

Herald 441

Chapter 441 Break Down Of Alliance

The way casualty calculations worked in Alexander's camp was quite simple.

Each of the ten squad captains would report his losses to his sergeant (100-man leader).

Then the tally of the 6 sergeants would be passed on to the captain (600-man leader).

The number of 10 such captains would reach the legion commander, until finally, each legion commander's number would reach Menes.

And according to the numbers submitted to him, Alexander had lost 394 dead, and 1193 really wounded.

The point of the use of the word 'Really wounded' was used because many more were shot and pierced by arrows but had no fatal or life-threatening injuries.

Such men were soon discharged from the medical clinic and so not calculated in the final tally.

So in total Alexander had actually lost around 1,500 men as dead and wounded, all who would not be available for combat any time soon, and many perhaps never.

1,500 out of 42,000 might sound like a small number, but it was actually huge.

This is because while the men were in formation, it was quite hard to kill a large number of people.

The reason for this was because for one, phalanxes were not designed to kill a lot of people, and for two when there were a lot of casualties formations needed to break.

Thus the numbers again reinforced to Alexander that his army had been really pushed to the edge of breaking and showed just how brutal the fighting had been.

"I see. Make sure they receive adequate compensation," Alexander lightly instructed, not harping on this matter too much.

After all, death and injury were part and parcel of any battle, and comparatively, his losses were minuscule compared to his opponents.

And it was these losses he wanted to inquire about next.

"Do you think the enemy has enough troops to launch an attack tomorrow?" Alexander asked about it in a roundabout way.

And for a while, none answered.

They did not want to say unambiguously say no because if there was indeed a battle tomorrow, then they would look very foolish.

And vice versa reason for saying yes.

So Menicus, being the leader, cleverly said this, "My lord, the enemy must have suffered around 20,000 casualties today. So an attack tomorrow is unlikely," as he then quickly advised a precautionary move, "But we can prepare for it."

"For instance, it has come to my notice that we are running low on crossbow bolts. Perhaps we could have our soldiers collect the many arrows laying strew across the battlefield."

"Most of them should be undamaged. And that will help replenish our arrow supply."

It was only with Menicus's mention that Alexander remembered that arrows were not like bullets, which were used up the moment it was fired.

In the case of arrows, it was perfectly possible to use already shot arrows, and it was even a legitimate strategy to simply pick up the arrows shot by one's enemy and shoot them back at him.

"Good, then have the 5,000 reinforcements scour the field for all undamaged crossbow bolts. Just make sure the torches don't attract the enemy," Alexander hence instructed.

And with this short address, Alexander finished the meeting.

Everybody was dead tired and wanted to go to bed after all.

And once they were alone Cambyses posed. "That 5,000 you took out, are you sure the enemy won't attack the city at night?"

It was certainly possible as a desperate move.

But Alexander did not seem to share these concerns, saying, "They are just as tired as us. So, the men stationed along the southern wall will hold. And even if they breach the city, we can reinforce it from here."

With this said, Alexander decided to turn in early, lastly saying to Cambyses, "You go back. The people will feel better knowing you are in the city."

"And keep the news of the victory a secret for now. We'll see what happens tomorrow."

"Okay," Cambyses gave a curl nod and then left the camp under the pitch black night.

While Alexander's camp slept soundly, Faruq's camp was in an uproar.

Or more specifically, the military tent housing all the nobles was.

And it was not because of them discussing whether tomorrow they would fight or not.

Because that had been discussed a long time ago.

No, they would not fight.

Almost all the nobles unanimously had said this to Faruq in as clear a way as possible.

This was because their losses were around 30%, crippling for any army.

Even for Faruq, his losses were no joke, as the Jahal mercenaries had lost around 800 men as dead and wounded, with 600 among them being dead, almost all from Grahtos's heavy cavalry charge.

And though such a number out of 10,000 might not seem like much, for such an elite unit it was heart-breaking, as being a mobile ranged unit, their casualties rarely crossed the hundred mark in any battle.

So for them to suffer eight times the usual casualty number was no joke and the mercenaries could not remember when was the last time they suffered so much dead.

Not to even mention that on top of all this, their leader had also died.

Then there were the slingers and archers suffering a total of around 1,000 dead and wounded.

Ural had lost around 900 men, which had also made the man feel faint at the realization that he had lost about half of his father's most elite fighting force.

And it even made Ural not want to return home because it was very much possible that his father would take off a few layers of skin from his back for this.

Then there was Lord Nibraz and his 6,000 horses and 6,000 men, almost the entirety of which had been claimed by Alexander, so much so that there was no one even in the military camp to represent that house.

In fact, in the short span of two months, that Jamider (Earl) house had lost all three of its incumbent, former and future lord, plus the great bulk of his most trained forces, leaving it virtually defenseless.

And it was to the point that it was even questioned whether that house might be able to exist at all some time into the future.

And lastly were the peasant levies acting as infantry that belonged to a group of nobles.

Aside from Lord Nibraz, they were the real losers of the battle, having lost about 11,000 as dead, wounded, or captured, amounting to more than one-third of the original 30,000 they started with.

These men had no appetite for another battle.

And some of the more vocal ones, like the Jamider (Earl) who had contributed the most men even heavily chastised Faruq, accusing him, "It is because of your greed that we lost so men. If you had only let us retreat earlier, we could have tried again tomorrow But noooo..."

He then mimicked and mocked Faruq, " 'Hold! Hold! Just hold on a bit longer!' Is that all you can say?"

Clearly the entire nobility was very upset with Faruq and would not hand over control of their forces over to him anytime soon.

While Faruq stayed silent and took the blame for now.

But that was not the case currently.

Because that was not what they were fighting over.

No, the reason for their bickering was much more primitive, and it involved money.

"What do you mean you will not pay unless we go to war tomorrow?" Lord Liakit shouted, banging his fist on the hard wooden table and glaring at Faruq menacingly.

And Fauq did not back an inch, repeating what he had said before, "Just as I've said before, the deal was that you help me win the battle, and I will give you five times the amount of your remuneration."

He then turned equally menacingly at the noble, snarling out his frustration, "But we did not win did we?"

"No! Because you chose to run in the middle of battle. Like cowards! No win, no pay." Faruq waved his hands dismissively, showing his staunch stand on the matter.

After the nobles decided the battle was over, and it had been lost, now was the time to find a scapegoat to dump all the fault on.

So they were now busy deflecting the blame, the foremost of who wanted to do was Faruq.

Because there was no way he was going to fess up it was his mistake if he wanted to have a shot at becoming a pasha.

And neither would Lord Liakit and Lord Nyantim, both of whom were outraged at being called cowards.

"What! You dare brat!" Lord Nyantim hence shouted, and then pointed his finger to Ural and snarked, "If your idiot brother-in-law had not run, leaving our flank open, our men would have held! If you want to blame someone, blame him."

"We only retreated because the Jahal mercenaries broke, and Alexander's reinforcements were coming our way. It's all their fault," Ural was prepared to defend himself the moment the acquisition came up, and even sneered, "Heh! To think the famed Jahal mercenaries amount to only that much. It seems like their fame is just that, filled with nothing but empty, hot air."

"We did not break. We withdrew to a safer place," Sunash immediately rebutted Ural, explaining, "That's why we returned to battle even after our losses. Even after we lost our commander. Where were you then, pretty boy?"

The finger-pointing had only begun.

Chapter 442 Break Down Of The Alliance (Part-2_

The nobles slung accusations all over one another, each trying to pin the blame on the other.

And they all rejected the notion that since they fought in an army as one, they all had a part in the loss.

No, they were determined to find that one scapegoat.

And once they failed to reach a consensus on that, the bickering devolved into trying to get the promised compensation from Faruq.

"You swore to the gods, now you are reneging on it?" Ural shouted in fury as Faruq made it clear that he would also not be handing over the mines.

"I said I would give it to you if we won. Did we win?" Faruq hissed back, reminding Ural of the terms of their agreement, before spreading his arms and adding, "Besides, without winning, I likely won't be able to get Kuleef's throne. So, there is no point in discussing that."

Faruq wanted to make Ural agree to a second attack tomorrow by saying this.

"Bullshit! You said we just needed to participate. You never uttered the word 'win'," Ural vehemently shot back, before turning to address the room and say, "Everyone here can attest!" Ural hoped for support among the nobles present in an effort to dismiss Faruq's scheme to weasel out of the situation.

But unfortunately for him, the people involved only returned him a blank look.

The people involved were all having a hard time remembering the exact words used by Faruq, whether it was just participating, or was it specifically winning.

And since they were required to swear by the gods, none wanted to blurt something half-heartedly and then make a mistake.

So, when Ural asked the people who had witnessed the swear to confirm the oath, these very people started to disagree with themselves.

"Was it win or participate?"

"I remember it was just Faruq saying him to attack,"

"Hmm, but I definitely did hear Faruq say win at some point,"

"Perhaps he said it outside the oath,"

The nobles were too confused to reach a consensus among themselves.

The root cause of this was because Faruq had said both, he had asked Ural to attack Alexander's flank in exchange for the mines, and he had also promised Lord Liakit and Lord Nyantim five times their usual reward if they could win.

