

Herald 101

Chapter 101 Story Of A Failure

Ptolomy rebelled out of genuine pity for his country, but Alexander wondered how much he understood still now that the nobles were just using him.

Ptolomy's story continued, "The first few years were very hush-hush. There were only a few of us. But it all began to change three years ago when the drought hit."

'I wonder if that Farzah guy knows black magic and caused the drought. At this point it would not surprise me,' Alexander had grown weary of this Farzah.

"The drought devastated Adhania, and although it was a tragedy for Adhania, it was a boon for us. The drought gave us the rallying cry we needed and our numbers swelled, But it could not still hope to compete with the royalists."

Ptolomy then produced a different smile, a slightly ashamed smile, "So we asked for foreign aid. And Tibias and Cantagena responded."

"But," his octaves roared again, "it was to save my Adhania, To save it from the clutches of a deranged lunatic." He justified his actions.

"I see," Alexander seemed to uncharacteristically agree with Ptolomy.

And then asked the question that crept up in his mind, "So, this asking for foreign aid, was it you that bought it up or....." Alexander trailed off.

"It was Pasha... Farzah." Even the slow Ptolomy began to see the pattern and smelled something was not right.

'Oh, you poor naive child, the Cantagenans and Tibiasians were already there. You didn't call them, they called you,' Alexander made a bold assumption that the coup's real intention was to carve up the nation by these three factions and Ptolomy was just the scapegoat.

Alexander noticed Ptolomy half connect the dots, but didn't give him the luxury of time to think. "So, the Cantagenans and Tibisians, they wanted to help you out of the kindness of the heart? Because the people were suffering and they felt it was heaven's will to help you?" Alexander found himself to be in a sarcastic mood now.

When asked about the details of the negotiations Ptolomy turned a bit red, "Those are secret negotiations. Nothing had been set in stone."

Alexander was displeased with this avoidance, "You are in our hands. To ensure that you do stay in our hand, and not end up in the king's, it's in your best interest to satisfy us," He growled.

Feeling the weight of the many eyes cast their cold gazes on him, Ptolomy could not hold it, he buckled, "Farzah said that our army was vastly outnumbered and that it was no match for Amenheraft's elites."

'Of course, it was Farzah- why was that guy not king, but this waste,' Alexander moaned in his mind.

Ptolomy was still talking, "So he said only hope was to take advantage of the fact that they were away campaigning and gather reinforcement before they had the time they could soon return to retake the city."

"And so we sent for the Cantagenan reinforcement-you while Tibias launched a suicidal attack to the south to draw the army's attention away."

"It was a very good plan, with the real hard part of it getting to the capital before the army could. And we did do that. But somehow the king beat us anyway." Alexander drew a rueful smile.

And it infected everyone in the room.

"Yea, maybe he really is blessed by Ramuh," Ptolomy had a dejected tone to his voice.

"So, the plan was to use the Cantagenans to fight the Adhanians? But doesn't Adhania traditionally crush Cantagena in land battle?" Alexander seemed to find a glaring flaw in the plan.

"No, no, we have intended to fight in them in open ground." Ptolomy raised with hands and waved them around to deny this tactic.

"The plan was to have your's and my forces use the large walls of Adhan to repel any sieges and essentially starve the besieging army. We have already gathered all the food from nearby places so they can't forage and we knew they had little food with them. And even if they did have a lot of food that would make their supply chain huge and slow, and be unable to come to their king's aid immediately. That would give us more time to consolidate our power." Ptolomy was forced to reveal his plan in its entirety.

'Hmm, I see. The plan is pretty solid. Due to the still infantile development of proper siege technology at this time, breaching the ten-meter-high walls would be almost impossible. Adhan by its terrain is nigh impregnable, situated on a cliff and having one of its sides facing the 'Life Sea.' Alexander only lampooned the fact that 'Man proposes and God disposes.'

"*Sigh*, If you don't have luck on your side, all the planning in the world means nothing," It was unknown if Alexander was saying it to Ptolomy or himself.

"Maybe the gods do exist," Ptolomy released a dejected sigh for the umpteenth time.

"So, what did Cantagena and Tibias want in return?" Alexander wanted to know what he had offered them, especially Cantagenan that launched a war even when they could not afford to.

Ptolomy forcefully smiled, "We promised Acme and the Zanzan province to Cantagena and a few southern provinces to Tibias."

"Heh, you sold your country? Didn't you want to save it?" Alexander taunted unreservedly.

This seemed to hit Ptolomy's sensitive spot as he flared up, "Don't assume stuff you have no idea about, brat."

But this outburst didn't faze Alexander as he only chuckled, "Tell me, did you plan to take them back once you took the throne?"

"That...that.." With his intention to break his promise totally exposed, Ptolomy started another round of flapping his mouth like a fish, but he eventually recovered and shouted, "I would never do that."

But Alexander read him like a book as he avoided eye contact while saying that, which was a tell of him lying, something Alexander had noticed quite early on.

"Heh," Alexander didn't bother arguing with him and only gave a snigger.

"So, how did you pull off the coup, like occupy the actual city and take the throne," Alexander asked off a tangent.

Ptolomy again looked around to find the curious gazes and replied, "First we arranged for Manuk to leave for the army under a false pretense. Then, a merchant from Tibias came to Amenheraft saying he knew of a herb to cure father and only someone of divine blood was qualified to pluck it. Amenheraft left the capital with a paltry force and with the forces Pasha Farzah had smuggled into the city, we took it in his absence. Our only mistake was letting Kefka escape and alert the king early. Ohh, that merchant is with us- he is called Kalopsus." Ptolomy named someone to help corroborate his story.

"Hmmm, tell me more about this Farzah?" Alexander was intrigued by this scheming old coot and wanted to know more.

"Pasha Farzah," Ptolomy seemed to be correcting Alexander for calling a noble with his honorifics. After that, he delineated, "He is around fifty years old. His territory- the Matrak province is huge and borders Exolas and because he trades with both them and Cantagena, his riches are second to only the royal family. But he is not arrogant. He treats everyone, even a neglected prince like me..."

Ptolomy then turned into a simp fanboy as he droned on and on about how good and kind and all the other superlatives this guy was and Alexander failed to get much of anything other than the things that were publicly known.

Alexander then impatiently raised his hand to stop with sycophantic drivel and asked, "Okay, now let's return to the topic why should we keep you? You are very dangerous to give refuge to and you have no money to pay for our services."

"I can get you.." Ptolomy almost shouted.

"We want it upfront. We have been cheated too many times with this 'later payment promise to fall for it again," Alexander shut off Ptolomy's proposal.

"Why are you being like that? You are going in the same direction anyway? What's the harm?" Ptolomy almost turned nagging and grumbling.

"Who said we are going north?" Alexander was curious why Ptolomy made that guess.

"Heh, you think I'm that easy to fool? Where are you gonna go anyway, south?" Ptolomy spoke in a disdainful tone.

Their destination Cantagena lay west to Adhania, and north, north-west, and south, south-west, were their only options as Adhan lay to the east and directly west lay marches and jungles that were very hard terrain.

"Why? What's to the south?" Alexander had an ominous feeling.

Understanding these fools were about to march to their doom, Ptolomy burst into hysteria, "Hahaha, you fools were really gonna march south? Haha, then forget what I said. Please go ahead, hahaha," Ptolomy found the entire situation so funny that he found it hard to keep himself seated, almost rolling into the floor.

"Why what south?" Alexander asked in a harsh tone, not finding the situation at all funny.

The lives of ten thousand men were at stake.

Understanding angering the mercenaries was not in his best interest, Ptolomy stopped laughing and turned his eyes into a gleeful crescent, "Let me guess, you want to travel south, enter a city and catch a ship to Cantagena, am I right?"

And was Alexander's plan.

"But you see, in winter, the sea winds south of our country reverses. So no ship leaves for Cantagena. Ships can come from Cantagena, but the opposing winds are too strong to make the return trip."

Then Ptolomy let out a huge grin in glee, "Hehe, it looks like you are stuck with me. Escort me to Agnirat and I will find 'escorts' to take your home,"

The remaining audience did not find his rhyme funny.

Chapter 102 Arazadm Comes

The group of leaders soon confirmed what Ptolomy said by asking around a bit and after a bit of discussion came to the same conclusion as Ptolomy- they had to march north if they wanted to leave Adhania anytime soon as the winds would only change directions back around March- April, where it was now was just the start of September.

Agnirat was also only hundred fifty kilometers northwest of their current position as opposed to Acme, which was around three hundred fifty kilometers southwest of them.

So, although the leaders and Alexander found Ptolomy not very reliable, they begrudgingly accepted his request to escort him in exchange for him helping them charter ships.

The other extreme alternatives were to march literally a few thousand kilometers on foot to reach Cantagena or take over a city that has a port and force the sailors to sail them there.

Neither very appealing options.

As Alexander escorted the king to the former tent of Agapios, he asked in an offhand manner, "Who's the girl?"

"She's my slave Nu.....she's my sister Hellma," Ptomoly deciding that lying to this sharp mercenary was a bad idea, came clean.

"I see. She has a high fever. I hope she gets well soon," Alexander offered some general words of comfort as he wondered why he escaped with his sister in particular.

Making sure Ptolomy was comfortable in his tent, Alexander did not retire to his quarters but called Camius to get the interrogation reports.

And he personally went over them one by one, looking for any discrepancies.

And although he noticed some trivial ones, what bothered him most were how the questions were all over the place, jumping from topic to topic and not following through on the answers.

Like someone answered the question, 'How many days were you out?' with 'Two days.'

This was not possible, but instead of following through and asking further questions like, 'The king won four days ago, what did you do the extra two days?', the interrogator just wrote the answer and moved on to the topic of what food they ate for which meal.

'Haaah, I will need to make a standard questionnaire for interrogations or at least teach them some basic conversational techniques.' Alexander sighed in his heart and then called Camius to show him some of the flaws with the questions asked and how they were asked.

