus- 'Defeat the enemy by simply outmarching them.'

Alexander's manual had reached the end of the first page at this point and so pausing a bit, Menes then turned it around to find the same detailed writings on the opposite side.

Chapter 267 Legion Training Manual (Part-2)

Alexander by nature loved giving detailed instructions.

And since this was for his army, the most important base of his power, of course, Alexander would be detailed to the point of being pedantic.

As the parchment was turned over, Menes, and others who were given the parchment too for that matter, all grimaced the same way when they saw that the other side of the page also had the same amount of voluminous writing, with all the words squeezed together to look like compact rows of apartment blocks.

'Just how detailed are the instructions?' Menes lampooned at the huge swath of instructions as he noticed that the instruction picked up from the previous page and said:

Due to the army's ability to march rapidly and in formation being at the core of our strategy, such skills, though hard to master, must be drilled with the utmost importance.

Thus the soldier must be taught the following things in his marching drills:

I. How to march with all of his equipment- A soldier must know how to march in synchronization with the army while carrying a thirty to thirty-five kilogram weight with him.

He must be capable of keeping up with the army so as not to slow down the entire procession or be at the risk of being left behind.

II. How to properly pack equipment- A soldier must be able to pack and unpack his equipment quickly. He is expected to properly maintain and look after his belongings and must remember to have everything that the high command expects him to be equipped with.

The total list of equipment a soldier must have are:

i. A dagger- A blade around 18 to 28 cm long and 5 cm wide with a thickness of about 3 mm, this multifunction tool is to be used for all kinds of purposes. Other than functioning as a secondary, last-ditch weapon, it can also be used for things like preparing meat, fish, and vegetables during cooking, opening the cork of wine barrels, slicing food like cheese and bread, cutting branches off trees for firewood, cutting strips of linen to prepare bandages, and much more.

ii. A Sword- The primary weapon of the legionaries, this almost meter-long (100cm) weapon sword is to be worn on the right hip. For obvious reasons, It is hoped that no legionary will ever forget his sword.

iii. Two to three javelins- The primary ranged weapon of the soldier, this special javelin, also called the pilla is around two (2m) meters long and weighs two to three kilograms. Soldiers will be ordered to throw two volleys of this special javelin just before contact with the enemy, while keeping the third in reserve in case of enemy cavalry.

iv. Shield- The most important weapon for any soldier. He either comes back with his shield or on it.

v. A Crossbow or An Instant bow- A select few soldiers will be expected to carry these specialized ranged weapons along with sixty arrows.

v. Six Plumbate- This is a lead-weighted throwing dart meant to be shot after the enemy has been softened up and deprived of his shield using the pilla, and a soldier must carry six of them, usually by clipping them to the back of the shield.

vi. Caltrops-This is a weapon made up of four sharp nails or spines arranged in such a manner that one of them is always pointed upward from a stable base, and designed to slow and discourage the advance of cavalry charges, war elephants, and human troops

vii. A spade- For digging and moving earth, like for constructing latrines.

viii. A wicker basket- To carry the earth.

ix. A pickaxe- For digging entrenchments like ditches and trenches.

x. A small scythe- To easily cut through the overgrowth, reap crops and collect grass for firewood and animals.

xi. The full armor set- This will include the helmet, the upper and lower body armor, the four arm and leg greaves, the boots, and any other accessory issued to the soldier.

xii. Ordinary clothes- A soldier must carry with him at least one spare tunic, a pair of trousers, a pair of sandals, a woolen jacket in case it gets cold, a neck scarf to prevent the torso armor from chaffing against the neck, a double-folded cloak to protect the wearer from the elements, and spare loincloths.

xiii. A leather military pack containing a number of items in and suspended from off it. They are:

xiv. A leather satchel for carrying miscellaneous things like gold coins, pendants, personal memorabilia, etc.

xv. A waterskin for carrying water for the day's march.

xvi. Two to three days of food- Though the army on the move will typically have a baggage train of mules or similar to carry supplies such as food, legionaries are expected to carry about 3 days worth of basic food supplies with them.

xvii. Cooking equipment such as a metal or ceramic bowl for eating, a cooking pot, and a skewer for roasting.

xviii. Stakes to be used for the construction of camps.

xviii. A trumpet measuring almost three meters is to be carried by some.

xix And lastly, The Standard of the army is to be carried to battle by one distinguished man.