And now the different parties were mixing all the statements altogether, some out of genuine forgetfulness, some like Faruq opportunistically.

And this event right now proved very clearly why written contracts were so important.

It not only made the agreed-upon deal much harder to deny, but it also made the agreement much more reliable, as even if the other side was fully trustworthy, people many times simply forgot or misremembered.

The same bickering and mud-slinging went on for hours, the men at one point simply repeating their points as they whirled in cycles, with none building an inch, until finally, tired, frustrated, and in a bad mood, Faruq pulled out his trump card.

"If you keep talking like this, I will simply take my ships and go! You can find your own way."

"..." For a moment the group went silent, stunned that Faruq would pull such a cheap and underhanded move.

And then they burst into outraged clamor,

"You scoundrel! We came here to assist you under your urging!"

"Brat! How dare you? To think we were supposed to be allies!"

"*Thoo*, *thoo*, *thoo*, To think we answered the call of such a man."

It appeared the alliance between Kuleef and various nobles of Zanzan was truly over, at least for the near future.

Which was good news for Alexander as he slept soundly in his small tent.

And while his enemy disintegrated unbeknownst to him, the young man still diligently got up at the crack of dawn the next morning, ready to give a fight if it came to it.

"*Argghhh*," But before that Alexander had to first get out of bed, which proved to be a challenge, as he half moaned in pain when by force of habit he got up using his right thigh, which sent a stinging pain coursing through his body, reminding him of his injury.

And so, as a tool of convenience, he picked up the wooden crutch standing beside his bed to help alleviate the pressure on that leg, before refreshing himself, and then asking one of the guards outside to help him put on his armor.

"Let's go to the medical clinic," Once fully suited up, Alexander afterward asked the temporary guard captain Cypus to escort him, intending to visit Hemicus.

He had wanted to visit the man yesterday but could not find the time or energy then.

Alexander made his way slowly to the clinic situated on the east side of the camp and found the hygiene of the place relatively to his liking.

The surrounding had a slight smell of limestone, as milk of limestone, which was made by heating limestone and adding water to it was sprinkled all over the floor to act as a relatively good disinfectant.

The environment around the camp also seemed quiet and relaxing, as the facilities were easily adequate to deal with the current number of casualties.

And amongst the scores of tents laid out in rows, only a few slaves and servants could be seen moving about, probably checking up on the patients and delivering food and medicine to anyone that needed it.

The relative calm around the place also had to do with the time, as since it was just getting bright, and the people were just waking up.

And this made it so that Alexander had managed to avoid most of the crowd, and he was soon in front of a small inconspicuous tent, with the only thing giving away its specialty being the single guard posited outside.

"My lord," This guard who was dozing off in his chair, suddenly in a startled manner got up when he heard footsteps approach and was almost mortified to see it was Alexander.

Falling asleep during one's watch duty was a court martial offensive.

But Alexander was not in the mood to prosecute this nameless guy, and he understood being posted at sentry duty after a heavy day's fighting was brutal for anyone, and so he just waved his hand dismissively, before opening the tent flaps and directly entering the tent.

"Alex...I meant... my lord, you are hurt?" The moment Alexander entered the camp, he was greeted by the shocked voice, of the now-in-charge of the clinic, Hiperteom, who seemed to be getting up from his bed just beside Hemicus.

And this half-doctor was shocked to see Alexander with a crutch on his right side, one because it was Alexander who was injured and two because he, as the head of the clinic had no idea about it.

He considered it a gross oversight on his part.

"Yes. A small spear wound. I will depend on you to clean it properly today," Alexander appeared unfazed by the shocked greeting and simply replied in a nonchalant voice.

His injury was known to only the highest echelons of the group

"Of course, of course," The man vigorously nodded as he then turned to look at Hemicus and lamented, "Aiya, first it was Hemicus, and now, to think even the lord got hurt. *Sigh*, I saw the battle from the camp. It was brutal."

He shook his head in dismay.

"Yes, it was. But we won," Alexander justified all the losses and injuries with this word, before moving on to the reason he was here.

"So, how is he?" He asked about Hemicus's condition.

"He has gotten better now. But at one point it was looking really shaky," Hiperteom let out a breath of relief, before recounting the whole story.

"When he came here, at first it was all good. The wounds were neither big nor in any critical areas, and so we just cleaned the wounds, cauterized them, poured strong spirit over them, and then bandaged them." He began, adding,

"And then, after we finished, because he got tired from the painful procedure, we simply asked him to have a bit to eat and sleep here for a bit."

"Which he did."

"But it was after a while, in his sleep, that he started developing a raging fever at around midnight." Hiperteom sounded alarmed, as he continued, "His body began to flare up, and he started muttering strange things and cried pained moans. At times his body would even jerk unnaturally."

"I even thought he was being possessed!" Hiperteom at one point confessed, as he considered performing an exorcism.

"But then I remembered your teaching, and decided to treat fevers as you taught us." He then said, recounting what he actually did,

"So I stayed the whole night here, pouring cold water over his body, and occasionally rubbing his entire body with a wet cloth."

"And then finally, at around dawn, the fever began to recede, and I decided to take a short nap right here."

Hiperteom ended his report, looking both relieved and haggard.

"You did well," And Alexander simply tapped the man on the shoulders to give his thanks, while he himself let out a sigh of relief.

'To think someone as strong as Hemicus, and built like a bull as him would be so close to death after three non-critical wounds. *Sigh*, this world is really dangerous.' Alexander was once again reminded of the power of bacteria, viruses, and open wounds without antiseptics and most importantly antibiotics.

Even an innocent knife cut could develop into tetanus, not even mentioning the wound he had on him right now.

Chapter 443 Hiperteom

Alexander was certainly worried about the backwardness of this time's medical technology.

Especially because he knew he had no easy way of advancing it anytime soon.

He estimated that the medical technology even a few decades from now would still be comparable to now, and the reason for this would be because he was no doctor.

He only had A level biology knowledge, and whatever he taught up until now was around the limit of medical expertise, while the truly effective medicines, like penicillin, were way beyond his capabilities.

Alexander did read that Flemming had discovered the magical cure accidentally when he left a petri dish to grow mold on, but that was the extent of it.

And even if he could somehow replicate that and produce that exact mold, there was no way he would be able to refine the mold into anything remote close enough for human consumption following that discovery.

After all, though Flemming discovered penicillin in 1928, it still took him another decade and 20th-century chemicals such as sulphuric acid and various organic compounds, treated under many modern purification techniques to obtain a level of purity that humans could take without dying from the other impurities present in the mold.

And even then it was only made available to soldiers seriously wounded in world war 2.

Hence to give a context to the technological prowess involved, by the time antibiotics, the truly wonder drug of the drug made its debut, the world already had nuclear weapons, which some might say was god's way of balancing the karmic scale.

Thus the possibility of Alexander having any truly meaningful weapon against his own mortality seemed really low.

And thus could only hope his own body would be able to fend off the inevitable approach of death as long as possible.

This was also one of the reasons Alexander was mindful to get up as early as possible to perform various exercises and calisthenics.

And he even made his girls perform the exercises with him.

But just because Alexander was unlikely to achieve something significant in this field did not mean he would not try.

So, after seeing Hemicus sleeping soundly, Alexander invented Hiperteom outside the tent, and once the duo was in a secluded position, said his piece.

He began first by congratulating the man, "I'm very pleased that you saved Hemicus's life. You have my gratitude."

To which Hiperteom gave the usual, modest answer, "No, no, it is my duty."

Alexander gave a small nod to this and then moved on to the real topic.

He first began by saying, "Hiperteom, you should know as well as I do that there will many more wars in the future. And we will suffer many injuries. So, it is a must that we develop better medicines and treatment procedures. Right?"

Alexander asked as he turned to look at Hiperteom who gave a nod of approval.

So he continued, "Mmmn, and the best way to develop these medications and procedures is to study how the human body works, right?"

Again Hiperteom gave a nod of approval.

So Alexander lastly asked, "And what is the best way to study the human body would you say? How do we know if our medicine works?"

Inquiring about this, even before Hiperteom could answer, Alexander gave his own answer, "For me, it would be cutting up to see how the insides of a body works. Because how can you treat the body without knowing what does what?"

Alexander then turned to Hiperteom and barraged him with many questions,

"Tell me, why do we need eyes to see? Why do we need noses to smell, ears to hear, and mouths to taste? Why can't eyes hear, or noses see?"

Alexander then gave his own answer, plainly saying, "The answer is we don't know. We don't know almost anything about our own body."

And posed, "And if we don't know these answers, how can we treat the injuries? Injuries to the eyes, to the ears, to the throats, to the hearts?"

Finally, Alexander said in a final, ultimate way, "So, cutting up the bodies and seeing what is inside the bodies is the only way for such to avoid tragedies! The only way!"

Alexander was very firm in his answer as he repeated the words, leaving no room for disagreement.

And then, finally having laid enough foundations, Alexander gave his, some might say controversial, order, "That's why Hiperteom I am instructing you choose a few dead bodies from the battlefield to cut open and see the various organs inside. And then you are to make drawings of them and show them to me."