"I will need to arrange for someone to turn your street knowledge into a book to teach new spies," Alexander was already making plans to form his security service.

'You do you doc,' Camius lampooned at the thought of even more paperwork.

It took quite a while for Alexander to read the transcripts of all fourteen people (Hellma and Ptolomy included made sixteen) and cross reference and gleam the truth out of them, after filtering out the lies.

And by the time he was done, it was already midnight and he was ready to turn himself in when a golden glint hit his eyes- the royal seal.

Melodias had taken it from Ptolomy when he searched him and then passed it on to him.

Alexander picked up the smooth, round, solid piece of gold, intricately decorated with the sword and thunder coat arms of the Adhanian royal family on one side, and the engraving of Life Sea on the other.

'I too will one day become king!' Alexander's heart burned with pure ambition.

As Alexander was psyching himself up to one day sit on a throne, a herald suddenly called out to him in the dead middle of the night to say that a messenger from Adhanian was here to see him.

'Ptolomy's location got revealed so quickly? Fuck! How many spies do we have among ourselves?' Alexander could write it in gold why the messenger- most likely Arazadm was here.

But for once, Alexander was wrong in his deduction on how the Adhanians knew where Ptolomy was.

Because the horsemen that were chased off reported to their higher-ups that it was the mercenaries that got in their way of killing Ptolomy.

And this quickly made up its way to the ears of the highest levels of power in Adhanian and soon reach the ears of the most powerful man in the country, Amenheraft, who could not sit still for a second knowing the murderer of his father was just a few kilometers in front of him.

He immediately ordered the deployment of twenty thousand of his twenty-five thousand army in the middle of the night and ordered Arazadm to go bring Ptolomy from the mercenaries and retrieve the royal seal or declare war.

"Esteemed noble Arazadm, such night calls are unbecoming of a man of your status, hehe" Alexander mocked the moment he saw the familiar mustached tall tanned man.

"You....." Arazadm hated this mercenary to his guts and wanted to go off on a tirade but held his tongue, knowing his mission.

"You are guilty of hiding the royal traitor, Hand him over along with the royal seal," His voice was peremptory and absolute.

"Ptolomy? We do have a soldier by that name, but why does Adhania want a low-level grunt?" Alexander played dumb.

"Our soldiers confirmed that you attacked them when they were about to capture Ptolomy. I know he's here. Don't play dumb." Arazadm was still a bit cranky at having been woken up in the middle of the night and forced to go talk with that abominable brat.

He thought the mercenaries' heads had to have been eaten to shit to choose this milk-dripping pup as their leader.

And the incessant rain on the way did not help improve his mood.

"Haah, ..wait, and let me get the other mercenary leaders. We will decide on it together." Alexander felt any further flowery talk was just dumb.

They knew what they wanted and had come to him with the full intention of getting it.

"What's there to talk about? Give him to us or there will be war?" Arazadm gave the ultimate.

But Alexander remained calm and told him to wait.

And soon the leaders were woken up and made to seek an audience Alexander, where they meet Arazadm.

"This is Arazadm, he is here to demand Ptolomy from us?" Alexander told the gist of the situation which made all the leaders frown.

"What does the esteemed lord have to exchange him with?" Menicus, who had years of experience negotiating with people politely asked.

But this soft tone fell on deaf ears as Arazadm only snarled, "Heh, we not simply killing you for harboring god's enemy on earth is compensation enough. Don't get greedy, you pigs!"

Menicus was very well respected by the mercenary leaders and this rude behavior angered many, though they kept their mouths shut.

"Hehe, please calm down esteemed messenger. We are not saying we will not hand this Ptolomy you claim we have over. But we are interested in knowing what he has done. If he is really a rebel as you say, we will hand him over. Going against a god's will is the greatest sin on earth and we certainly will not associate ourselves with him if what you say is true." Alexander was trying to get Arazadm to talk so that he could form an emotional bond with him.

'If I had known this I would have been nicer to him,' Alexander regretted his earlier cavalier taunts.

And Alexander too was now learning about the bitter pill called regret.

"Everyone knows about the rebel, Stop wasting my time." Arazadm only screamed.

The reason for his drastic change in behavior compared to the first was because the king had deployed twenty thousand men against the mercenaries if negotiations failed.

So Arazadm- who already hated the mercenaries, had little incentive to negotiate.

But Alexander still tried, "I am sure they do. But great lord, we are only illiterate mercenaries from foreign lands. Mindless brutes who only came here drawn in by the smell of coin. So please enlighten us."

Alexander even fully bowed to the noble.

'Wow, Alexander sure can oil when the situation calls for it.' Melodias smirked in his heart, while Heliptos sneered, 'The commander is a better ass-licker than me.'

Seeing the insolent brat debase and lower himself before him, Arazadm felt his heart cool a bit and so spoke, "Ptolomy attempted a coup and failed. Now he needs to stand trial."

This concise answer was not what Alexander was looking for and asked, "Ahem, high noble sir, perhaps you could tell us a bit how he did it, what atrocities he committed while becoming a rebel, and how this man escaped the clutches of justice this long."

Seeing Alexander describe Ptolomy in this negative light, Arazadm's mouth loosened a bit and he started his recount.

And although he was reluctant at first, but under Alexander's cajoling, he revealed the entire rebellion plot as seen through the lens of the other party.

And though the events were decorated and told differently, like how according to him the actions of Amenheraft's father were right, how the nobles simply did not have the money to pay for the food the populace needed, and how the nobles were just living mouth to mouth and could not afford to lower taxes, the general information about the rebellion was consistent with Ptolomy's version.

Though there were additions like the involvement of Cantagena and Tibias long before Ptolomy called for them and how Ptolomy tried to burn down all three granaries of the city and succeeded in two, while the third attempt failed, but instead spreading fire to the nearby houses, mostly housing by nobles and killing close to a thousand of them.

He also framed the drought not as a punishment but as a test from Ramuh to separate the chaff from the wheat, the believers from the non-believers, and those that remained steadfast would be granted eternal residence in Aaru.

'Wow, you guys are really selling the religious thing seriously huh?' This reminded Alexander of the exact things some people in his previous life used to say when disaster hit them.

"So, are you satisfied with the reason now?" Arazadm was running out of patience.

"Okay, we will hand over Ptolomy." Alexander nodded, managing to eke out a tiny smile from Arazadm.

Chapter 103 Declaration Of War

Alexander had no qualms about handing Ptolomy over, the man was a fool and a liability.

"But we want safe passage by ships to Cantagena before the winter," Alexander stated his condition.

"Are you dumb? Hand over Ptolomy or be destroyed. There will be no negotiations." Arazadm shouted.

"And besides what do you need ships for?" He asked, "Aren't you gonna be hired by us?"

"Heh, you think we are fools?" The quick-mouthed, fiery mercenary- Petricuno could not hold his tongue any longer, "You just want to lure and kill us"

"What who told you that?" Arazadm was genuinely confused by this accusation.

Adhania really wanted to hire the mercenaries in good faith, because they needed their men to plant wheat instead.

"Then why does Adhania need to hire us when they can threaten to kill us?" Alexander asked with a sneer.

"That....," Alexander's argument made it difficult for Arazadm to explain his position.

It's unlikely they would buy the farming story.

"It seems we have reached an impasse," Seeing Arazadm give no reply, Alexander sighed heavily.

Then he gestured for the messenger to leave the tent, "Please enjoy some refreshments while we come to a decision."

The 'enjoy some refreshments' was sarcasm as Arazadm had been just told to wait in the cold rain, which he did, but not before sending a look of pure loathing towards Alexander, as if wanting to eat him raw.

Alexander then called a guard and told him to get Camius.

"Run as fast as you can. And tell Camius it's a code delta situation," Alexander gave the cryptic command.

As the guards scampered off, Alexander turned to look at the concerned faces of the leaders.

Meniscus was the first to speak up, "War it is then."

He said this fiercely, grinding his teeth in anger.

Surprisingly the old bones still had a lot of spunk left in them.

"*Sigh* can we win?" After losing two battles consecutively so decisively, Heliptos had grown somewhat afraid of facing the Adhanians, who seemed to be protected by the heavens themselves.

"We have to win," Melodias shouted raising his clenched fists in determination.

Alexander was very happy to see them not discussing folding or running away as he too felt that running now would be a mistake.

"What? Seriously? We can't fight them. Let's run away." Petricuno thought everyone else had lost their mind.

"Leader Petricuno, didn't you hear how they boxed Ptolomy in? If we run, it could also happen to us. It would leave our flanks open to attack as the Adhanians will be able to use the roads and cities to move around, while we would have to go around urban centers, vastly slowing us down. They can attack us in waves and slowly whittle us down." Alexander showed the flaw in Petricuno's reasoning.

"But..." Petricuno attempted to defend himself.

But Alexander cut him off, "Yes, what you mentioned does make it possible for some of us to leave Adhania. But how many? As the commander, I have a responsibility to my troops and I will not leave them." He heroically declared.

"If we fight them, we will all die. Some alive is better than none." This was not Petricuno, but a buff, strong man named Zumahun.

He was the one who had taken over Alcmene's camp.

"Being slain under a sword is a much kinder death than being hounded like dogs and slowly bleeding to death over days. We are mercenaries, we aren't afraid of death, just of an undignified one." Menicus had the tone of a martyr.

"Leader Petricuno if you fight now, there is a chance you can win. Nothing's been set in stone yet." Alexander placed his hands on Petricuno's shoulder. "But if you run, your loss will be. Can you take responsibility for the death of many of your men,"

"I..we..Then we can over the marches. We marched over them right?" Petricuno pointed with his hand to the west, his eyes full of a hopeful glow as he felt he had come across a brand new option no one had thought of.

"That was originally a massive lake that had its water drained due to the drought, Even then we had to wade through knee-deep water then." Melodias reminded Petricuno of a piece of information we conveniently had forgotten.