This specific part of the training will last one day.

III. How to march in formation- A soldier must remember to maintain a loose formation during the march, with around two meters of space on all four sides, and is expected to be able to rapidly form up into close battle formation at a moment's notice from his commander's order. The soldier must always remember to keep coherence with the group and never be caught alone.

IV. What specific trumpet signals mean- The various complicated trumpet signals are to be memorized and burned into the hearts of every legionary, so they can follow such orders almost subconsciously. There will be two mainly two types of trumpet signals- in battle signals and marching signals, and during this exercise, the latter must be learned, which will include orders like to speed up or slow down the marching speed, to start or stop marching, orders to set up camp, to get into battle formation and many more.

Developing these skills will not be easy and thus, in addition to strict enforcement of training and discipline, the soldiers must be given a nutritious diet to build up muscle and strength.

They are to be fed a balanced, nutritious diet made up of around 75% grain and 25% non-grain food produce, two times a day, once in the morning, and again in the evening, though extra rations might be included if recruits are deemed too weak due to factors like suffering from famine or are too poor to feed themselves properly.

The grain will typically consist of wheat, though barley might be issued as punishment, or if supplies are low.

Various types of cut meat such as pork, beef, and mutton depending on the local availability will need to be given to the soldiers twice a week, though alternative sources such as lamb, venison, rabbit, and in some areas, elk, wolf, fox, badger, beaver, bear, vole, ibex, and otter meat can also be consumed.

If meat is not available or in short supply, fish can be introduced as an alternate protein source, which can range from large fleshy fishes like trout and salmon to various small fishes to mollusks such as shellfish, crabs, and lobsters.

Vegetables such as beans, carrots, tomatoes, cabbages, lentils, peas, fennels, etc. as per seasonal and local access, alongside seasonings like garlic, pepper, thyme, and rosemary should be part of the soldier's diet.

Cheese made from goat, cow, or sheep should be made available to the soldiers and olive oil is to be supplied to be used both as a condiment and a cooking supply.

Liquor such as vintage wine and sour wine should be reserved for rewarding good behavior and battle accomplishments and lastly salt is to be included in small amounts to provide the body with crucial minerals and vitamins.

It is the expected goal of this training course that the rigorous exercise ordained upon the soldiers, supported by the nutritious meals provided to them, will produce strong, hardy soldiers, who will be able to easily win against their much weaker and less trained counterpart one-on-one.

#### \* Formation Drills-

This is the most complex step of the training process, and just as the title suggests, it will involve teaching the soldiers how to properly receive and carry out the orders being given to them through the use of trumpets, whistles drums, and sometimes even flags. In this way, he will be taught to work as a cohesive unit in the army.

The training at this stage will include:

- i. How to form a specific set of formations- The soldier must be able to quickly and smoothly form the formation being asked of him, such as testudo, hollow square, and checkerboard to name a few.
- ii. How to identify the trumpet signals and flags for each formation- A complete and comprehensive memorization of each of the unique signals for each of the formations must be achieved.
- iii. When certain formations are used- A soldier should have the good sense to form the formation that makes the most sense depending on the circumstances. For example- A testudo should be formed when enemy missiles are encountered, a hollow square should be deployed in case of an ambush or encirclement, while a checkerboard formation is recommended during pitched battles on flat ground, which would enable tired soldiers to be switched out from the front lines and be replaced by fresh troops from the back.

This training will last three months.

With this, the third point ended and only one remained- The mock battles.

Chapter 268 Legion Training Manual (Part-3)

"Only one point remains," Menes gleefully thought about the end nearing.

The huge, detailed manual that Alexander had written had made Menes feel his energy getting sapped out of him the more he read, and to finally find that the finish line of this vast bundle of instructions was very near was something the tall giant very much looked forward to, a sentiment shared by the rest of the military as well.

And so he quickly turned his eyes to the last point.

\* Mock Combats Conditioning:

This will be the final phase of the training and will take place during the last month.