Normally such an order was perfectly normal, as humans did autopsies in modern times as easily as breathing.

But in his time period, defiling a human corpse was seen as one of the greatest acts of sinning against the gods.

And this was why Alexander talked for so long, and in such a roundabout way before getting to his point.

But unfortunately for him, it appeared even this amount of reasoning was insufficient.

For Hiperteom vehemently declined to do such a thing, as his voice rang out in shock and alarm,

"Ale...my ...my lord...tha...that's blasphemy! No, I will not do it,"

He hence flatly refused to do it.

Because according to him, an eternity in hell was not worth serving Alexander over.

Alexander did not immediately pressure the man, for he had anticipated this for this was the prevailing custom.

So instead he tried again, saying, "I'm the son of Gaia. And the goddess has given me the right to open the bodies of her creation to heal her subjects."

"So, if you do this, not only will your soul be protected, but you will also be rewarded for your work in saving the goddess's flock."

He hoped that by saying this, the man would be more amicable to the idea.

And this reassurance did comfort the man a bit.

But it appeared that still was not enough.

"My lord, I'm sorry, but I still can't. If the goddess has so decided, let Her pick a different champion," Hiperteom seemed adamant.

And even after Alexander enticed him by saying, "Hiperteom, this is a great blessing from The goddess Herself. Your gate to Elysium will be open if you do this. Do you really want to throw such an opportunity away just because you find the act a bit uncomfortable?"

Hiperteom stood his ground and simply replied, "I find the act of cutting bodies repulsive. Hence I will feel ashamed to enter Elysium with such hands. Even if the goddess wills so, my heart¹ cannot comply."

The answer was so strong that Alexander understood no amount of cajoling will convince the man.

Hence, he finally decided to back down, shrugging his shoulders and saying, "Okay, if you truly feel so strongly about it, then I guess there is no helping it."

And seeing that Alexander was not going to strong-arm him, Hiperteom gave a grateful nod, and said, "Thank you, my lord. And I'm truly sorry."

And then suggested, "But my lord, since the goddess has given you such privilege, why not transfer the gift to someone else? Or why not do it yourself? The goddess did give it to you personally."

Hiperteom did not mean to make the wording sound like a jibe but it certainly felt like one to Alexander, who only weakly replied, "Okay, I will."

The reason why Alexander did not do it himself was simply because he did not have the time.

After all, it took a long time to cut open bodies and then make accurate drawings.

And then there was the added concern that if he did this, people might accuse him of witchcraft.

This was because cutting bodies or doing autopsies was an act so hated in Adhania that it had to be seen to be believed.

Even his allies like Ptolomy and Pasha Farzah might cut ties with him if he did such acts too openly as according to them it intruded into the domains of gods.

And even for the normally half atheist Pasha Farzah this step might be one too far.

That's why Alexander really wanted someone else to be the one to do this.

And Hiperteom fit the bill perfectly.

The man was loyal, diligent, and talented at his work and hence Alexander could place great confidence in him to be able to produce results,

His position as the head of the medical clinic gave him a fresh, almost limitless source of new patients and cadavers to whom he could do a lot of things without raising any suspicion, and lastly, he was highly respected by the men under him, who were hence unlikely to not tattle on him.

Thus, competent and able to be used to take the heat off Alexander, he was the perfect candidate, and if worst came to worst, even could be used as a scapegoat.

And though that second part sounded horrible, such were the dangers of such 'forbidden' research.

But it seems that through luck and blind belief in his convictions, Hiperteom had managed to avoid that fate.

And so Alexander was left with the thought, 'Hmmm, maybe I should find some executioners. They might want to make some extra money.'

Since Hiperteom did not want to be the scapegoat, Alexander decided to find another one.

Why Alexander thought executioners would make a good scapegoat or more importantly a good doctor was a question for another time.

For his thought was broken by the hurried steps of Menes, who reached him to ask, "My lord, the army is ready. What should we do?"

Chapter 444 Noble Negotiations (Part-1)

Alexander put aside the issue of future medical technologies aside for now, as Menes's call directed his attention to the battlefield.

So Alexander shifted his mind to winning the current engagement.

"Yes, let's go," Alexander thus gestured with his hands while leaving Hiperteom to attend to the clinic and he soon found himself outside the camp where his army was ready and waiting.

They were all geared and reared to go, yesterday's victory seeming to energize them.

"March out!" Hence Alexander gave the order to march to their positions as they had done yesterday.

While on their way, after the other commanders greeted him, Alexander posed the most pressing concern to Melodias in a low voice. "How many arrows have we managed to retrieve? Can we fight?"

Those arrows were his trump card, and if he did not have much, Alexander planned to retreat behind the walls.

"About a million, my lord. Should be barely enough for today," Melodias whispered back the reassurance, which calmed Alexander for the time.

At least he had something to fight with.

With these various thoughts and considerations with him, Alexander soon deployed his army the same way he did yesterday and the troops were in position, ready to fight.

But soon, those who were looking for a fight were grossly disappointed.

Because no fight came.

In fact, the other camp barely reacted to Alexander's deployment.

Almost as if they were asleep or the place had been deserted.

"Are they thinking of skipping today?" Menes wondered out aloud.

It was possible Faruq intended to rest the day.

They had the supplies after all.

"Hmmm, maybe we should attack? Not give them the time?" And from the side, Grahtos suggested the offensive option, wanting to bring the fight to them.

Which many others seem to also consider as a good idea.

'Why give them the time to rest?' They thought, as 'hit them when they are down' was and always is a classic strategy after all.

But Alexander did not seem to share that concern, who uncategorically rejected such an idea, firmly saying, "No, they have lots of cavalry. I do not want to be caught out of why defensive structures."

It seemed to him that his generals had grown too complacent and were starting to belittle the enemy.

For he knew that as long as one had a large cavalry advantage, victory was still possible even if one was grossly outnumbered by outflanking and charging the enemy.

So Alexander was determined not to commit such a mistake and present the enemy with an easy opportunity.

Besides, he also guessed that his generals' motives might not be hundred percent militaristic.

Many of their decisions might be actually directed by the tempting thought of looting the enemy camp and obtaining its vast riches of food, slaves, jewelry, and gold.

But Alexander was there to squash any such greed, and gave the order, "Tell the men to be at ease and rest until the enemy deploys itself. We will only defend this position."

With this command executed, Alexander and his men spent the next three hours in idle chit-chat, as the enemy showed no sign of coming out.

It seemed that there would be no action today.

Until finally there were some stirrings, some flutter of movement, and a bit of din of chaos from Faruq's camp.

And this got some of the men on Alexander's side quite riled up, but soon it was revealed to be a lot of thunder, but no rain.

As contrary to all that hustle and bustle, finally, only a small contingent of riders came slowly forward and tried to approach Alexander in a non-threatening manner.

They were certainly not any soldiers, as the group came forward holding many standards, possibly the family insignia of various noble families, and much opposed to the ordinary riders of Ural or Jahal mercenaries, these men were very well dressed, garbed in flashy, expensive bronze armor, and various gold embellishments.

These were without a doubt noblemen, representing tier individual houses.

"We wish to meet your commander and lord, Lord Alexander,"

Once the group got close enough, just a few meters from the legionaries' spears, one man, presumably the leader as evidenced by how spectacularly he was dressed in fine armor, and who even wore a gold helmet with a red feather plum called out, while remembering to address Alexander respectfully.

And seeing the man come so close in such a defenseless manner, Alexander had to say that this man had guts.

"Go see what they want." Hence, Alexander decided to send Menes to greet him, as a way to somewhat reciprocate the other's status, though he had a pretty good hunch why they would want to talk to him.

"Yes," Menes accepted the appointment with a nod, and soon greeted the noble at the front,

"My name is Shordar Menes, the commanding general of Zanzan. Who are you? And to what reason do you seek my lord?"

Menes to his credit managed to present himself half-decently, courtesy of the etiquette lessons Alexander had mandated on all of his retainers.

But his blunt question regarding the noble's identity seemed to have hit a nerve, as the leading man snubbed him by saying, "A mere shordar (baran) is not worth revealing my identity to. Never mind a made-up, fake one we don't even recognize."

And then in almost a chastizing tone scolded Menes, and said, "Now go tell you leader he is the one we want."

This overbearing tone sounding as if they were yesterday's victors and like it was them doing Alexander a favor by visiting him, made all those who could hear certainly angry, and some hot-headed men in the front even gripped their swords tighter.

Menes too felt his blood rush as he had a bit of an inferiority complex when it came to dealing with nobles, or as he would say, 'real nobles'.

He always suffered a bit of self-esteem issues due to his low-born status and past slave record, and so would react fiercely when others would look down on him using that fact.

Especially when those people were nobles with long bloodline histories.

"My lord also does not want to talk to anyone who is not a Pasha. And neither do." Menes angrily replied waving his bulky, armored hand, and then mocked, "So if you want to talk, bring DJose. And if you can't, then go away."

The martinet Menes had his own blend of spice, as he turned his horse around and attempted to leave.

It seemed the talks were over even before they could begin.