"And now it's been constantly raining for two days. It will have returned to a lake by now," Alexander chimed in.

"With no nearby large trees to make boats. Because of the drought, remember?" Meniscus added sarcastically.

"I...then..." Petricuno stammered, but ultimately just hung his head, grabbed a fistful of hair and spat, "Augh fine. If I am gonna die anyways, dying with you guys is not the worst thing that can happen."

"Good, then it's settled..." Alexander did not get to finish as a sharp cry interrupted him.

"I'm here. I'm here. What's going on?" This was Camius who had barged into the tent, sweating, soaked, and out of breath.

Code delta was Alexander's way of saying drop anything and everything you are doing and come meet me.

"Camius, it's good you are here. Now, there's a messenger outside the tent as I'm sure you noticed. When he leaves the tent, on his way I want him to hear this multiple times, 'Wake up! Adhania is gonna attack us in the morning. We gotta run at the crack of dawn.' Got it?" Alexander whispered the words so Arazadm can't hear.

"What? The Adhanians are attacking?" Camius jumped up in fright and yelled in horror, even letting Arazadm hear it.

'Wasn't the negotiations supposed to start three days from today? Why is the Adhanian messenger here now? Is it because of Ptolomy?' A million questions ran through Camius's head.

"Go now! Time is of the essence. We will make a formal announcement in two hours." Alexander ignored Camius's question and sternly ordered him.

And though Camius was confused, he trusted Alexander, so with a silent nod, he exited the camp.

"So, we are unanimously in not handing over Ptolomy even at the threat of going to warm right?" Alexander even looked at the two new mercenary leaders: Zumahun and Agnosh.

And all unanimously nodded.

"Good, then let's call Arazadm in."

And so the news was delivered and Arazadm left huffing and puffing, though he had a weirdly satisfied smile on his face.

And as if the heavens were smiling on him, by chance he had even heard some soldiers shout calls for running away right at dawn.

'So, that man was called to get the soldiers ready to run. That brat isn't totally incompetent.' Arazadm identified Camius and praised Alexander.

Then he sneered in his heart, 'But our army is already ready. The moment dawn comes, we will be at your doorsteps, hehe.'

Arazadm was ecstatic that he was able to gleam this 'secret information.'

After Arazadm left, the mercenary leaders look at Alexander with baffled looks.

He was the one who advocated going to war, yet going by what he had told Camius, it seemed he wanted run?

That made no sense.

"Hehe, our plan is simple. We will fake a retreat, making it appear we have left our camp, and with a little bit of luck the Adhanian will charge up the hill and right into our ambush."

Alexander succinctly explained the plan.

"Commander, did you already think of it while we were discussing if we would go to war or not? Is that why you called for Camius just as Arazadm left?" Heliptos asked incredulously, finding Alexander's thinking operating on a whole different level from his.

"Hehe," Alexander only chuckled a bit.

"It's my great luck to be able to meet a youngster like you. Ohh, only if I was a bit younger," Meniscus praised Alexander in his own, unique way.

The amazing part was not the strategy but the time he took to devise it and the little scheme he pulled off to pretty much guarantee the Adhanians will attack them, and not suspect it is an ambush.

"Please, store your praise after we have won." Alexander reminded them that the battle was far from over and they were still in a bad situation.

"Does anyone have any good estimates of their forces?" Alexander looked around.

"They had fifteen thousand (15,000) infantry, five thousand (5,000) archers, and fifteen thousand (15,000) slingers. Out of the thirty-five thousand (35,000), we killed around ten thousand (10,000). Particularly before the first ambush and when Samaras had forced the slingers to retreat. So twenty-five to thirty thousand (25,000- 30.000) would be a good estimate," Melodias made quite an accurate prediction.

"So, around double our forces," Alexander had a small frown but found the situation though bad, but not hopeless.

Hannibal beat eighty thousand (80,000) Romans at Cannae with forty thousand (40,000) men.

At Agincourt, the English with (8000) beat twenty-five thousand (25,000) French.

At the Battle of Bard, 300 Muslims beat 1000 pagans on open flat desert, by sheer determination.

Compared to them, Alexander's position was extremely enviable.

So although he felt pressured, he wasn't discouraged.

"Go and prepare your men for battle. It will dawn in about three hours, so you have two hours to get your soldiers to pack their things, arrange them in full combat formation, and then report with them at the clearing. I will address them there" Alexander commanded the leaders to take action immediately.

"Ohh and do not tell them about the ambush. But have them dismantle their tents and pack everything. They won't be able to do this in time and that's okay. We want to give the Adhanians the impression that we left so quickly, we only had the time to take the barest necessity." Alexander gave detailed instructions.

"Hehe, the commander's thought of everything," Heliptos let out a chuckle.

And with this, because of a negotiator's own personal feelings over the dislike of a particular mercenary group's commander, because of his one's own hubris to not compromise an inch, a war that could have been easily avoided was started.

Chapter 104 Dawn Of Destiny

The call to war sent the camp momentarily into panic as many were confused to be woken in the middle of the night by their friends, squad captains, or even captain and told them to get dressed for battle.

Some thought the camp had been breached and started spreading panic, especially the Cantagenans, but after a few good punches from nearby people, these people calmed down.

But all in all, the mercenaries were all veterans and so after a small moment of shock, their mechanical training kicked in and they started diligently obeying orders.

They hurriedly put on their linen armor, equipped their bronze-plated wooden shield and iron-tipped spears, and then started taking down their tent in the midst of heavy rain.

They also started filling their leather sacks with drinking water, packing as much food as they could, readying the carts by attaching the mules to them, trying to decide what smallest thing that has the highest value to carry with them, and doing all things within the time frame set by their commanding officer.

The medical clinic also went into emergency mode, as whatever wounded that could hold a shield and spear were forcefully equipped and told to report to their commander.

The women were then all commanded to prepare meals for close to fifteen thousand within two hours as who knew when they could have a hot meal next and all male servants were told to report to Menes.

Alexander also met with his captains, and gave them instructions on what to do next, but didn't even tell them about the full plan.

He spent some with Menes, urging him to get all the slaves and servants motivated with the promise of freedom if they win.

Then he met his spymaster, "Camius spread among the soldiers that the reason why Adhanians knew so quickly about Ptolomy being here was because there is a high-level spy among us. And also spread the relation about me and Pallidus, what he did and how he treated me." Alexander's motto was always to use the best of the worst situation,

Then, because of the time crunch, he gave his stratos the power to choose temporary phalanx captains for their thousand-man formations, though he did recommend some names he thought were promising judging from the inspection he had done the day.

And while all this was happening, time slipped past everyone in a blurry whirlwind of activity, and just as the thinnest thread of dawn pierced the sky, the sky opened its eyes by a sliver as if waking up from its slumber to reassure the world dawn and life was on their way, Alexander got up on the podium, the same podium that was used to elect him as the commander just four days ago, and addressed the fifteen thousand men and women, that were gathered in front of him.

"Men! Rejoice! Because you have me," The very first thing Alexander did was give a huge hurrah, playing his god's blessed card.

And this worked, as most of the fear and anxiety that the soldiers felt was washed away.

"Yeah, commander! We have the commander."

"Gaia's blessed. The Adhanians are not the only ones who have gods with them."

"With the commander with us, we can't lose."

"Yeah, the commander can see the future. We are invincible."

Soon, joyful cheers began to infect the crowd, as more and more soldiers joined the celebrations and left behind the doom and gloom thoughts such as, 'We are outnumbered,' 'They defeated us twice,' 'Capture means eternal servitude in Aaru.'

Alexander then raised his hand to pacify the crowds, and like a maestro conducting an opera, the crowd's octaves disappeared the moment Alexander raised his hands.

'He holds such control over our men,' Some mercenary leaders lampooned.

But they were also glad to have him as their commander as more control over one's army meant more obedience and less chances of soldiers breaking ranks and running when things go rough, which very well might go in this situation.

"Men, many of you might know why we have to fight. But for those who do not know or are not sure, let me tell you: The reason for this fight is because Adhania wanted someone from us- someone most of you heard of and many of you have even seen- The rebel Ptolomy."

Hearing himself be referred to as a rebel and not a king made Ptolomy quite angry, but what could he do but only endure?

'Be careful that the ship you get on doesn't sink,' He cursed Alexander.

But Alexander was absorbed in his speech to know or care.

"And we wished to hand him over to Adhania in exchange for letting us charter ships. Ptolomy had told us if we escorted him to a city just a hundred and fifty kilometers from here, he would help charter ships

for us. And we wanted the same thing from Adhanian as we did from Ptolomy, To go home. Is that so wrong, men?" He shouted the last sentence.

"No." came a unified chorus.

"We even offered to pay for the ships," Alexander exaggerated. "But these stinky Adhanians told us we would get nothing."

"Booooo," The crows jeered.

"They also came to me four days ago to hire us. Imagine that! Hire us after what they did to our brothers, fathers, and friends."

"They think we are just dogs."

"Revenge. We want revenge."

Many felt their fear be replaced with the desire for revenge as Alexander drenched up their sorrow.

"Their real intentions were to lure us out and then slaughter us. Have they not killed us enough," Alexander fanned the flames of hatred even more.

"Fight! We must fight! Revenge for our brothers," The crowd was whipped up into a frenzy, their blood boiling, eager for a fight, just as Alexander wanted.

"Yes, brothers. Fight! We must fight! Goddess Gaia had decreed we must fight the devils of Ramuh!" Alexander roared and held up his arms towards the sky, wanting to envelop it within his arms and paste the raining sky into his chest.

"Hooooooo, revelation, this is a revelation, hooooooo!" The soldiers were driven into such ecstasy, over the declared crusade that the very ground began to shake and vibrate under the zeal of fifteen thousand men and women.

'He really knows what buttons to press to make the soldiers do as he tells them to.' Menicus told himself that he could do the things Alexander did if he was made commander, and sighed in regret he had not met the kid sooner.