The trainees will be required to perform mock combats with wooden equipment that weighs as much as their real equipment, in an attempt to simulate real-life battles and give the men some experience in real fighting.

Every alternative day, they will be required to march twenty miles in five hours, immediately fight a pitched battle and after finishing, should be able to set up a fortified camp, equipped with wooden walls, embankments, ditches, sentries and watch towers.

In these mock drills, the soldiers will be tested on everything they learned until now and the tests should be designed to make the soldiers face a variety of situations, such as pitched battles with an outnumbering enemy, ambushes, flanking attacks, night raids, and many more.

And once the four-month training is over, they are to swear an oath of loyalty to Pasha Alexander and after that, they will be proclaimed Zanzan soldiers.

Finally finishing reading the, in Menes's opinion, booklet, the general let out a small, almost imperceptible sigh of relief, 'Ohh...at last it's over.'

Though, the others were far less tactful, drawing large sighs as they slowly digested the huge info dump.

Of course, they were not expressing their displeasure towards Alexander, they would not dare.

Instead, it was more like they were making these sighs towards themselves, as the magnitude of the difference in skill level between Alexander and them was once again laid bare in front of them.

"The Pasha is so great that any praise seems perfunctory," Menicus slightly ruefully said this as he laid down the parchment on the table, the light animal skin feeling heavier than lead to the aged mercenary.

To him, the information contained in the small, rolled-up parchment seemed to be from the gods, because he could think of no other way that Alexander could have made up a detailed and meticulous list without trying the new, theoretical formation first.

Menicus even had the urge to kiss and bow, not towards Alexander, but at just the mere parchment his lord wrote on.

And if this was the reaction of the most experienced, stoic man, naturally the others were much more expressive of their praise.

"Haha, lord Menicus is not overstating. The lord's capabilities seem almost divine," Melodias lightly chuckled and such similar praises soon sprouted off the mouth of all others, primarily true and genuine, with only a few embellishments hung to them for illustrative purposes.

"So, are there any problems you can think of with this training manual?" Sometime later, Alexander asked the thing that really mattered.

"Not at the moment," This rapid reply came from Menes, who was hawkishly scanning the parchment again, explaining, "We will need to conduct some battle drills to see if some things need adding or subtracting, or if the time period for each of the training steps needs to be adjusted."

Menes's very short, almost cutthroat professional answer pleased Alexander and produced a nod of approval from the eighteen-year-old, who said, "Yes, those are my thoughts too. The time periods I stated are only ballpark numbers and they can be molded to the instructor's wish to fit the training regime."

"I will give you the report regarding this as soon as possible," Menes suggested this by himself, promising to let Alexander evaluate the training schedule for himself.

"Okay, give it at your leisure," Alexander lightly replied.

It was at that point, one person raised the issue of time.

"But will the brand new formation be ready by the end of December?" Heliptos asked concerned.

Alexander himself gave the training timeline to be four months and so naturally this former merchant was skeptical about Menes's two months claim.

"No problem." Menes decisively waved his large hand to brush off these worries, pointing, "The four months of training is designed for new legions, for turning raw recruits into soldiers."

"Mmmn, I too agree with Menes," Melodias, who was also in charge of overseeing the implementation of the legion system alongside Menes, supported the latter, reasoning, "We can skip the first and second point, the mental conditioning and the weapons training and even many of the formation training."

"From what I read we need to only really develop the new legion formations and mostly the stamina." Menicus gave his own opinion, emphasizing, "Marching with thirty 35 kilograms of weight is no joke."

"Hmmm...." The reminder about the weight produced a bit of a headache for Menes.

"My lord, ...about the..." Menes attempted to raise the issue.

But was promptly shot down by Alexander who had already guessed what his top general wanted to say, "The requirements for the army will not be lowered."

"If anyone thinks it's too hard, they can quit no problem. We have lots of vacancies in the civilian department and they will be more than welcomed in any of those departments." He then added.

Though this might appear as Alexander providing an alternative, in reality for any soldier to switch from a military career to a civilian sector was generally seen as shameful, barring impediments such as injuries and sickness.