This abrupt end of negotiations was not something the other side expected, as the opening tough stance was something they did to put themselves in a better position before the haggling could begin.

But it seemed to have backfired on them as it appeared that the other side did not seem to be in the mood for negotiating.

And so for a moment, the group was unsure about how to proceed.

If they let Menes leave, then the reason for them being here would turn moot.

They could not let that happen because it was really important.

But if they called him back, they would be seen as weak and desperate.

Which would put them on the back foot during the negotiations.

Hence for a brief moment, all the nobles only shared confused looks with each other, unsure how to proceed.

Until finally one broke.

"Wait!" He called out from the back and then quickly blurted out, "We wish to talk to Lord Alexander to surrender and discuss the ransom for the prisoners. Please take us to him."

The man sounded desperate and impatient, while others sent daggers at him.

The reason for this difference in attitudes was because the few thousand prisoners that Alexander got were not spread out evenly among the nobles.

This occurred because soldiers, or more accurately levies, would always be deployed in units composed of people who were familiar with each other, i.e. - people who were from the same place, which also meant that they served the same lord.

And since Alexander had the bulk of his prisoners from those units placed to the enemy's right, as that was from where the collapse began, the nobles who had men there suffered the most.

And the man who just now called out was one of the most heavily affected ones.

He was just a shordar (baron) and he really needed those men.

Hence he squeaked first.

Menes turned back hearing the desperate plea, and placed his eyes on the man with a slight, unshaven stubble and thin face, and noticed he even had a few supporters, who appeared equally distressed.

Menes understood that these were the small fries of the noble world, one whose heart bled if even a hundred men died.

This was because shordars (barons) only had around a thousand to at most a few thousand men under him.

"Wait here. I will see what my lord has to say," Having fished out the reason for the group's arrival, and even smelling out some of their desperation, Menes replied with a smirk, before riding off.

He was sure Alexander would wring them dry.

And when he notified Alexander of the reason, he simply said, "Okay, let them in. We can talk at the back."

Alexander was hopeful he would be able to get his first noble retainers from this exchange.

Chapter 445 Noble Negotiation (Part-2)

Alexander had already guessed that the men were here for such talks.

And so now, he was thinking of how to squeeze the most out of them.

The few thousand infantry he caught were not negligible, but neither were they vital to his city, particularly if some much more lucrative alternative deals could be made through them.

Hence, Alexander looked forward to the negotiations.

Soon the group was allowed into the rear of the army and their horses slowly trotted until finally they reached Alexander, who sat perched atop his horse surrounded by his bodyguards with crossbows at the ready.

They were ready to respond to any sudden attacks, like if any stupid nobles wanted to charge Alexander and commit double suicide in an attempt at some kind of revenge.

"Pasha Alexander, greetings, my name is Shordar (Baron) Prantik," The man to first introduce himself was the same man who had pleaded to Menes, as he broke protocol to step forward in front of his other noble colleagues, many of whom had higher peerages than him.

This show of eager servility and servitude displeased many of his peers, who furrowed their brows and turned their heads in disgust.

But ultimately all held their tongue for the time being as they still needed to negotiate a price with Alexander for the release of their men.

And so following Lor dPrantik's lead, each of the other nobles got to introducing themselves, starting from the lower peerages, until finally the last introduced himself as,

"Greetings Lord Alexander, I'm Jamider (Earl) Bahram. It is an honor to meet you at last. My fiefdom is around the Wari county, north of here. And I hope you would visit it one day."

This was the same person who had contributed most of the soldiers.

'Maybe once I conquer it,' Alexander smirked in his mind at the thought, as he was sure he would be pretty much dead if he visited the place any time soon.

And then decided to formally introduce himself.

"I'm Alexander. Pasha of Zanzan and ruler of the province, as appointed by the true king of Adhania, His Majesty Ptolomy." He grandly declared, deciding to use Ptolomy's name to boost his image, while also subtly hinting that they were all technically his retainers.

This was a topic that had been left undecided and so many of the nobles simply decided not to engage in the conversation by cleverly feigning they had not even heard Alexander's little speech.

While Jamider (Earl) Bahram being the leader of the group cleverly said this, "Haha, yes your lordship is the ruler of Zanzan according to some. While others claim it to belong to another man. But we lesser men are neither strong nor clever enough to know which is which."

The man had learned from Menes's attitude that adopting a strong stance was useless, and so decided to try the soft, putty method.

But even then he at least tried to vaguely show his support for Amenheraft by subtly denying the statement about Ptolomy's status, while also attempting to please Alexander.

This was a three-way balancing act that the veteran lord tried to perform to the best of his abilities but found it very hard.

In fact such an act would be hard for anyone.

Noticing this, and speaking from a position of strength, Alexander hence decided to press on with this narrative, asking, "What is there to be confused about? Adhan is the capital of Adhania. And His Majesty Ptolomy controls it. Thus he controls Adhania. Pretty simple I think."

Alexander's logic naturally had huge flaws, but the nobles knew they could not nitpick here, especially not when they were here to negotiate.

So Lord Bahram only said, "Yes, that is certainly one way to look at it. While others might say since His Majesty Amenheraft controls nine of the twelve provinces, he is the king. But who can say?"

He shrugged his shoulders and then quickly added the following before Alexander could twist the words further, "But that is a discussion for another time. For now, perhaps we can discuss the issue at hand?"

Alexander put on a disinterested face hearing this, and then pursed his lips to simply ask, "What is there to discuss? You guys launched an unprovoked attack against me and then lost. Now I have some of your men. And they are my prize."

Lord Bahram's lips almost imperceptibly at Alexander's nonchalance, feeling like getting anything out of this man would be very hard.

So he first tried to ease the situation.

"Ahem, my lord, the reasons for the attack we can discuss at length later."

"But for now, maybe your men could lower their new bows? I know they are superb weapons but there is no need to point them at us, is there, hahaha?"

Lord Bahram tried very hard to keep a straight, jolly face while being pointed at by a weapon.

This was the utmost insult for a noble, being treated as if they were ravenous dogs.

But instead of easing the situation, it seemed to somehow incense Alexander, who almost snarled, "I think there is a need. Especially against people who destroy all conventions and etiquettes and kill messengers."

Alexander was still very angry Vespay- the man was a good soldier.

"And in retaliation, you killed Lord Nafi who was our champion, tit for tat," Lord Bahram instantly shot back, but then quickly tried to placate the situation by saying, "So it seems trust has been eroded on both sides. And it is our hope that we can rebuild it again. Starting right now."

The man seemed to be genuinely trying to negotiate.

But Alexander could not bite so easily.

"Haah! How can those two actions be remotely considered the same?" He angrily snapped, raising his clenched knuckles and pointing out, "What I did was simply respond in kind. A reciprocal gesture."

"While it was you who came to my land unprovoked, killed my messenger whom I only sent to dissertate why you came, and then attacked me without any rhyme or reason. And now you are saying I'm at fault?"

Finishing this Alexander then raised his chin as a way of looking down on the nobles and asked in a mocking tone, "Tell me, did all that happen as I just said? Or was it all my imagination? Perhaps I'm wrong and have invaded your land instead?"

Alexander's dripping sarcasm was not lost on anyone.

"....." There was a silence that followed afterward, as Lord Bahram's facial countenance changed quite a few times in the meantime.

He was still trying very hard to make Alexander a bit amicable to their cause while also trying to douce his hatred for the man.

'Bastard kills my sister and nephews, burns them to death, and then has the balls to say we attacked him unprovoked. Fucking scoundrel! Bastard! Mothe...'

Lord Bahram cussed Alexander using some very choice words while trying as hard as he could to not show it on his face.

But the issue about Jabel was not bought up as Alexander had already published his reason.

And the official reason given for the complete overnight destruction of Jabel and the death of all its inhabitants was a simple, unimaginative one- A deadly storm.

Yes, according to Alexander, there was a fierce thunderstorm that day around Jabel, and one of the innumerable lighting strikes had unfortunately struck one of the many wooden structures present and set fire to it.

Which then the strong, gale-like winds carried all across the city, spreading it like wildfire, and soon the small residence was engulfed in a fiery tornado that burnt everything down to crips, and with it all its citizens.

Truly a tragedy.

And such a thing presumably happened according to Alexander even though the fact remained that none of the nearby settlements were the least bit affected by this supposed 'one in a lifetime' huge, brutal storm.

And neither were any other houses outside the small town blown away or even damaged in the slightest.

And in fact, none of the people living around even witnessed the storm, as they also reported the complete opposite, saying that the sky was clear that day, with nary a cloud in sight.

And this was further without the fact that many of the bodies had sword and arrow wounds on them, and while also none of the bodies had any valuables on them.

One might be even forgiven for thinking that the wind had just picked up all the precious things for itself when it came as dictated by Alexander.

All these discrepancies made Alexander's official story look almost like a joke, as he did not even really try to hide his involvement.

As such, given that he had chosen to say these ridiculous things anyway, many nobles saw this as Alexander treating the death and murder of their kin and relatives as a kind of farce or entertainment, something to laugh over as they received the news.

And what made it worse was that it was not Alexander who delivered the news, but the letter came using Ptolomy's channels.