'Oh, how I wish to see how he will bloom in the future,' He thought regretfully.

'He is a better leader than me,' Petricuno at that moment fully submitted to Alexander.

'We can win,' Heliptos seemed to prophesize.

'I didn't choose wrong,' Melodias had a light, content smile plastered on his face.

The soldiers cheering even reached the Adhanian army that was assembling in front of the fates of Adhan in preparation for the battle, who thought the Cantagenans had lost their minds and mutinied.

Thus they were even more eager to attack them the moment the sky brightened.

But mutiny was in fact the furthest thing the soldiers had in their minds for the time.

"Now, soldiers! All who are not cavalymen, please follow your superiors as they lead you to your battlefield. And do not be surprised by where they are leading you. We have all relayed to them the correct information, so keep calm and follow orders. And the fifteen hundred cavalry please report here with your horses as soon as possible." Alexander thus finished his speech.

Then, the soaked Alexander, with water dripping out his body, met with the leaders and gave them some last-minute reminders, "Leaders please be sure to hide your troops so that the Adhanians can't spot them from afar. And be sure not to launch the attack too early. Let the Adhanians in as deep as possible. I will blow the trumpet myself to signal the attack."

Their plan was to hide behind the slopes of the huge valley, using trees and foliage, and launch a two-prong attack once the Adhanians reached the top of the hill, one from the front left, the other from the bottom right, enclosing the enemy from both sides and destroying them.

"Yes, yes, commander. You have told us this three times already. We even have lookouts to ensure the force is not just a scouting party, but the real army." Petricuno impatiently answered, a little frustrated at being treated with a greenhorn little no battle experience.

"Well then, life or death, let there be no regrets between us brothers," Alexander then strongly hugged each of the six leaders, counting Melodias.

With each of the leaders leading a group of soldiers, they then headed to their destination, with mules pulling carts to make realistic tracks on the muddy ground, their tents strewn about, and shiny stuff glittering inside, giving the impression they left in a hurry.

But Alexander did not immediately follow.

He was yet to give command to the cavalry.

The reason the mercenary leaders had no cavalry was because horses did not stay quiet for very long and Alexander feared the neighing of the horse would give their positions away.

Also, horses didn't like riding in complete darkness.

So Alexander wanted to delay the deployment upto the last second.

Soon the clearing was filled with the braying of a thousand five hundred mares and stallions.

"The one hundred riders of the scouting group come forward," Alexander ordered and it was very quickly carried out.

"Good. The other fourteen hundred will divide themselves into two groups, And then you will ride down the valley west and then change directions east to hide yourselves in the forest," Alexander pointed to the woods the Adhanians had used to hide themselves.

"Seven hundred will hide on the left and the other seven hundred on the right," Alexander detailed.

"Haha, the commander is gonna make the Adhanians eat their own medicine," Remus could not help himself be excited.

Alexander only smiled and nodded. "Yes," then warmed, "Be sure to hide yourselves deep in the forest so the sound of fourteen hundred horses doesn't alert the Adhanians. That would be disastrous."

"Yes, commander," A chorus rang.

"Good, Remus will lead the left group and Grahtos the right," Alexander selected a Sycarian he found very competent at yesterday's training.

"Now, go, ride through the dark carefully and position yourself secretly. Once you hear the trumpet blown, emerge from the forest and strike behind the enemy lines and if you can kill the king! Don't worry, I, the blessed of Gaia have received permission from the goddess." Alexander reassured the group that killing Amenheraft was okay as killing a king was viewed generally as being eternally damned.

"I promise to cleave the head from the body as soon as I get the chance," Remus promised.

'For brother!' He swore in his heart.

"Um, go now," Alexander then saw off the riders.

Then he turned to command the remaining hundred, "Split into two fifty-men groups and go behind each part of the army to act as a reserve. And remember to keep your voices down."

"Yes, commander," Came the obedient reply and the horses rode off.

'Just a hundred horses over such a large valley won't likely be detected,' Alexander reasoned in his heart.

He then slowly made his way to his lookout post, feeling the sky getting brighter by the second, signaling the time for battle drawing in ever closer.

He was both nervous and excited, believing unless the enemy was overwhelmingly huge, he could win.

And with his pep talk to himself, he readied himself to battle, confident in the prey taking the bait.

And so, with all the preparations done, all the men in place, the sky bright and clear, the stage was set to determine the fates of the mercenaries and who knows maybe even Adhania's?

Chapter 105 War Of Destiny

The sun finally rose in all its magnificent glory after two whole days of relentless rainfall, finally signaling to the world it still existed.

"Haha, looks like dawn has come early, Your Majesty. Ramuh blesses us again," Kefka credited the king for driving away the two days of relentless rainfall to give them the brilliant sunshine they were basking in.

"Those rats will not be able to run," Arazadm growled menacingly, eager to kill the mercenaries and if possible personally slay the mercenary commander or better yet capture and torture him.

Alexander also had a similar reaction to the rain stopping.

Remembering that Ramuh was the god of lightning, thunder, and rain, he remarked sarcastically to the nearby soldiers, "The rain has stopped. This signals that Adhania has lost Ramuh's favor." And only time would tell how right or wrong he was about this seemingly mundane statement.

The Adhanian army was led by Amenheraft, with its two generals being Kefka and Arazadm.

Manuk was not able to participate because of the immense workload he had to deal with as the archpriest, mainly overseeing the restoration of the Temple of Ramuh, which had been partly damaged during Ptolomy's brief rule.

Also, the greater reason was that Amenheraft saw no point in dragging him to battle when he outnumbered the enemy by double and they were reportedly running.

'What kind of a god can't beat a running army halve his size?' He pompously reasoned.

"Your Majesty, the army is ready. We are ready to march at the breath of your command," Arazadm who was a primarily military man, said giving a military to his king.

"Then, charge. I will personally behead that kingslayer." Amenheraft regally commanded, his eyes looking with imponderable hatred at the cliff Alexander had camped.

And soon the Adhanian army of twenty thousand (20,000), ten thousand (10,000) infantry and ten thousand (10,000) slingers marched to meet the Cantagenans, camped just four kilometers away.

And in just under an hour, the army crossed the flat plain where they had decimated the Cantagenans twice just five days ago and arrived at the foot of the valley housing their enemies.

Or so they thought as they could see the tents that likely housed their enemies, but no enemies, the tent's only inhabitants being miscellaneous paraphernalia.

Some of them even glittered with gold and silver, piles of tustas and ropes left strewn about, them shining back the rays of sunlight to all corners of the earth, enticing men from all over the globe like a siren to grab and possess them.

They had clearly run and run very recently given the state of things.

"Heh, craven cowards!" Sat atop his horse, Arazadm let out a snigger, which drew a similar expression from his king.

"Forward! Their supply wagons will slow them down. And I want them caught soon" Amenheraft felt every second Ptolomy lived, the more sin spread throughout the earth.

And so, like a firefly drawn to a flame, the entire army made its way up the valley, their eyes fixated not on their sides or around the slopes of the valley, but on the shiny prize waiting for them at the top, just begging to be taken.

So soon, without arranging any vanguard or rear guard, the entire army found themselves inside the 'abandoned' camp of the mercenaries.

And soon, some of the army began to lose cohesion as many began to break rank and take part in the looting of the tents.

These were not the regular armies of Cantagena, but mostly conscripts, and so discipline among them was low to begin with.

"Haha, we are gonna drink tonight, brothers."

"Oh, Meleka how long I haven't tasted that body."

"Look at these clothes. *Whistle*, fucking fancy."

"These uppity bitches have some good thing,"

At the sight of the unprotected riches, some soldiers threatened to turn into an unruly mob.

"Why are the soldiers breaking rank? Commanders, what are you doing?" Arazadm who was used to commanding professionals felt incensed at this shabby show of basic discipline.

"These are pathetic peasants. What did you expect?" Kefka only sneered.

"There's there a pile of gold right in front of them. They wouldn't be peasants if they could keep their greedy hands off of them," Amenheraft joined in on the taunt.

"Herald!" Amenheraft then sternly called for his messenger, and imperiously ordered, "Tell the commanders to kill two men from each of their phalanx formations and restore order." Amenheraft gave the cruel order.

"Yes...Yo.." The herald didn't get to finish as the sound of a loud trumpet being blown smashed into the ears of twenty thousand men.

And as if sparked by that sound, a second trumpet was blown, and hearing that a third trumpet and then a fourth and so on, almost like the musical version of lights turning on one after another and Amenheraft got the same sinking feeling he had given Agapios just five days ago.

"Shit!" was the chosen curse word Amenheraft uttered out loud.

Immediately after the signal, the air was filled with roars of jubilant cries screaming, 'Charge!' which collided with pained howls of 'Ahhhh.'

"Get in formation! Get in formation!" Arazadm screamed.

But the sight of twelve thousand armed men, with their shields up, wielding three-meter spears and charging at them both from the back and front sent panic into the hearts of the spread-out soldiers.

"Ambush!" They immediately started screaming and started running haphazardly.

This trap sent the high commands' and particularly Kefka's into blind panic as he realized in horror that the king was with them, in the thick of it.

'I need to get His Majesty out of here. If anything happens to him..., ' Kefka shuddered to think further.

"Your Majesty! Run! We have to run!" Kefka then stupidly shouted this at the top of his voice, causing the shrill cry to spread to the ears of all the soldiers, especially the nearby commanders.

"The king's leaving, the king's leaving!" Hearing this, some of the commanders started shouting in alarm and broke off to pave their own destiny.

"The king's gone, the king's gone!" The phrase changed a bit as it spread among the soldiers.

"The king's dead, the king's dead!" Then the phrase changed to a deadly one.

This rumor spread like wildfire, as it was human nature to spread the worst news in times of crisis.