"...As you command, pasha," Menes reluctantly nodded the reply, knowing that with the staunch stance displayed by Alexander, there was little point in arguing.

This hidden unwillingness did not escape Alexander's notice and so he addressed, "I understand the reservations you have, Menes. You fear that the soldiers might find the training too demanding."

And this produced a slight nod from the general.

It was such a case with Menes, and even other military officers, though they never said it aloud.

So Alexander instructed, "But you only need to implement these reforms as I stated in the manual. I will visit the army around the next month and I will address the soldiers directly about any hidden resentment they might have, as well as announce new benefits for them."

"Hahaha, the pasha is wise and just," Hearing the soldiers will be getting new financial support, Menes instantly grinned.

Menes being a former mercenary himself, knew that as long as enough money was dangled in front of them, the men under him could walk through hellfire, no problem.

And Alexander did too.

And hence the scheduled announcement.

After Alexander finished placating the slightly frayed nerves of Menes, another rose to take his place, though for completely different reasons.

"My lord, I had a few questions regarding the manual," Grahtos politely started, and then he pointed to the first page, "In the weapons training part here, it says the words crossbow and instant bow. What are these?" He looked in askance at Alexander.

Naturally, these things were brand new weapons to be developed in this world, and so outside the manufacturers, only a few of Alexander's bodyguards had seen them.

Grahtos's reasonable question also made many others think about what these could be.

They were familiar with the concept of the bow and after reading the manual about how a soldier was supposed to be a decent shot, these smart people could roughly figure out that these were some kind of handheld weapons that shot projectiles much like the bow.

'But then why was it called a crossbow?'

'Where does the word cross fit?'

'Is it two bows stuck to one another?'

These questions were asked by some of the people present.

While in others' heads, they asked questions regarding the instant bow.

'What is an instant bow?'

'Is it something like an instant death now? A kind of bow that kills instantly and hence the name?'

'How is it different from the crossbow?'

All kinds of weird questions and hypotheses swam inside the heads of the military leaders.

"Haha, the crossbow and instant bow are different types of bows." Alexander succinctly replied.

And then quickly reassured, "Don't worry, all the different types of new weapons that are mentioned in the manual will be revealed to the army when I visit them next month. They are being manufactured in secret now and once they are ready, not only the new types of bows but also the other new things like the plumbata and caltrops will be introduced to the men."

Everyone, including Cambyses, was surprised that new weapons were being developed without their knowledge.

Some were even a bit peeved that they were told nothing about them.

But not Menicus, who as the representative of the collective military leaders quickly praised, "As expected of the lord! We very much look forward to seeing them."

"Mmm, I too am confident you will like them," Alexander replied with an enigmatic smile.

Chapter 269 Cambyses's Point

Finally finished ironing out the creases in the legion infantry formation, Alexander remembered to double back to the original topic that started all this- the to-be refugee crisis.

"My lords, we seem to have gotten off track," His voice drew everyone's attention, after which said, "Because we have yet to decide on what to do about the people who enter the city for food."

"Ahem," Alexander's speech was immediately succeeded by a low cough, though the sound was not gruff like a man's, but a high-pitched feminine one.

Cambyses had decided to take the stand, and proceeded, "My lords, I did not say this before, but I believe that we are looking into the refugees all wrong!"

This was a bold statement by Cambyses, but she said it regardless because she thought her opinion was correct and also felt that by proving herself right and even Alexander wrong, she could prove her mettle

to the council and make the men recognize her as an individual and not someone just riding on Alexander's coattails.

"Oh? Then please explain?" Alexander did not mind getting corrected if he was truly wrong.

"Mmmm," Getting permission from her boss, she hummed with a short nod and began.

"My lords, first let me lay out the situation in the near vicinity of Zanzan," Cambyses pointed, saying, "I am sure all of you have witnessed it already by now, but for any who missed it, please recall the fact that it has been close to two weeks since we started giving out the food, and still no refuge has come to us."

"This is very unusual." She then proclaimed, "Usually people flock like ants even if the food is only being sold at a discounted price."

"So what does it mean when free food is given out during not just normal times but during a drought and no one comes?" Cambyses pointedly looked at the men as she asked.