Meaning the so-called king had sanctioned this.

And the reason why the way the whole thing worked like that was because Alexander lacked the connections and infrastructure to send his messenger all around Zanzan by himself.

So he first sent Ptolemy the 'official' reason for the tragedy at Jable.

Then it was Ptolemy who used the Ramuh temples scattered throughout the entire empire to distribute this message.

This was also how Bahrim got his message, who had torn apart the letter moments after reading

it, and was considering trying to do the same to Alexander.

Chapter 446 Noble Negotiations (Part-3)

Lord Bahrim might have actually tried something if not for the strict quarantine Alexander had set for himself using his bodyguards.

But since he had, the lord could only swallow his grievance for the time.

And then instead of getting into the nitty gritty of who was the aggressor, Alexander or them, Lord Bahram diverted the topic to the thing they were here for.

"Lord Alexander, you must be aware of why we are here. As per the rules of war, we would like to exchange our prisoners for a ransom. Please name your price," He asked, taking charge of the talks.

But Alexander did not seem interested in such an exchange and so only replied in a sharp, angry tone, "Ransom? Why should I accept a ransom? So that you can take your men, rest and recuperate, build up your forces for a later time, and then try again a few years later? Why should I accept such a dumb deal?"

"No, it's better that your men stay with me." Alexander said shaking his head, firmly declaring, "The captured men will work as slaves in Zanzan, toiling away to redeem themselves for the crime of wanting to destroy it. There will be no ransom."

"....."

Alexander's denial of the norms of the battle shocked the nobles to silence, for battles in Adhania were usually low-casualty affairs, especially when fought between the nobles themselves.

This was evidenced by the existence of various rules designed to encourage talks even just before the start of the battle, how nobles would be protected even during battles, and how it was the norm to exchange prisoners after the conclusion.

Hence, for Alexander to ignore all such rules made them feel alarmed.

Because they saw such a man as not one of them with a conflict of interest, but as an intruder threatening to conquer their lands.

"...Alexander....do you not wish to follow even the slightest bit of modicum of civility in this battle?" Lord Bahram talked slowly while clenching his teeth in rage, feeling like he was talking to a wall.

Such blatant disregard for the basic rules of battle set the man's blood on fire, but if Alexander truly refused to ransom the men, then was no little they could do.

"Hmmm, it was you who destroyed the pillar of civility first! It was you killed you Vespay! Not me," Alex snorted in rage, turning his head to the side in disgust.

He was still very angry with that loss.

"Yes, we killed him. And we would kill him a million times again. And even then it would not have been enough to douse our hatred for what you did in Jabel." Seeing the talks go nowhere, Lord Bahram finally snapped, pointing his finger and hysterically shouting in rage.

The man had had it.

"Whether the destruction of Jabel happened before you plotted to attack me or after, is something you are better aware of than me. So get off your high horse!" Alexander only replied with a cold, chilly tone to the accusation, as his eyes then glowed with hatred over the following words,

"You people ask me for a ransom price. Yet you were the very same people who swore an oath to maintain an armistice of six years. You people swore to not attack me over the time period. And then you people accepted money and goods in exchange for that."

"But you still broke the sacred deal. And now you dare to stand before me and preach to me? What guts!"

"You are a group of liars, cheats, swindlers, and shysters. There will be no ransom deal with your kind." Alexander let his tongue lash out to its fullers, holding nothing back as he brushed his hands in a dismissive manner to show his anger and frustration and to indicate the talks were over.

"Bah! A lowly mongrel, scum of the earth dares call us names. You are not a noble! You will never be a noble! Hmmp, choke on your slaves!" Lord Bahram too was not to be outdone, spewing similar accusations as he turned his horse to leave.

It seemed the talks were over.

But in reality, they were not.

Because though Lord Bahram could afford to walk away, the other, smaller, nobles could not.

One particular example of this was Shordar (Baron) Prantik, who frantically rode to the front of the Jamider (Earl) and quickly addressed, "Pasha Alexander, Lord Bahram does not represent all of us! Some of us are still willing to negotiate."

And then he spread out his palms to say first and foremost, "I will admit that attacking your lordship was a mistake. We broke an oath we should not have. For that, I personally apologize."

Lord Prantik had no problem putting him in the weaker, defensive position as Alexander held all the cards.

And seeing the negotiations hanging by a thread, the other nobles too decided not to intervene.

Prantik noticed that this admission somewhat softened Alexander, as he then went on to say, "But the reason we had for attacking you was the various unfortunate happenings that occurred around you. Some of which were interpreted by our superiors as breaking the treaty. And hence we were summoned to the cause without knowing the full details."

The man eloquently described the circumstances, dumping all the fault on those with higher peerage than him, and absolving him of all the blame.

This was the one instance his low peerage rank came in handy.

The man then finished by saying, "But now I can see that we were wrong. And so I hope that you will consider the ransom deal, so that other nobles do not similarly misinterpret your intentions and cause a repeat of the unfortunate circumstances."

This Prantik was quite shrewd, managing to weave in an apology and a threat at the same time.

And what was even more dangerous was that he was right.

For if Alexander truly wanted to deny a ransom, it was very much possible similar coalitions would form against him again and again.

Because Amenheraft would use this as a rallying cry to make the Zanzna nobles attack him again and again, saying Alexander did not follow their customs and thus labeling him as a foreigner occupying a part of Adhania.

And though the nobles of Adhania loved to fight against one another, they were also rather protective against any outsiders, for when faced with an external threat, many times they would put their differences aside for the time being and rally together to deal with the intruder.

This was how a nation twice the size of the Roman empire in terms of land area had managed to stay together for two thousand years.

Its rulers, ruling class, and various aristocratic families had come and gone many many times, more times than anyone would care to count, but its people had not changed, as each successive ruling dynasty strongly and bloodily defended against all external threats.

A similar example could be found with the European powers, who tore and fought each other every day of the week but would always ally together to fight against outside invasions, such as the Ottoman invasions into the Balkans.

Or the various Germanic tribes banding together to fight the Romans.

Hence, faced with such an opponent, even if Alexander won this time against Kuleef, next time it might be Ankoot sponsoring the attack, followed by maybe Jahrubah. then Abu Hamam, and the list could go on.

Alexander would be foolish to expect that he could win every single one of his battles.

And even if he could, then all his resources would be spent on trying to suppress rebellions and uprisings in his own land, hampering his land's growth and development.

Alexander would be prudent to avoid this as he had very acutely felt the extent to which a war could hamper one's productivity just in the past two months.

And this was a relatively short war.

"You Adhanian nobles do not see me as your own. And it is likely you never will. So why do say agreeing to this deal will get me peace? It seems to me conflict is inevitable." But even knowing this Alexander put on a tough front, for he did not like being threatened.

And basically told the others that he would be seen as their enemy regardless.

"No, no, Lord Alexander can certainly become one of us. You just need to show you are willing to. All of us are men of our word," Lord Prantik replied quickly, trying to edge Alexander toward a deal.

He had noticed that Alexander was no longer so staunch in his stand.

"...." Alexander gave a strategic pause, as he glared at the thin noble, putting a sort of psychological pressure on him.

"How will you guarantee that the ransom will be followed through? You already broke the treaty once," He then slowly asked, maintaining eye contact with the man the entire time.

He was like a predator, looking down on his prey.

"I will swear by the name of the gods." Came the short, simple answer.

The man was desperate and that promise was as ironclad as one would get when it came to deals during this age.

But it was still not enough for Alexander, who brushed such a solemn promise by saying, "That is not enough. If I give you the men, even if you keep your promise, you will come back after the armistice ends to fight me again. I need something more."

Alexander was basically asking them to become vassals.

Chapter 447 Noble Negotiations (Part-4) [Bonus]

Lord Prantik of course understood Alexander's demand.

And surprisingly, he took the offer quite well.

"My lord, in exchange for the ransom, I'm willing to become your vassal, and declare His Majesty Ptolomy as the rightful king." He quickly and fluidly replied, showing little hesitation in such a grand announcement.

One would think a man would think a bit more before switching allegiances.

Especially as choosing the wrong one could easily end in getting one's entire family and ancestry wiped out.

He was in a civil war regarding the legitimacy of the king after all.

And in such conflicts, loyal followers of the 'false' king did not usually end up well.

And being one of Alexander's first vassals, unless Shordar (Baron) Prankit betrayed Alexander, he would be considered among the core inner circle of his retinue.

Whether that be true or not.

But the man had good reasons for doing this.

On one hand, it was because he was that desperate for the men, and at another hand he saw Faruq, and by extension DJose as unreliable, as evidenced by the disagreements and Faruq's oath-breaking that had been going on up until now.

In fact, the chaos and clamor that Alexander had detected was caused when Lord Bahram and the others wanted Faruq to negotiate about prisoner exchange, but the young man had straight up refused, giving the excuse, "I'm too busy organizing the ships. You go if you need to."

The nonchalance and the indifference with which he had said this led to another round of row between the two factions, as Faruq was accused of dereliction of duty by the other side,

This is because traditionally it was the leader of the army who facilitated such talks.

But Faruq had simply brushed these accusations to the side.