"Let's go," Understanding the morale of the army destroyed, Amenheraft decided he would fight another day and escorted by eight hundred of his guard, attempted to leave the battlefield.

And the Adhanians, seeing their banner fall and the royal horse clad in gold turn tail and run, their formation melted like butter.

Thus, even before fighting, even before first contact was made, a brutal rout began, and just like that the war was over!

Seeing the mercenaries coming at them both from the northwest and southeast and their flanks compromised, the Adhanians started running down the east and west slope of the valley in a blind panic to escape the encirclement.

This caused many to trip and fall over the steep slope, and when they did, they rolled down the hill like a bowling ball, smashing against tens of their brothers on the way, forming a chain reaction and causing a grotesque avalanche of flesh, blood, and gore as many impaled themselves on the very spears they once carried, their own weapon seemingly turning against them.

"They are routing, We have won!" Some of the mercenaries shouted in ecstasy.

"Kill them all! Break rank and charge!" Seeing the battle finish even before it began, Alexander screamed in rapture and commanded his men to give up the bulky phalanx formation and just go and engage in melee to kill as many men as possible.

And the bloodthirsty mercenaries did just that, dividing them into small groups of five and ten and stabbing and slashing at the back of the screaming enemy.

Some tried to resist, some used their comrades as body shields, and some surrendered, but in front of the fierce omnidirectional attack by the mercenaries, the disorganized mob was slaughtered like pigs as many mercenaries lost their minds to grief, thinking what these animals had done to their loved ones just five days ago.

The muddy ground beneath them soon turned like the floor of a slaughterhouse.

"Hold! Hold the line, men." Some competent commanders tried to rally their troops and the stand out among them was Arazadm who had not fled with the king, but vowed to hold back the mercenaries as long as possible to buy time for the king.

And under his cry and prestige, they actually managed to gather some around them, mainly the trained slinger.

And soon these pockets of resistance began to spread and finally coalesce into a large contingent equivalent to a quarter of the total force, about five thousand (5,000) men around.

But these soldiers were the wrong type of people to join and fight on their own.

Because, they were slingers and not infantry, meaning they lacked the most important weapon in an ancient battlefield- the shield.

Thus all alone, with no shield support, their large numbers and constant attack soon drew the ire of Menes, who led Camius and Pallidus to crush the five thousand men with their three thousand, with Arazadm being slain by him and Camius, one through the stomach, other through the back.

Alexander saw everything unfold and although he was ecstatic inside, he didn't show.

Instead, he spoke to Menicus, who due to his age decided to take part in the melee, "If the Adhanians had held together and dug themselves in, even with this ambush, cracking them would have been hard."

"Because of the cowardice of a few men, a plausible victory was turned into an utter defeat." Menicus's sharp eyes had caught the precise moment Amenheraft had fled.

"Yes. And I intend to catch that coward! You are in charge," Alexander then rode down the valley followed by the hundred horsemen, intending to catch the biggest fish in the world.

Chapter 106 The Chase

Alexander had sent word to his cavalry the moment the battle started to get in formation and attack the rear camp of the Adhanians, destroying their supply base and hopefully even capturing the king of Adhania.

But he had not expected the Adhanians to rout at the very sight of them, and so the battle had progressed so quickly that the cavalry that had hidden themselves deep in the forest to not let their horses alert the Adhanians, had yet to come out of the forest and arrange themselves in formation.

But this had a butterfly effect Alexander could have never predicted,

Because, the king's escort, burdened and slowed down by its eight hundred, slow, on-foot infantry had the good fortune of meeting the fourteen hundred cavalries that were getting ready to charge the Adhanians rear side.

Remus instantly recognized the golden man on the golden horse as the King of Adhania as he had seen the very same man, wearing this unique apparel giving commands to the Adhanians from the opposite valley five days ago and immediately sent word to both groups that the Adhanian king was all alone and trying to escape.

So, the cavalry abandoned their previous orders and started encircling the contingent, trying to break through and kill the great ruler.

But although they had encircled him, the bristle of steel-tipped spears held strong and steady by the escorting troops made any breakthrough impossible.

These soldiers were the very best trained as they could march in the hollow square formation where the spears covered three hundred sixty degrees and yet not reveal gaps in the formation thus pulling off this supremely difficult technique flawlessly.

They were also blindly loyal and would never gonna break as evidenced by now.

Even after being almost encircled by double their numbers, they simply pointed their spears forward and fearlessly advanced, taking javelins shots to the face and dying without even a bit flinching as another from the back stepped over the corpse of his brother to get a chance at entering Aaru.

So, the cavalymen could only circle the tightly packed contingent, keeping their horses from the pointy ends of the stick and throwing their limited supply of javelins into the center of the circle, in the hopes of scoring a lucky shot, and preferably a kill, and more preferably a king kill.

"Protect the king!" The horsemen around Amenheraft understood the danger these projectiles possessed and hugged and squeezed themselves together against the king, raising their shields and trying to act almost like human shields.

Amenheraft sorely regretted not just riding with his horse escorts and dashing for his city as he would have been home sweet home by now, but that chance had evaporated to thin air.

Even if he wanted to break away, their horses only numbered twenty, and knew the moment he exited the safety screen of the infantry and their large spears, the enemy calvary men would destroy them.

And thus, he was forced to stay put, under the bodies of his companions, hoping the javelins don't get lucky as the eight hundred men slowly but surely crawled and inched toward the city and where their assured salvation waited.

Alexander rode like the wind and soon caught up like the king and his own cavalry.

"There's the king! On the golden horse!" Alexander confirmed to his riders what Remus had already hypothesized.

"Do not let him escape. Kill him and all our loved ones will be released from Aaru," He screamed words of fantastical encouragement.

"Ohhhh," The men roared, and renewed by the presence of their god commander, charged again, in the hopes that the soldiers would break and run at the sight of a two-meter-long pointy stick making its way straight towards them.

But no matter how many times they charged and from whatever direction and in whatever numbers, the soldiers held their ground and scared the horses away with their pointy sticks.

"My liege, quickly! Switch clothes with me. You stand out too much," Kefka shouted fearfully when he heard a voice identify the king using his armor.

The reason why unique and eye-catching armor was worn by commanders and leaders was that it acted as a beacon for their soldiers to listen to and rally to.

This was especially true of a god-king like Amenheraft whose very presence would lift the soldiers' mood and alternatively him leaving would destroy it.

As such this was a double-edged sword as it could not distinguish the types of eyes it attracted, like now and many times drew enemy attention as they could easily identify the high-value target.

And so understanding this phenomenon Amenheraft even amidst this battle, under the flesh canopy made by his entourage, switched his golden armor set with Kefka's dull, matt black armor blending in with the rest of the eighteen men.

And so, unbeknownst to Alexander and how his simple cry had caused such a change, how his prey had changed color, the chase continued.

'They are gonna escape into the city!' Alexander's heart sank as he could see the silhouette of the city's gate getting clearer and clearer every second as the infantry crawled towards their destination slowly but surely.

In about an hour they would be home free.

Of course, the reason why the Adhanians would need an hour to cross just one kilometer was courtesy of Alexander and the formation they deployed.

But slow as they were, nevertheless, they were inevitables gonna reach it if things stood as they were.

This realization stuck Alexander hard, as he was so close yet so far to capturing the grand prize to upend all grand prizes.

And the regret that filled his heart was scarcely comparable to any he had felt recently because he doubted he would ever have the chance to catch the forty-year-old king ever again.

'Wait? The city? He's gonna enter the city?' Alexander suddenly began to see Amenheraft entering the city as not being a bad thing.

In fact, he began to see it as being a very good thing.

He quickly began to evaluate the feasibility of his plan and soon thought it was ninety percent possible.

"Remus, come here!" Alexander commanded and then said, "Take ten men and go to Menicus. Tell him that I have taken over Adhan and need reinforcements."

"What?" To Remus, it sounded like Alexander was speaking in tongues.

'When did he take Adhan, we are still a kilometer from its walls?' Remus was befuddled by Alexander's claim.

But Alexander didn't have the time to describe everything, he just fiercely ordered, "Soldier! Learn to obey orders. Not what! Yes!"

This loud shout frightened Remus and he understood what Alexander really meant, 'It is not a soldier's place to question his commander, especially in the middle of a battle.'

"Yes, commander," He loudly shouted.

But as he was about to set off, Alexander beckoned to him, "Wait! Take this."

He then handed the golden royal seal he had kept with him to Remus and gave further orders, "Show this Menicus if he doesn't believe you. And tell him that he is to leave behind a contingent of two thousand men and march the rest of them as quickly as possible so I can actually hold the city."

"Okay, I will be back in ten minutes," Remus promised with a grin and set off.

And although the time he stated was a bit exaggerated, it wasn't totally bonkers.

Their camp was just three kilometers from here and a horse could cover that distance at full sprint in about three-four minutes.

So that's eight minutes to and fro and in Remus's mind, he needed just two minutes to give the message.

With Remus gone, Alexander then called Grahtos and commanded him, 'Find everyone who can speak fluent Azhak (the language of Adhania) and bring them to me.'

"Yes, commander," He said and then quickly passed it down the chain of command.

And by the time, a group of forty people gathered around Alexander, they were just a few hundred meters from the city gates.

Remus had also come back by now with good news and Alexander could expect a ten thousand men reinforcement within the hour.

Alexander then addressed the group of forty, "Ride east to the forest. Then turn back and head to the gates of Adhan and start screaming. 'The king is coming! The king is coming! Open the gates'," Alexander gave the bold command which made the forty bulge their eyes in shock.

Alexander ignored this and further emphasized, "Remember! You must give the impression you came from a different direction than us and are from Adhania. If it works each of you will be heroes, and I swear by the gods I give each of you a million tustas."

"Commander, instead of all forty of us going together, how about we do it in small batches of five to avoid drawing eyes," The squad leader very intelligently suggested.