Then she herself gave the answer, "It means that there are not really many people in the near Zanzan. They have all either moved into the city already, left for the further countryside where foraging is easier, or died."

Afterward, Cambyses posited, "Hence, the people you are expecting will be coming from far away places. Places where they are still unaware that Zanzan's plague has passed and likely just started the journey after getting the confirmation."

Hearing Cambyses's very logical argument made Alexander realize she was right.

'I did not think about it like that!' The thought dawned on Alexander as he understood that he had completely misread the situation.

He had thought that the refugees were not coming because of the plague, but listening to Cambyses he began to understand this was not correct.

This was because when one is starving, when the stomach acid is slowly eating out the stomach lining because there is no food there to digest, and when one is having hunger pangs that produce intensive stomach cramps, fears about catching secondary diseases are pretty down the priority list.

And this was very evident even in Alexander's past life, where people would go to unimaginable lengths just to get even one morsel of food.

There were records that even during mild droughts, peasants would wait expectantly for the spring grass to appear, which they would eat with relish by making a soup out of water and grass.

Yes! Just water and grass boiled together and it was many times not only drank with great satisfaction but even sometimes fought over.

And in case of a worse drought, the situation would go from tragic to horrific or descending into utter madness.

Entire cities becoming devoid of cats and dogs were not unheard of, and in some instances, people would fight over not just human vomit, but animal ones too.

Even cannibalism of small children was not unknown in some hellish recounts.

Such are not the actions of a normal human, but a man sufficiently hungry enough, pushed to the edge of insanity by his body's innate desire to live, could be made to do such extreme acts.

And fortunately for Alexander, he had never had to experience this feeling firsthand, neither in his previous life nor after his transmigration.

In the past ten years, even when things were the toughest for him, even when his body was tested close to its limit, he at least never starved.

Yes, sure, there were some nights where he went to sleep with an empty stomach, there were days he would tie stones to his rumbling stomach to fool the brain into thinking that the belly was full, and there were many days he finished a meal with half a belly and feeling unsatisfied.

But in general, being professional mercenaries, though they were not swimming in gold, they were also not starving, and Nestoras had generally tried to provide all the men with at least two hearty meals a day, ensuring the soldiers kept up their strength and physique.

And for that reason, without suffering from abject hunger, Alexander's thoughts drifted to the reason that people were coming because they were afraid, not because they were really far away.

And it seemed that his council thought the same way too, leading them to almost adopting a wrong strategy.

The only exception being Cambyses who took that into consideration and was still speaking, "When these refugees get here, having traveled on average fifty to sixty kilometers from all directions to get here, they are not gonna just pack and leave after getting their meal. They are gonna stay and live here."

"That's great! The manpower issue is solved," As soon as Cambyses said this, implying that more workers were going to be soon available, a very enthusiastic and happy voice cried out from across the table.

This premature celebration was called by Harun who felt that he had gotten the magic cheat code to solving the labor shortage.

But the others, especially the military leader were less enthusiastic.

'That's not the important thing here.' Alexander said to himself, a little peeved that he had missed such a crucial.

And so, when he along with many of the military leaders give Harun a flat, unimpressed look, the man's grinning face instantly deflated, and his flushed.

"Ahh, sorry, my bad for interrupting," Harun immediately apologized, as he lowered his head in embarrassment and quickly zipped his mouth tight.

After seeing Harun go silent, Alexander gently turned his head and gestured to Cambyses, "Go on. We are listening."

"Mmmp," She gave a slight nod and resumed, "As I was saying, these people will probably come to stay in the city. And even if they are thrown out, they will likely gather outside the city and beg or try to smuggle out some food." Cambyses seemed to have given what she was saying quite some thought.

After saying this, she paused for a bit to let everyone evaluate what she was saying, and after finding no one was finding faults with her, she then said, "So it will not be as easy as the previous plan of sending the soldiers. In the previous action, we assumed that the soldiers will be operating near the city's vicinity and so did not take logistics into account."

Cambyses then finished by saying, "But now, the soldiers will have to march around sixty kilometers and likely take part in many small skirmishes. So they will need enough food for at least a month."