Since the battle had been lost, this man who had come here with grand dreams could care less about anything else.

In fact, this damn care attitude had pissed off some of the more hot-blooded and affected nobles so much that they had called up their men to surround Faruq's tent and blockade it, intending to drag him out and beat him up.

And it was only luckily due to the intervention of cooler heads that there was not a full-fledged civil conflict at the camp.

Much to Alexander's disappointment.

But even though the worst possibility had been avoided, the event had managed to drop the relationship between Faruq and some of the nobles to a nadir, and there was even the distinct possibility that Faruq might not even give them a ride back home.

Hence there was ample reason for Lord Prantik to jump ship.

But many of Shordar (Baron) Prantik's associates, even his close friends, did not see it like this, so they shouted in alarm, shock, and even somewhat in rage.

"What! Prantik, have you gone mad? Allying yourself with this usurper?" They looked at the thin man with disbelief, even calling Alexander names right to his face.

Even Alexander himself was a bit surprised by the quickness of this declaration and found the hastiness of it all a bit insincere.

"Your friends may be right. Perhaps you will reconsider it when I say that all lords under me have to pay a property tax of 1%." Alexander tested the man.

And this test proved to be a challenging one, as Prantik, and all the other nobles for that matter too, looked at Alexander like they were looking at a freak.

'What kind of an idiot would choose to become his vassal?' They were all eager to see, as being a noble and paying taxing was oxymoronic.

After that, that struck at the very heart of what it meant to be a noble.

Prantik too felt a blow to his chest at this outrageous demand, and woodily asked, ".....cou...could you elaborate on that a bit my lord?"

He really hoped that he had heard it all wrong.

But Alexander disappointed him on that, repeating what he said and then adding, "Many of my generals have been made Shordars (Barons) with the same condition. That they will give a 1% land property tax for six years until the armistice ends."

And then, putting on a magnanimous face, Alexander finished by saying, "Of course, as an invader, you should be asked to be paid much more. But since you are the first one to accept my vassalage, I will give you the same deal. Do you accept?"

"....." Hearing Alexander, Prantik silently cursed his weakness over and over right now.

to everyone.

After all, only low-born peasants paid taxes.

So to ask him to pay taxes was basically reducing him to the level of peasants.

There was no way any true, blue-blooded noble would ever accept that.

'This idiot has a cracked head!' Lord Prantik thus ultimately shook his head in dismay, resigning himself to losing around a thousand men, and most likely all his spring harvest.

He had hoped that this young man whom he had heard so much about, both good and bad would be a sensible man and maybe even a good lord, able to see reality and judge accordingly, but it seemed he was just a brash fool who had gotten lucky.

Because speaking from experience, Lord Prantik knew that there was no one who would ever want to become Alexander's retinue unless forced to at the threat of the sword.

And even then, the moment that threat disappeared, there would likely be a rebellion.

Because nobles paying taxes ran in complete antithesis to everything up until now.

And there was no way Alexander was going to collect that from them without many bloody conflicts.

Thus, Lord Prantik instead focused on mentally preparing himself for the mass starvation about to occur in his territory as he had planted all the edible crops he had left into the fields.

This would likely cause a revolt which he might not be able to stop as he had lost a lot of men in yesterday's fight, and even if he was able to get help from his neighboring lords to pass these predicaments, they would surely take a huge bite out of his desperate rear.

This was how the world worked after all.

But that was still better than losing his pride as a noble.

So while Prantik thought of a way of try to minimize his losses, the other nobles, hearing of Alexander's deal jeered.

"Heh! Lord Bahram was right in calling you fakes. To think you guys would voluntarily choose to pay taxes even after becoming nobles. Oh, Ramuh! How did we lose to you, idiots?" One cried at Menes and the others, laughing hard while clutching his belly.

And this man was soon followed up by another,

"Hahaha, yes. I don't know whether to call them idiots or Alexander a genius for managing to swindle them out of their money. Hahaha, does your lord also pay a 1% tax, hahaha?"

The last sentence was a completely throwaway line, meant to disparage Alexaner's men.

But it would prove to be a pivotal point in the negotiations, as Alexander seriously replied in a short burst, "No, I pay 2%. Plus all kinds of sales tax from the goods my business sells."

"...wh..what?" The other side appeared stunned, unable to believe their ears.

As they were busy mocking Alexander and he had spoken over them, they thought they had not heard it properly.

"I said I pay double the land tax, ...plus all the sales tax." Hence Alexander repeated, leaving no doubt.

It was not only the opposing side that was surprised by this declaration.

Even Alexander's own side was caught off guard.

Because up until now, it was known that Alexander would only pay the same amount of land tax as them.

So when did that double?

But whether Alexander had genuinely decided to increase the tax burden on himself or simply lying could wait.

For right now, it was the duty of his retainers to back him up.

Hence Heliptos bravely jumped forward into the conversation, swing his arms around to gesture to Alexander, and then say, "That's right, Lord Alexander is the most benevolent lord there is. Where else will you find a man that pays double the taxes as his retainers? He is the greatest lord in Adhania."

Following him, Menes too stepped forward, and grandly declared, "You call us idiots for following him! We would indeed be idiots for not following him. For his sacrifice is greater than all of ours."

Menes truly believed that, not only because of this new announcement but also because of the enormous amount of ropals Alexander had dumped to bring the city back to life.

He had truly sacrificed a lot.

800 million ropals to be exact.

"Is that true my lord?" Lord Prantik then slowly squeaked out, unable to believe his ears.

This was like the king paying taxes, something akin to the sun rising in the West.

"Yes, in Zanzan everyone pays taxes. That's how we were able to field such a huge army despite being only a single city," Alexander mixed lies with truth.

"Th..then I accept. I will pay the 1% land tax for six years in exchange for my men," Finally, clenching his teeth, Lord Prantik bit the bullet, and cast his dye.

Since even the lord himself paid twice the tax as he did, the man saw no point in wasting time ruminating.

Because if true, he would likely be a million times better lord than his superior.

And so, in this way, Alexander got his first noble retinue.

Chapter 448 Noble Negotiations (Part-5)

Shordar (Baron) Prantik had always hated the experience of it being always the upper nobles sucking off the lower ones, without ever giving anything back to their less ones.

Sure the upper nobles would not tax them per se.

But every year they would also be expected to give expensive gifts to their superiors in the form of gold, fine fabric, jewelry, and women, on occasions like weddings, birthdays, and a million other religious celebrations.

The lesser nobles would also be tasked with organizing various extravagant entertainment such as lavish feasts, balls and hunting games during various times of the year, all done so that the nobles would not be bored in their homes.

After all, what else are the nobles gonna do all day?

Work?

Of course, it went without saying that all the expenses came out of the lesser nobles' own pockets.

And that was not the worst of it.

Because if that was all there was to it, then perhaps most of the shordars (Barons) and talukders (viscounts) would not have grumbled so much.

But what really stuck to it was their superior's ability to ask people like Lord Prantik to come to battles with them, along with contributing food and livestock in such campaigns. embroidering them in conflicts they had no part in.

Prantik had wished many, many times to be able to just pay off a bit of money to take that headache off the battle and the constant threat of life that it bought along, as did many other nobles.

But that could never manifest due to the stigma related to paying taxes and the subsequent inherent unjustness of one party paying for everyone else's benefits.

This was created because the upper levels of nobility would agree to pay taxes, one, because, they were made the rules and thus never pressurized to, and two, because if they did, their tax bill would be truly enormous.

Enormous enough to affect their lifestyle.

So why would they?

After all, even in modern times, with very advanced monetary surveillance, rich billionaires still used every legal loophole in the book, and even crooked means like bribes and 'election donations' to skirt the 40% cut from their paychecks.

So it was little wonder that nobles of this time would refuse to voluntarily tear a chunk of their income.

And besides, what was the point?

They were the rulers and held ninety percent of the wealth.

So taxing them would just be moving money from their left pocket to their right pocket.

It would be going through all that hassle without any real benefit.

And since a select group of upper-class nobles did not want to pay taxes, neither did they see any reason to, the entire class evaded paying them.

But since Prantik finally found a lord willing to pay his fair share, then he was willing to side with him, at least for the time being.

A sentiment not at all shared by many of his friends.

"Prantik! You cannot be such a fool?" They exclaimed, pointing to Alexander and saying, "Never mind he might be lying, even if he is not, this is him just him moving the money from one pocket to the next. All the taxes will go to him, remember!"

They had a point there as Alexander could use the funds too fatten his own pocket.

But Alexander was there to quickly rebuke them.

"As nobles, we are rulers of these lands. So of course any tax we pay ends up in our hands." Alexander did not surprisingly decline the accusation, instead doubled down on it, saying, "But that is the point. These collected taxes will be used to help the nobles themselves."

"The large amount of money will be used to help fund projects that individual nobles would not be able to easily finish by themselves. Projects which would require them decades, if not their entire lifetime to finance if they wanted to self-finance it." Alexander then stated.

And then quickly listed some examples, along with the benefits,

"For instance, the money collected can be used to build civilian infrastructure like roads and bridges in one noble's territory that is particularly remote."