'Dammit it! Why didn't I think of that?' Alexander was very impressed by the plan and then asked the leader's name which he committed to memory- Laykash,

And he then proposed that small groups can set off in different directions and converge on the eastern forest and then travel to the gate together.

'It's a long shot but stray groups of five men leaving a group of fifteen hundred should not draw too much attention. If luck is on my side, hopefully, the soldiers will be more interested in gazing at that golden armor,' Alexander seemed to pray for the first time in his life, though even he did not know to which deity

But, noticing how praying was not his thing, he shrugged in his mind and consoled, "Even if it fails, no great loss. We will blockade the city gate and wait for the infantry to come and destroy them.'

'Amenheraft, no matter what happens, you have an hour to live. And I will personally slay you,' Alexander swore in his heart, it burning with greed as he feasted his eyes on the grand two-thousand-year-old city.

Chapter 107 Alexander Vs Amenheraft

Alexander hawkishly watched the battlefield, repeatedly turning his back to see if Menicus was near and then swinging around to see if the horsemen had arrived at the gates.

'Time's running out!' Alexander's heart began to beat with anxiety as the small group was only a few football pitch lengths away from the city gates.

Then, with the grace of the heavens, he spotted the riders riding towards Adhan, screaming the phrase he had taught them, 'Open the gates, open the gates! The king is coming.'

This loud shouting coupled with the fact many experienced soldiers could see the all too familiar golden armor they had seen their king on just four days ago when Amenheraft re-took the city was enough to convince them.

They had long spotted their god-king being surrounded by the enemy and were praying to Ramuh to save their king.

A large number of the city watch and the garrison, numbering around two thousand strong were also assembled just behind the gates and they were about to set off to rescue their king from the horse vultures.

So, when the messengers of the king arrived with the order to open the gates, and seeing their king was only a few hundred meters away, they didn't ask questions and immediately released the complex mechanism holding the gate.

Alexander was ecstatic by this but it was very short-lived as he experienced a brief moment of elation followed by plummeting depression.

Because standing right in front of them were two of the five thousand men Amenhearft had left behind and their numbers were swelling by the minute as more and more of them were being woken up from their slumber and told to join the formation.

Alexander wasn't the only one confused as the forty men were also nonplussed.

Their original plan to just cut down the few men manning the gates and then take control of it was no longer possible. So they just kinda stood there, dithering.

Then he began to return as if to show they were going to rescue their king.

'Dammit, of course, the Adhanians would gather their forces to rescue their king, they had hours to do it. My brain must have been eaten by shit," Alexander was infuriated at himself for not considering this simple tactic.

If he could, he would court-martial himself.

But there was little use crying over spilled milk and soon Alexander took a deep breath to calm himself, "***Sigh***, calm down, calm down. Center yourself and think. There must be another way."

And like a light bulb going inside his head, it came to him.

"Men, to me! Form up! Form up for a charge!" Alexander roared with all the might he could master, ordering to form a line with him and to do a cavalry charge!

And soon, the cavalry gravitated around him and thus relieved the Adhanians of the encirclement.

Seeing the calvary disperse, the Adhanians were ecstatic and their elation turned to rapturous joy when they saw the city doors open with two thousand men behind them, eager to greet their king.

But then. just like Alexander, they also experienced 'a brief moment of elation followed by plummeting depression'.

"Charge! They are forming up to charge the open gates." Amenheraft was the first to realize the danger and screamed in terror as he turned his head to the right to see the mercenaries form up in a line.

"Our men haven't realized the danger! They are still in the middle of changing formations and must be getting ready to march toward us." A noble beside the king gave his analysis with equal horror mixed in his voice.

"We can't let them do that. Their spears will not be positioned correctly and will have no time to point them forward," Another military veteran, him quite composed, pointed out a simple fact.

They were just three hundred meters away and the horses could cover that distance within less than a minute.

"The garrison thinks the enemy horses had given up and are retreating and regrouping. They don't know they are under threat" Kefka shouted so loudly that it seemed he wanted the garrison to hear his voice.

"Kefka, you take the lead. Now the siege has been lifted and they are forming lines, it's the perfect time to break up and charge into the city!" Amenheraft could not let bear the thought of being so close and failing.

The last few hours had been brutal for the mental physic of Amenheraft and he wanted this whole ordeal to be just over with and so ordered Kefka to act as bait while they charged.

"At once, your Majesty!" Kefka nodded and then began to form a wedge-shaped charging formation.

And then, *Whoosh*, they were gone.

The front lines of the hollow square formation magically seemed to collapse as the soldiers seemed to break away, while from the center came a screaming, blind gallop of twenty horsemen led by a magnificent golden horse like one out of a painting.

'The king is running!' Alexander's heart sank to the inky depths of hell at seeing the golden sun-like horse starting to disappear into the horizon.

He thus frantically raised his spear to the sky and screamed a chase, "Charge!"

And so the epic horse chase of the century began, with twenty horsemen kicking up dust clouds as they tried to outrun the fifteen hundred horsemen led by its vicious commander Alexander.

"Faster, faster," Alexander whipped his horse, even causing him to get out of formation and be in danger of being caught isolated.

Amenheraft too glanced back to see which man had managed to push him so close to the abyss and his deep, black profound eyes met the furiously blue steely eyes of Alexander.

But Alexander did not know he was looking at the king, his focus was instead squarely placed on the golden armor worn by Kefka.

Then Alexander noticed the forty men that were returning from their half-successful mission and shouted, "The gold! Kill the gold!"

In his mind, the forty horsemen could easily stop the twenty Adhanians or at least kill the very leading man, which happened to be the king.

'Hahaha, the heavens are still smiling at me,' He hysterically laughed in joy at this happenstance.

But how could anyone hear a tiny human's voice over the galloping of a thousand and a half horses?

And even before the men could understand what their commander was moving his mouth about or even who was charging at them, *whish* they had gone past them.

'Fuckkkkkk,' Alexander's disappointment was immeasurable and his day seemed to be ruined.

But, luckily, there was one sharp man who managed to understand the situation and screamed, "The king! There's the king!"

This was Laykash, who immediately turned with his horse, and started galloping.

'Shit! We were so close,' He cursed himself as he tried to catch up with less than two hundred meters remaining.

As such, a strange scene developed just outside the biggest city in the East.

Twenty horsemen led by a golden horse led the front, followed by a solitary horseman behind, and then a thousand and five hundred men even more behind them, whipping up plumbs of dust storm in the process as they charged.

Laykash maneuvered his horse very skillfully and even started to gain on the Adhanians as, as a Sycarian his horse skill were top-notch, much better than the likes of Kefka and the others.

But it was too little, too late.

The distance was too small and the twenty horsemen finally reached the gates of Adhan.

They were safe.

The king was safe.

'It's over!' Alexander bitterly cursed his heart, 'The king will now disappear into the city and the soldiers immediately will point their spears forward to stop the cavalry charge and then close the door within minutes.' He told himself.

Or so he thought!

Or so everyone else thought!

But this was not what Laykash thought!

Because, unlike Alexander who had started to slow down his charge, he showed no signs of stopping.

Instead, he spurred his warhorse, his buddy to speed up and galloped full speed ahead

And because as twenty Adhanian men inevitably slowed down nearing the gate to not smash into their own men and thinking there was no lunatic stupid enough to still keep charging at them, they couldn't see this coming.

Even in their wildest dreams, they didn't expect what would happen next.

Laykash zipped past everyone, ignoring the other nineteen tired men gasping and panting and leading their horses through the large city gate, and keeping his spear pointed directly at the back of the golden armor.

And then *Pierce.*

The steel tip, powered by the momentum of the horse and man, pierced Kefka's heart like butter, killing him even before he could a sound, even before anyone could understand what was going on.

Everyone just saw a shadow, arriving behind their lead man, and piercing him with a spear out of nowhere, and then, because Laykash hadn't bothered to slow down, the golden horse their 'king' toppling over.

For a moment, that seemed to run towards eternity, the nobles, the soldiers, and even the horses seemed to have hit the pause button as they all went wide-eyed and just kept staring at the golden armor slowly being dyed red and the Catagenan whose femur bone seemed to be sticking out of his thighs.

All seemed paralyzed by fear.

"The king is dead! The banner has fallen!" This howl was not from the Adhanuian but from Alexander, who being just thirty meters away from the gates saw everything clearly.

And because of the pin-drop silence flowing through the Adhanians right then, every peasant, soldier, and noble heard it as clear as a day.

And they routed!

Chapter 108 Inside Adhan

"The god-king is dead! The god king is dead!" Alexander screamed in elation as he thought he had finally done it.

After experiencing such a myriad of emotions with such a small amount of amount, it was finally over.

Finally, Amenheraft was dead.

Or so he believed as he took the lead in the charge through the gate.

But fortunately, Alexander wasn't the only one to believe in this erroneous conclusion.

Because the Adhanians also believed their king was dead.

And although some of the nobles and even Amenheraft himself wanted to come out and explain the situation there was no time.

Alexander was literally just tens of meters behind them and charging at full speed with his spear pointed toward them.

"Your Majesty, run!" A noble screamed at the thought of another daredevil charging towards them with no regard for his life and then spurred his horse to smash through the densely packed garrisoned soldiers.

Seeing the nobles attack them to save their own hide, the 'king' laying dead in front of them, and a group of cavalymen charging at them, the soldiers saw no reason to keep fighting.

They threw their shields and spear to the ground and started running, exposing their back to the spears of the horsemen and opening massive gaps in the formation.

Alexander himself led the charge, his spear scoring the first kill when it pierced a young man's heart threw the heart and because the momentum was so great, threw the man several meters off the ground as he flew like cannon, smashing against the people behind him.

"Kill them all! For King Ptolomy!" Alexander had a cunning reason to declare this.

But the men needed no such encouragement, as they were all very eager to paint their steel tips red.

And thus a one-sided massacre began, as the horsemen, ripped more and more lives by the minute.