"Hmmm, yes, I guess you are right." Alexander traced his chin as he spoke, and then frankly admitted, "I hadn't thought about it like that."

Afterward, then suddenly turned to his council and chuckled, "Hahaha, looks like we men got beaten by a girl."

This produced some wry and devious smiles from the lords, who were then quick to praise Cambyses.

"Hehe, as expected of the lady chosen by the Pasha. She's both graceful and talented."

"Lady Cambyses's insight is truly one of a kind. We have surely avoided a disaster."

"Hohoho, looks like even our great Pasha is no match for his wife,"

Various types of praises and sobriquets were given to Cambyses, as all everyone tried to suck up to their madam as subtly pointed out by their lord.

Though for a small minority, who considered themselves to be over-smart, thought that Alexander might have orchestrated the whole thing, to boost his wife's image.

But no matter what thoughts the individuals shared, they all kept it to themselves and instead focused on trying to find a solution to the problem.

"Given that Cam has pointed out the real situation," Alexander addressed, "The situation on the domestic front becomes on where to house these refugees and militarily on how to reclaim the eastern lands."

"What are your suggestions?" He thus posed this question to the decision-makers.

#### Chapter 270 Land Shortage (Part-1)

Hearing Alexander's question, Menicus took the lead to express his viewpoint of the situation, "I too agree with Lady Cambyses. Even if we assume that the soldiers will be able to march twice as fast as those starving men burdened by women and children and the baggage train, it will still take us some time to finish this campaign."

"Or the campaign might not even happen." Melodias posited, cautioning many of the bellicose men, "We should not break the treaty so soon."

"Melodias is right to weary. We paid a lot to get this peace and to tear it up so soon will not only inconvenience us, but it will also cause our allies extreme displeasure." Alexander nodded approvingly at Melodias's warning.

But this had the side effect on many of the men, especially the military leaders becoming visibly deflated.

All of them save one were in their prime and so were eager to earn glory, booty. and land.

Not to mention it was the fastest way to rise through the ranks.

"But we must do it anyway," Just as the men were starting to feel a bit down, Alexander then, in many's eyes, suddenly u-turned on his announcement and declared that the campaign will occur regardless.

"My...my lord, that's...umm..." Menes went a bit slack-jawed at this mercurial response.

This was because though he would be a bit disappointed if this deployment could not occur, he certainly did not want to commence if it meant tearing up the treaty.

This was also the only real reason they were even debating about using the military and not simply going to greet the rebel with the men.

Without this restriction, Menes could confidently say his army could have curbstomp any opposition the nobles of Zanzan might be able to pose, as the latter's men and material were severely depleted through the drought and the two years war with Tibias, whereas Alexander not only had five thousand elite warriors but also had the freed Cantagenan slaves, many of the Cantagenans that followed him to Zanzan and most of all the twenty thousand slaves he bought.

In all, Menes could wield close to forty thousand experienced men, enough to be more than a match for any army or even armies that the lords of Zanzan could throw at them.

As Menes and along with him the other men too, tried to figure out Alexander's angle, the eighteen-year-old gave the answer, "The answer is simple -Because we need more land."

'More land? But we are not even using the total of our existing farming land!' Menicus just barely stopped himself from blurting it out, telling himself that Alexander must have his reasons.

But even if he could do it, did not mean Cambyses could, who said the exact same thing.

"\*Shake" Alexander produced a gentle shake of his head and then waving his palms said, "Let me show you the maths."

Alexander thus began, "Currently, we have around eighty thousand (80,000) men in Zanzan. And in the next two to three months, all the families of the men from Thesos, numbering around thirty to forty thousand (30,000 - 40,000) will be entering the city. And that will bring the total to roughly around one hundred and twenty thousand (120,000)."

He then paused to see if everyone was keeping up, as for many of these half-educated men, even such simple additions were considered hard.

But fortunately, finding that no one was just blankly staring at him, he decided to proceed, "Then there are the twenty thousand (20,000) slaves we purchased from Pasha Farzah. They will also arrive in around January, raising the total to one hundred and forty thousand (140,000)."