"Or to construct huge, expensive, productive structures like mines, and quarries for someone who might not have the funds to develop his lands.

"Or simply boost the agriculture output of the land by digging canals for irrigation, and even producing more farmland by clearing woods and forest."

Alexander then raised his index finger to further continue,

"Also, the funds can be used to finance military projects in addition to civilian ones."

"For example, they can help to pay for the construction of military structures such as forts and walls, allowing the nobles with particularly hostile neighbors better protection."

"The large pool of money can be used to recruit better trained and greater number of mercenaries to aid in the fight."

"And lastly, it can even allow the building of a large, permanent army that can protect everyone."

"After all, having one, single unified army is much better than the patchwork of many small garrisoned forces that individual nobles have nowadays. These little forces can be easily picked off one by one by the attacker." Alexander pointed out.

Then finally finished by saying,

"And lastly, the taxes can help raise funds for nobles who have fallen in hard times. Natural disasters such as famines, floods, and droughts, rebellions, and uprisings, and external invasions from enemies all count."

Alexander had said this very long piece not only to convince Prantik, but all those around him.

And his target audience were his retainers as well, whom he feared might waiver in their commitment after seeing the other nobles' way of doing things.

For a while after Alexander's speech, the crowd went silent, evaluating his proposal.

The nobles of course understood that Alexander would only give them their men if they became his vassals and that this was Alexander's way of convincing them to take the deal.

"You said one large army. Do you mean that we will not be allowed to have any men of our own?" This pointed question was made by Jamider (Earl) Bahram, who had decided to once again insert himself into the conversation, and shrewdly pointed out a subtle point Alexander had quickly brushed over.

The man had recognized the threat Alexander's proposal posed to him, and his king Amenheraft, and tried to quash these rebellious thoughts at the roots.

And it worked to some extent, as it hit a weak point that Alexander was unable to defend against.

For he would never allow his retainers to wield significant numbers of troops.

This was just asking them to rebel against him.

'Cunning bastard!' Hence he gnashed his teeth in frustration.

But Alexander was nothing if not resourceful.

So he quickly diverted the topic, as he put on a mocking tone, and sneered, "Heh! Bahram would make you think that he has the best concern for you. That his heart bleeds for you that you do not have an army."

"But remember, it is them that demands lavish parties and ornate gifts from you all."

"Why?"

"Why can't the richer nobles pay for their own entertainment?"

"Are they too poor?"

"No."

"It's Because this is their way of taking money from you. Money that they fear you will use to fund your armies with."

"But of course, all of you knew that, hehe."

Alexander frankly revealed an open secret with a snark that made every go silent.

Even Jamider Bahram had no counter to this.

Alexander, seeing no rebuttal, seized this opening and decided to go the KO, as he said the last piece of the deal.

"If you choose to become my vassal, all of you will be allowed an appropriate number of garrison, adequate enough to deal with most threats. "

"As for the other threats you cannot deal with, the army will then be displaced to deal with them." He promised.

"But like Jamider (Earl) Bahram pointed out, you will not be allowed to form armies of your own."

"Instead a single, grand army will protect everyone."

Alexander then lightly added,

"As for the details of how that army will accomplish this and the command structure of the whole force, all that is confidential and cannot be revealed to the enemy."

"You will know once you join."

Alexander declared.

And then threw out an ultimatum.

"Now, it is your choice."

"You can choose to stay loyal to Amenheraft and live under the illusion of having to pay no taxes, but still have no army, while your lands remain undeveloped."

"Or you can choose to side with me. And in exchange for your money, I will contribute to your land's development, making you richer and letting you live more safely."

"....."

A long silence followed as Alexander gazed intently at the nobles who went poignant for the moment.

This might seem strange to some as given the clear benefits, one would think Alexander's deal would have been a no-brainer.

The economic benefits of investing into developing one's lands as opposed to whirling away one's money in frivolous extravagance should not be a hard choice.

But things in real life were rarely so simple.

And many reasons played into the event that resulted in the current curtain of silence, as the nobles weighed their options.

Options that were economical, political, strategic and also personal.

Chapter 449 Zanzan's First Victory

The nobles' economic consideration first and foremost was that Alexander might be lying to them.

They feared that Alexander would simply give them peanuts in return for their contribution, only a small, token amount simply as a front to justify this extortion.

Hence, there were people who felt that whatever the money they saved would be better.

Secondly, some considered that even if Alexander had the best of intentions, he might simply not be able to provide the economic benefits he was claiming to give, i.e.- he was overestimating his abilities.

Then came the political considerations.

The risk of switching allegiance need not be said.

Even if Alexander could give them everything he promised, it would do them no good if Ptolomy and his faction were defeated, and the turncoats were charged with treason by Ameneheraft.

Then they would lose both the gold and the goods.

Following this came the personal considerations, which were also the most numerous ones, and they ranged from a variety of reasons.

Firstly, there were some die-hards who would choose to side with Ameneheraft regardless, whether out of loyalty to his master, devotion to his cause, belief in his divinity, or simply out of a personal relationship.

And this mainly applied to many smaller nobles, who had built up quite a strong alliance with the noble family, and as the former crown prince, Amenheraft in general.

This was because these people relied on a strong royal family to stave off the influence of their much bigger and stronger superiors, who were all tacitly trying to annex or vassalize their retainer so that these lesser nobles would follow their rules instead of having any autonomy of their own.

Thus, if the lower peerage nobles such as the shordars (barons), and talukders (viscounts) wanted to retain independence and free reign over their lands, then supporting a strong royal family was a must for them.

Hence, their hesitation to switch sides.

For even if they were protected by the treaty for the next six years, what happens after it expires?

What if Amenheraft come knocking at their doors looking for blood?

What then?

Who would protect them from the much stronger Amenheraft?

This question was asked by all the ruminating nobles, and they could find no good answer.

There were also some who simply disliked Alexander inherently, be it his Thesian background, his low birth status, for being beaten in multiple battles by him, or simply his face.

These particular people did not give the offer a second thought.

And lastly, some simply did care for the benefits Alexander promised them.

They were perfectly happy with their current status and saw no reason to risk all of that for a very risky potential gain.

The last category of people would be a rare breed in the modern world, as people who did not want to acquire more wealth in the present day and age were as rare as golden deer.

But in Alexander's current timeline, such a mindset remains embedded in many, mostly high-level noble's minds.

For they already had more money than they or their three next generations knew what to do with.

These people already lived in a kind of post-scarcity world of their own, eating the best food available, living in the grandest house possible, wearing the finest clothes money could buy, and having access to cutting-edge medical procedures.

And to protect these things they also had enough muscles to ward off any ordinary threats, such as thieves and bandits, and so their only real threat were others like them.

Hence, since they already had everything life had to give, they felt no reason to acquire gold, as even the gold they normally collected would end up piled in their treasury, wasting away for years until an emergency arose.

And since Adhania was a relatively stable country with a strong military to ward off most foreign threats, and strong cultural norms among nobles which discouraged infighting, the nobles would rarely need to use these funds.

Perhaps they would need it once in a lifetime during things like droughts and famines.

And even then, they would skimp out on helping the poor folks, much preferring to use their money for merriments.

And yes, a lot of the people very much liked spending their money on lavish gifts, expensive parties, dances, feasts, and hunting trips, as the tasty foods, the dancing experiences, and the time spent with everyone filled them with joy.

So these people did not see the money being wasted to entertain their superiors, but as a way to enjoy life with others.

And knowing this, the phenomenon of even some very rich noble territories having very poor infrastructures could be explained, the prime example being Zanzan province itself.

Thus, when Alexander proposed that they use this money to do something else, hence hampering their way of life, they shunned it.

Now, as a side note, such behavior was not limited to Adhania or even this world.

Such examples would even be found in Alexander's previous world's history.

For example one of the reasons Egyptians built the pyramids or could even afford to build the pyramids was because of how rich they were.

The Nile Delta produced so much food that the kings were able to mostly satisfy the needs of their populace, expand their territories to their desired size, finance an army strong enough to protect their borders, and still have enormous wealth left over.

So, with nothing to use the wealth on, they built huge mausoleums for themselves, glorifying themselves.

Now, of course, they might have used the funds on more productive endeavors like free education and healthcare, but then kings, dictators, and autocrats have and always had an obsession with flattering their image.

After all, if the pharaohs had given the money away, they would not be seen as gods, would they?

So, spending money for oneself as opposed to investing it did have its reasons, if not personal or economical, then political.

And lastly, the nobles thought about the strategic considerations.

Mainly, it was the ban on owning an army, which was a non-starter for some.

They simply refused to hand the keys to their security to someone else, never mention to an outsider like Alexander.

They were of the thought that they would rather depend on a small army that they can trust to protect them, as opposed to a large, but dubious force whose true allegiance lay with another master, and it would be his mood that would determine their safety.

That thought was simply not palatable to some, mostly militaristic noble families.

And lastly there were also some who viewed Alexander's development plans as an encroachment upon their territory,

The roads particularly stuck like a fish bone with a few, as they feared it would be used by their enemies, aka-Alexander, to easily attack them, completely missing the point of how a good set of roads would help them to become richer and employ more soldiers to protect them.