They seemed almost spoiled for choice, as the horde of tightly packed men, with their backs, turned to them, presented themselves like gifts wrapped exclusively for the horsemen to collect and they were not rejected as the cavalry showed no mercy and took no prisoner.

And the horsemen weren't the only danger the fleeing Adhanians faced.

The fleeing two thousand men, also smashed against each other, screaming, pushing, and hitting against each other as they tried to escape the deadly situation, creating a brutal stampede.

Later, when the body counts would be taken, it would even be revealed that only a tiny fraction had any gaping spear wounds on them, most deaths being due to crushing and asphyxiation.

After the first kill, Alexander didn't continue leading the charge, as it was a very dangerous thing to do, especially within an urban environment with narrow streets that restricted horse mobility.

Instead, he stayed behind and issued orders to capture the gate.

"Commander, you are truly blessed by Gaia. Please accept my humble prostration," The Sycarian commander Grahtos approached him and overcome with emotion and even got down from his horses and did a full prostration toward Alexander.

Alexander was surprised by this action and thought the commander's actions were excessively humble.

But he misunderstood the level of emotion running through the other men, especially the Cantagenans.

Because to these men, Adhan had an almost mythical status- the superpower of the East which was nigh unconquerable.

Their king was said to live in a palace that had been sculpted by the gods, protected by walls thick enough to host chariot races on them.

His soldiers were said to be immortal and when slain, they would rise again at night, ready to serve their king again.

And this feeling was reinforced by the two, miraculous defeats they had suffered just five days ago, where even when all mortal conditions seemed to be in their favor, the gates of Adhan laid open to them thanks to the rebel king Ptolomy, and they were led by their war-general, by the machinations of fate and the hand of god, they had lost.

And not only that, they had lost miserably and their brothers were sacrificed to Ramuh as eternal slaves.

But now!

Under the leadership of an eighteen-year-old boy, in just five days, they had done it.

They had done the impossible.

They had killed the king, taken Adhan, and freed their loved ones from the unending servitude of Ramuh.

If this was not a sign of divinity, then what was?

And this sentiment was shared by many as some twenty men, enlightened by Grahtos's actions followed suit.

But the one who killed Amenheraft was not Alexander but Laykash, and Alexander was not the type of person to take credit for others' work,..generally.

"Captains, please! The one who killed Amenheraft here," Alexander pointed to the man who lay smack right in front of the gate, groaning in pain and barely conscious, as his femur had been broken when his horse fell on him.

"Yes, commander, he did kill the king. But it was you who positioned him. As the commander, it is your glory as Gaia used his hand to further her blessed's cause." Grahtos so elegantly pointed out.

Alexander was very surprised by this man's eloquence, peasants did not speak like that, but then he remembered who Grahtos was- a cavalryman.

More importantly, he was a cavalry captain, meaning he was likely a noble and from the looks of it a religious noble.

But although he nicely gift-wrapped the claim for Alexander, Alexander insisted, "The military records will show Laykash killed Amenheraft,"

He had his own sense of integrity, and could not steal credit that was not his.

It might sound hypocritical for him to not do this, given he committed worse crimes, but men were not made of a single defining character, but a myriad of emotions.

For example, a sadist might love and cherish his family.

Many serial killers have excellent friends and family.

And vice versa, a kind person, who very much loves helping people, which enjoy animal cruelty.

And for Alexander, he detested taking credit for others, a feeling he developed due to a certain incident in his previous life.

But Grahtos was insistent, "Commander, look at him. His femur is broken, meaning he will die soon, or be a cripple. How can give kill a god? Take the credit!" He enticed.

But Alexander only answered, "How says he's gonna die? Men, get Laykash up and bandage his legs. I will fix his legs tonight." He boisterously claimed.

"Commander, you giving me this honor is enough to last a lifetime." From the ground, Laykash weakly spoke with panted breaths.

"But, you don't have to comfort me. Even a child....a child knows that femur injuries are fatal. We Sycarians learn this the moment we ...we start riding." He groaned and gasped with pained moans.

"That's right commander. The number of Sycarians who have died or been crippled by femur injuries is endless," Grahtos chimed.

"Yes, captain Grahtos is right. So commander, please use your name instead of mine," Laykash pleaded with teary eyes.

"Okay." Alexander seemed to agree, but added, "I will do it when you die."

Then, without giving him a chance to retort, he barked, "Men, why are you not bandaging and moving him to safety."

As the men were moving him, the glint of the golden armor hit Alexander in the eye and he grew curious about what the man who claimed to be god looked like.

So, he ordered, "Take the helmet off. Let's see if a god is different than a human."

And Grahtos personally took off the armor, super excited himself to undrape a god.

But the moment the head was revealed, the sight of it made all the men around freeze their blood in horror.

"This is not him," Alexander exclaimed involuntarily at the golden-haired man.

Alexander had never seen Amenheraft, but even he could bet all the money in the world to promise that he wasn't blonde.

He had heard the Agapios in his speech before the battle describe Amenheraft as the black-haired devil so he was sure of it.

Also, thinking back now, it seemed strange to him how the Adhanians had just left the body of their god laying behind to be desecrated.

And, subconsciously Alexander's floated to remember the deep, profound eyes that gazed at him that time.

'That was the king! He switched armor!' Alexander hit on an epiphany.

"This is bad! The king is alive and could still organize his forces behind the inner wall," He shouted.

And the other men all went pale at the confirmation of this dreadful nightmare.

"Commander, what now?" His men all looked at him, expectation dripping out of their eyes.

"....." Alexander was thinking so hard, he feared his brain might cook off in the immense pressure he was putting on it.

But nothing came to him, when suddenly the glare of the shiny armor hit his eyes.

"That's it," Alexander roared in jubilation and shook his fisted hands in front of him.

Then giving no opportunity to anyone else to say anything, he got off his horse, while screaming, "Quick, take off his armor. Quick."

Then men were a bit slow to act as they were confused by the order, but seeing Alexander start stripping his own armor, the smarter ones immediately got the plan.

"Quick, help me. Quickly," Grahtos screamed to his men s he started to slip off the complex leather bands that held the bronze armor.

And soon, Kefka was left with only his tunic and pants, while Alexander was dressed head to toe in gold, golden helmet, cuirass, thigh and leg greaves, and boots.

In his hand, lay the golden royal seal, and from afar the disguise was perfect as the small hole in the front and back, which had been cleaned off any blood was really not visible.

And Alexander planned to use this to enter the inner ring, with acted as a citadel, and this time slaughter the king for real.

Chapter 109 Inner City

The citadel or the acropolis was a kind of huge castle or temple, usually built on a hill that was used as a last resort to hide inside if the city was taken.

The idea was to barricade the narrowly designed entrance and wait for reinforcement while taking refuge inside the tower which would typically be always stocked with food and water for the citizens or at least the nobles to last for weeks.

Such as now, where the Adhanian main army was said to be just a few hundred kilometers from the city, and even if bad road conditions were taken into account, they would be here in at most a month.

Regarding the citadel, Adhan was special because it didn't have a citadel like the other cities per se.

Instead, the royalty had turned a small part of the city into a permanent fortress, for the nobles to stay in and enjoy themselves.

This massive enclosed structure housed all the important buildings of the city- the palace, the Temple of Ramuh, lots of noble houses, and the various administrative buildings and was called the inner ring.

The six-meter high walls that barricade the land, its tops manned by sentries, had the important job of keeping out the common rabble from mixing with the noble blood as much as it had the job of keeping out any external threats- which it had yet to face in its recent history.

Until now.

Because for the first time in three hundred years, an external threat had appeared.

And that external threat was now devising a way to get past the last line of defense and enter the soft underbelly of the city.

"Remus, I leave the job of guarding this gate to you. You will have two hundred men to do this and tell Menicus to head straight for the inner ring the moment he arrives," Alexander first addressed the boy.

"Yes, commander!" Remus quickly replied, finding the prospect of fighting two thousand men with only two hundred horsemen not a problem, as the former had turned to a fleeing mob.

Then Alexander turned to Grahtos and asked "Can you speak Azhak?"

And he got an affirmative reply.

"Good, we will charge straight towards that building." Alexander pointed to the spire of the palace, "And you are to shout 'The king is coming, the king is coming, open the gates on the way. Got it?'"

"Yes, commander!" The strong, chiseled man was shaking with excitement at being a part of this clandestine operation.

"Good, order twenty men to get around me and the rest are to follow me behind as if they were chasing me!" Alexander intended to give the wall defenders the impression that their king was being chased through the city and urge them to open the doors as quickly as possible without asking too many questions.

Alexander did fear the real king might have made his way inside by now and intended to use the chase, his armor, and the royal seal to bluff his way inside.

'Please let it work!' Alexander prayed in his heart.

Then he blew his trumpet signaling to all nearby cavalrymen to disengage with the enemy and rally towards him.

And soon the scenery of a group of twenty horsemen being 'chased' by thirteen hundred Cantagenan cavalry manifested itself on the narrow streets of Adhan, as they made their way straight towards the spire in the horizon, following a simple straight road that led there.

'The king is coming, the king is coming, open the gates'. This phrase soon entered the ears of the guarding soldiers who ran up the walls and witnessed their 'king' clad in golden being chased by what seemed to be a cloud of dust being driven up by an imponderable number of horsemen.

The man in golden armor ran while the very ground underneath him shook under the trembling hoofs of so many horsemen, as he held up a small golden round thing, which looked like the famed royal seal high up in the sky.

"His Majesty! His Majesty! Open the gates quickly, His Majesty is coming!" Some of the men shouted in surprise and started to open the gates as they had practiced doing.

But some of the sharper ones, particularly a young boy called out, "Wait, we just let in a group of nobles just now. And we were sternly told not to open the gates for anyone."

"Bah, snort-nosed brat," The leader of the watch, a wrinkled, veteran, shut the boy down.