"And after that, comes the refugees. Though we do not know their exact numbers, let's be generous and assume a bit bigger number of sixty thousand (60,000) to make the total city's population a nice, whole two-hundred thousand (200,000)." Alexander pursed his lips as he said.

"And because all these people need to be fed, it nicely brings us to the issue of food," He subconsciously frowned as he said it, finding the number that was produced in his head very distressing.

But one does not just hide the answer because the numbers are too inconvenient, and so he let the men know the situation they were in.

"The two hundred thousand (200,000) men will eat around seventy (70 kg) kilograms of wheat per year. For ease of calculation, we will assume that children and women eat the same amount as a grown man, though, in reality, they each eat half ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) and three-quarters ( $\frac{3}{4}$ ) of a man respectively. And so that comes to fourteen thousand (14,000 tons) tons of grain a year."

Alexander then glanced at the old man Menicus, "My agricultural minister informed me that the lands of Zanzan produce on average two-fifty to three hundred kilograms of wheat per hectare, (250-300 kg/ha). Now with the use of the heavy plow, and using the three-crop rotation, let us say that the yield will almost triple to around seven hundred kilograms per hectare, (700 kg/ha)."

"So to feed the two hundred thousand (200,000) men, we will need twenty thousand hectares (20,000 ha) or two hundred square kilometers (200 sq. km) of land."

This number strangely produced a light smile on many, which Alexander noticed and addressed, "I see many of you are very pleased with this number. After all, in many of your minds, we control around a thousand kilometers (1,000 sq. km) around Zanzan."

"But," Alexander tapped his index finger on the table wood, "Remember that one cannot live off just grain. A man also needs fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, and eggs."

"Thus, given that grain usually consists of a quarter (25%) to at most a third (33%) of one's diet, we can calculate that we will need to at least quadruple the calculated land."

"As a matter of fact, realistically we will need to make it five or six times because things like rearing sheep, goats, and cows, and husbandry of other animals like horses, mules, and donkeys will need more space than planting crops."

"So that brings us to around one thousand two hundred square kilometers (1,200 sq. km) of required land, that is, much more than the thousand we have now." Alexander at last finished, making everyone draw poignant looks.

"And not to mention we can't use every inch of land to just grow crops," Menicus spookily added.

This thought had not even crossed anyone's mind and so they could not even think how Alexander had managed to not only notice there might be a potential problem on the spot but also do such complex maths in his head to evaluate the extent, all while he was talking to them.

In fact, over the past few days, Alexander had displayed such competence and foresight, that the men here had gone from being surprised to amazed to finally numb to it all.

'Sigh, perhaps that's how a god's mind works,' Some came to peace with Alexander's abilities.

But just as they were about to go on another round of puffery, a familiar, feminine cough rang out, "Ahem," It was Cambyses, who said, "I'm afraid my lord's calculations might be a little off."

"....." This was a first for everyone in the room, as Alexander had yet to be proven wrong, and other than darting their nervously or in befuddlement, so one really knew how to react.

'Darn, I'm really out of form today,' Alexander cursed himself as after looking at Cambyses's sly, grinning face, he knew he had fucked up.

"My lady, perhaps you are mistaken. I don't usually do mistakes, hehe," Alexander playfully tried to dissuade Cambyses.

And if Alexander was seriously asking her not to embarrass him, she would have listened.

But as the girl knew that Alexander was just pulling per leg, she too mirthfully chuckled, "Hehe, well there is a first time for everything."

'Could you two couples stop flirting and take this seriously,' Seeing this playful exchange, the others had the urge to shout at them to take the situation seriously, but could only hold it off because it was their boss who was doing it.

And so with placid faces that they managed to keep with great effort, they patiently waited till the duo finished their little recreational teasing.

"Ahem," Finally done, Cambyses then signaled the return to the topic with a gentle cough, and began, "So, as I was saying, the twelve hundred square kilometers (1,200 sq. km) is a gross under evaluation. And there are several reasons why."

'I am gonna get my ass handed to me ain't I?' Given how confident Cambyses sounded, Alexander could smell that he likely had messed up majorly in his calculation, and Cambyses was going to give him a good thrashing.