After all, the nobles of this time rarely had a good business mind, viewing the profession as base and low.

'The merchants peddled their ware like how prostitutes flashed their bodies,' An Azhak saying went.

So, combined with the four factors, a vast majority of the nobles refused to accept Alexander's demands, and they only stood silently in front of the man, mute and dumb.

'Looks like beating them once was not enough," Alexander determined seeing the wooden faces, and seeing no point in talking, decided to finish the talks there.

"Accepting my terms is only one way I will give you the men. Think about it for a week." Alexander declared and turned his horse before shooting, "And also think about how you are going to compensate me and His Majesty for breaking the treaty."

"....Hmmp! Alexander, no matter how eloquently you put it, at the end of the day, you dare to tax the nobles? Heh, you are just asking us to rebel. Just wait for our next attack!" With the end of the negotiations, Lord Bahram, finished his piece with this threat, before turning his steed around and galloping out.

Thud, *Thud*, *Thud*,

And the group of nobles silently followed, leaving none behind.

Even Lord Prantik had returned to the camp, as he still had all his stuff there.

And Alexander let them, for killing them in broad daylight here would bring him even more retaliation from the other more neutral parties.

Solving everything by the sword was not a solution.

On the other hand, Alexander focused on what Lord Banram had said, pondering on it.

Of course, he knew that imposing a tax on the nobles was just sowing the seeds of rebellion for him.

But he still chose to do it.

Because he needed the funds.

And because he believed everyone should contribute fairly to society.

And if it led to rebellion so be it.

He would just have to crush it.

After all, rebellions over taxes were nothing new after all.

In fact, it was possibly the most common cause of rebellions, as exemplified by the Magna Carta, the Boston tea party, and the French revolution, to name a few.

And so, as Alexander made up his mind, the rest of the day went without an incident, Faruq's camp refusing to give a fight.

And as Alexander returned to camp at dusk, under the cover of nightfall, Faruq recalled all the ships from blockading the harbor, boarded them as soon and as silently as possible, and were gone before sunrise- leaving only a group led by a handful of nobles who had chosen to side with Alexander.

Chapter 450 First Four Vassals

Alexander certainly noticed the rapid evacuation that was going on near him all throughout the night.

After all, thirty thousand people and close to fifteen thousand draft and combat beasts moving about was kind of hard to miss given the amount of noise they made.

There was also the not-so-subtle clue that nobles had come to him requesting a prisoner deal, which typically indicated the end of a battle or at least a ceasefire.

Hence Alxx knew the enemy would not leave Zanzan soon.

But even knowing this, even as the enemy was slipping through his fingers as some would say, he still let them complete their departure with virtually no resistance.

After all, it was dark and he had little cavalry.

He did somewhat plan to attack them in the morning if they were still there, hoping to catch them out of formation, but found the enemy was proficient enough to complete the entire loading of their forces within twelve hours, which was something Alxx was actually very impressed by.

It was after all not easy to load all the men, cargo, and animals into ships in the middle of the dark, never mind so quickly.

But Faruq and his allies managed to do this, fueled by a great urgency, and also by the fact that their camp housed little food and grain, which were the heaviest of the objects to carry, preferring to keep them in the ships for easier transport as they marched towards Zanzan.

And so when Alxx woke up before dawn the next day to prepare for the day, he was greeted with the sight of the numerous giant ship sails slowly disappearing into the horizon as he had breakfast and discussed various things with his generals.

The fact that Faruq had still decided to give his allies a ride home would have certainly disappointed Alxx if he knew about the row the man previously had with his allies.

But Faruq still had the state of mind to not destroy the goodwill completely, and so decided to play the fake role of a generous host.

But not for all of them.

Faruq had not given the ride to all the nobles, a total of four men to be exact.

"*Sigh*, so the die has been cast," One of these four men, Lord Prantik let off a breath of resignation as he, like Alxx watched the white sails disappear.

He had made his bed and now he had to live with it, good or bad.

While Shordar (Baron) Prantik came to terms with that, he also reminisced about yesterday, particularly thinking about how he thought he was trying to convince Alexander to agree to a ransom, but in hindsight, it appeared as if Alexander convincing him to come under him.

He even suspected it might have been Alexander's plan all along, to put on a hard front, and make the other side concede to his, in most eyes, ridiculous demands.

And the possibility of it had the experienced politician shiver a bit at the thought.

'Maybe that's how a lowly slave could defeat us. Maybe he is special,' He then hoped, somewhat praying that his new lord might be as bit as formidable as he was thinking him up to be.

Because that would mean greater protection for him from his once allies turned enemies

"Well, let us get our men. We need to get back as soon as possible,"

A while later, seeing no point in waiting, another man from the group gestured towards Alxx's camp, wanting to start the formal negotiations as soon as possible.

And so the small group made the short journey across the small distance and were soon at Alxx's doorsteps.

"My lord, someone name Shorder (Baron) Prantik is here to see you. He is with about a thousand men and three other nobles." A herald came to inform Alxx around 8 o'clock, just as he was preparing himself to head back to the city.

"Oh?" Alxx let an involuntary hum of intrigue, for he did not think there would be so many buyers of his proposal given yesterday's response.

He was also surprised that the other party let these 'rebels' go.

If he was in their position, Alxx would have certainly considered executing them for treason.

After all, why should you just stand by and suck your thumb as your ally switches sides, letting the enemy become stronger?

Is it not better to kill them when they are at their weakest?

But Adhania did not work like that, where outside of combat, nobles were seen as almost inviolable.

And so, they were allowed to live even when they choose to leave.

"Escort the nobles inside. And then tell the thousand men they can either give up their weapons and enter the camp, or wait outside." Alxx gave the order, as he then quickly set about reorganizing his room to better entertain these guests.

They were going to be his first guests after all.

And a while later, after the body inspections, four gentlemen were ushered into his personal tent.

"My lords, welcome, welcome," Alxx put on a very cordial face in front of them the moment they entered, much different from the one at the battlefield, as he gestured to them to have a sit on the couch he had prepared for them, while one of the guards quickly stepped forward to serve them wine and some fruits.

"My lord let me introduce you...." Once seated comfortably, the very first thing Shordar (Baron) Prantik did was introduce his three fellow allies, saying their names, peerage, and where they were from.

There were two shordars (barons) and one talukder (viscount) among them, and their fiefdoms were in areas Alxx had no idea of.

And knowing this Lord Prantik was generous enough to give the estimated distance they were from Zanzan, which ranged from 250 to 300 km from him, and that put their lands around the center of the province, which was around 600 km from north to south.

This distance was not close, but neither too far, being about 10 days march away, meaning Alxx would be able to exert his influence relatively strongly around them.

"It greatly pleases me to all of you my lords. So how can I help?" Alxx then casually replied with a smile, knowing full well the reason for their presence.

"It is a pleasure to make your acquaintances my lord. We have considered your offer, and we wish to accept it,"

With the pleasantries done, the one named Quasim, who the Talukder (Viscount), went straight to the point, frankly and directly.

"That's great!" Alxx flashed a large smile, and then chuckled, "Haha, I can see many of you are impatient to get your men."

"I presume it's because you want your men to harvest the spring crops," He paused to look around and got a unanimous nod, before continuing,

"So, since we are short on time, we will skip all the large feasts and lengthy formalities, and simply hold the oath of allegiance tomorrow at the temple."

"How does that work?"

This was a very fast schedule as typically such formal occasions usually took months to prepare and plan, though a lot of that had to do with setting enough time for the party to arrive from his fiefdom to his lord's.

But still, it was very fast, and seeing Alxx was not trying to take them on a spin, all of them were relieved.

"Thank you for understanding, my lord. We are really short on time now. But we promise to back come another time to truly dine and feast." Came the joyous reply.

With this most important deal done, the group settled down to a more relaxed posture, as it was then Alxx's turn to pick the quad's brain.

So for the next four hours, the four answered all kinds of inquiries of Alxx, ranging from political, economic, military, and personal categories.

Alxx firstly asked about the quad's neighbors, and their relationship with them, which they all answered as being once good, but now very bad, which was normal.

He then asked about their administrative style, their fiefdom's specialties, tax revenues, and the general state of their lands.

And the answer to the last query came mostly as negative, which was also normal, as they would not have joined Alxx otherwise.

He then asked about their military and past experiences, followed by why they chose to side with Djose and then change.

"He promised us a lot of money. More than King Ptolomy."

"But his son Faruq refused to pay, saying we had not won so he won't pay. That's why we changed sides," Lord Prantik was very open about his reason, and Alxx did not think there was anything wrong with it.

Another question that Alxx had asked was this, "Why did you want your men so badly? Why could you not borrow some from others?"

And the answer was the others also had lost a lot of men, and did have enough to spare right now.

While those that did saw the men being put to use in their own territory as being much more useful.

Alxx for his part also answered many of the quad's questions, such as some of the details of how the vassalize would work and how the army would help protect them, while also telling them about Zanzan's style of rule, which the nobles recorded.

So, all in all, it was a very fruitful conversation, as Alxx got to many times multiply his knowledge about the lands he ruled.