"Don't you get it, those nobles turned tail and ran from the battle, leaving their liege behind. And now they want to cover their own asses," He who had put up with a lot of the noble's bullshit over his long career thought he had figured it all out.

But one of the reasons the nobles had not shown Amenheraft to the guards was because the guards were unlikely to recognize the king even if they saw him.

How many knew what the king actually looked like?

Another reason was they felt no need for it, as according to them the soldiers had been given orders and they were expected to follow them. To the poor soldiers what difference was there between a high lord and a king?

And the final and biggest reason Amenheraft had not shown himself to them was because he didn't trust them.

Ptolomy's rebellion had ended just a few days ago, and he had switched and killed a lot of royalist watchmen to gain hold of the city, resulting in a manpower shortage that Amenheraft had not been able to fully make up within the short time, thus resulting in many guards with unknown allegiance still keeping their post.

'I should have been faster with the purges.' Amenheraft swore in his heart, berating him for spending the last few days being too busy punishing the nobles, readying the farmers to reclaim the farmlands that had fallen to the wayside, and reorganizing the army.

So, he didn't know who to trust and hence kept his identity secret, lest any of the watchmen got any stupid ideas.

"But, leader, they say the king is dead!" The young boy tried to reason.

"*Smach*" And he got a gut punch for his efforts.

"The king is eternal, you got! There..there is the proof" The religious old man shouted frantically, pointing his wizened arm toward Alexander.

He spoke with religious fervor, "If been said the king is immortal. Even if he is slain he can rise again. Look, he even has the royal seal! How can an imposter get that?"

And his sentiment was also shared by his deputy who joined, "Look, the king is riding on a different horse." He pointed to the fact Alexander's horse was not draped in gold canvas.

And offered his own hypotheses, "His Majesty's horse must have died. And the nobles and the soldiers must have then thought he was killed."

Then he barked, "What's the holdup? Didn't you hear the leader? Open the gates quickly!"

And so, to Alexander's utter glee, he could see the strong bronze doors five meters high open themselves to invite him in as he felt the approach of the crossroads of fate behind those gates.

'Once I cross that gate, my destiny will irrecoverably change.' He swore in his heart.

And to catch that new fate, Alexander rode like the wind and at last, passed the last hurdle.

He was in!

"Ohhhh." Him and his surrounding soldiers let out triumphant cries of joy which the surrounding soldiers took it to being a result of having escaped the enemy and joined them in cheer.

But the very next second, the latters' enraptured cries turned to wails of horror as Alexander smoothly pierced the throat of the veteran leader sprinting to greet his king and screamed, "For King Ptolomy!"

Then without stopping to listen to the sweet dread-filled cries of the Adhanians, he bashed his shield against another soldier, while his horse stood up on his hind legs to kick a man who stood right in front of it.

"Enemies! They are enemies!" Finally realizing what had happened, the young boy screamed in terror and then heroically turned tail and ran.

And following this model soldier's retreat, and under the bloodthirst spear points of the aggressive soldiers, others ran too and the gate was secured within seconds.

'These Adhanians have no spine! Only fighting fiercely when they are winning and running the moment things go a bit south for them,' Alexander sneered in his heart.

The watchmen here considerably outnumbered his paltry force of twenty and could have put up a decent fight if they tried.

But instead, they ran, treasuring their own life for a few more precious seconds, not understanding that the soldiers they ran from would destroy his city and then most likely kill them later.

"*Hooooonk*" Alexander blew the trumpet once again to signal to the rest of the cavalrymen to meet up with him and when they assembled he ordered, "Fifty men are to guard the gates."

Then he turned to the Sycarian, "Grahtos, take five hundred men and storm the palace. Kill anything that moves. And if you want to keep your head, keep shouting, "By King Ptolomy's orders!" all along the way."

The intelligent noble immediately understood what Alexander meant by that, that he could kill, ****, and plunder with impunity if he did it in the king's name and thus shift all responsibility to him.

So, he returned a gleeful grin, "By the blessed of Gaia's command."

"Um, just be careful of Ptolomy's wife and children. Anyone claiming to be related to Ptolomy is to be spared. And no fires. Besides that you can do whatever else you want inside the palace," Alexander gave a very ominous permission which got an immediate cheer from the men.

Chapter 110 Temple Of Ramuh

Alexander watched the lucky five hundred cheer and get jealous looks from the other eight hundred with nonchalant coldness even after knowing the brutal fate that was to befall the mostly innocent men, women, and children.

He particularly felt bad about the women and especially the young girls as these brutes will pounce on them with hyenas on meek sheep, and tear their dignity to shreds.

Most had never seen girls so beautiful, so fair, so tender, so noble and so sheltered, and under the hands of these brutes, death might be a better alternative for the women than to survive the ordeal and live with the trauma for the rest of their lives.

But although Alexander was certainly moved by the thought of their tragic fate, he remained unmoved about the order.

The palace had to be taken, Amenheratf was most probably there and even if Alexander forbade committing any atrocities he could write it in blood that it would have to effect.

These men were ruthless and after the little stunt Adhania had just five days ago, they were out for blood and no amount of order and Gaia's blessed's command was gonna stop that.

And so since this was inevitable but he lacked the stomach to witness it, he gave the order to Grahtos to do it, himself being content with only knowing what was happening and not wanting to see it first hand the true scale of it all, the distinctive reaping of clothes, the screeching screams, the painful grunts and the doleful howls of husbands and brothers.

Alexander watched the five hundred cavalry storm towards the defenseless castle with mute indifference, the castle guards being mostly absent, just waking up or having been already sent to the front line.

Then he turned to address the eight hundred or more precisely seven hundred and fifty men left behind (Fifty were left behind to guard the inner gate), "Men, you may be disappointed that your brothers got to taste the finest flesh. But do not be saddened."

He then pointed to the temple of Ramuh and shouted, "Because the world's greatest riches lie await for you."

In ancient times, people did not have banks but instead stored their money in temples, the idea being the temples were the dwelling of the gods and thus inviolable.

And for most cases, this belief held true, as even the most barbaric soldiers usually refrained from looting the temple, even if they sacked the whole city.

But the key point was 'for most cases' as it implied there were some exceptions- like now.

Alexander's declaration caused a shallow tide of uneasiness to rise in the hearts of many as Alexander's sharp eyes caught his men fidgeting and hesitating but seemed to be too afraid to say anything.

Alexander decided to wipe this uneasiness away, "Men, do not worry, Goddess Gaia has blessed us with her champion and I will lead you. The mother goddess has fought god Ramuh for the past two days, evidenced by the continuous downpour, and finally today she won! This is why the rain stopped just before the battle and this is why we stand where we are!"

He spoke these words with such confidence and authenticity that even he began to feel they might be true as soldiers let a triumphant, "Hurrah."

'Hehe, I missed my calling in my previous life. I should have become a snake oilman.' Alexander chuckled at his own bullshit.

This was why he couldn't go to the palace to kill Amenheratf and let Grahtos take the temple.

To take the temple would need some one blessed by the gods.

Alexander blew his horn to signal to the horsemen to form up and they charged!

They beelined straight towards the magnificent white temple, overlooking the beautiful pink waters of the sea of life and standing majestically on its sixty huge, thick, intricately decorated white granite pillars, them being carved and chiseled to perfection.

Its walls were twelve meters high, made of the same flawless granite as the pillars, and decorated with elaborate friezes that depicted epic battles between the gods, various stories and parables from the Takqa, and even the names of famous Adhanian kings and heroes.

To add to the luxuriousness of it all, the fringes of the friezes were embroidered using gold threads and each depiction of Ramuh had jewels embedded in him, while the names on the wall were set with black granite and embroidered with the same golden threads.

The temple's roof was a huge dome, on top of which stood the golden statue of the god of lightning himself, planting his feet on a canvas of exquisite painting of gold and blue as the whole dome seemed like a golden mirror reflecting the magnificent azure sky above.

It was an architectural marvel and could go toe to toe with any of the seven wonders of Alexander's previous world.

But Alexander's eyes did not linger on this magnificent spectacle as he barged into the lush lower courtyard floored with white marble and then galloped up the ten-meter-wide marbled stairs with hundreds of men trailing behind him, emitting a bloodthirsty aura intent on destroying all.

Alexander kept his gaze fixed on the open bronze temple doors and his heart bled with greed when his eyes were hit by the glittering riches inside.

"By I, King Amenheratf's orders." He shouted in broken Azhak when he finally reached the top, chanting the same thing he had heard Grahtos say, just cleverly switching out the name of Ptolomy for Amenheratf.

This was also chanted by the rest of the men behind him minus the 'I', their chorus finally drawing the attention of the many priests and priestesses that were just about to start their day.

All of them, having just woken up and due to the rapid blitzkrieg conducted by Alexander, had little cognition of the mortal danger they were in and only looked at the golden armored warrior holding the royal seal and speaking in a thick Azkak with curiosity and confusion.

'King Amenheratf? He's here?' They wondered as the golden armor and the little golden circle held by the man claiming such seemed authentic.

Thoughts like 'Does the king need us to do something?' And 'Why is he here with so many men?' were produced in the minds of the priests.

But Alexander was not gonna wait for these helpless fools to figure things out as he went forward and spilled first blood on sacred grounds when he speared a priest and followed it up with an accurate javelin throw to a young priestess.

"Urg..., Your..Ma...", Even as they fell, they weren't able to understand what had happened and their last moments were filled with not anger and unwillingness, but by confusion and a desire to know what they had done wrong so they could ask for forgiveness.

The audience was also frozen in shock, seemingly unable to even believe their beloved god-king, their master, their god, was capable of doing such a thing.

'Those two must have committed blasphemy' They tried to rationalize themselves.

But this notion was quickly shattered when the men behind their king also started slaughtering them en mass, reaping their lives like they were harvesting wheat, all the while chanting the phrase, 'By King Amenheraft's orders' like a broken record player.

"Nooo, Your Majest..aahhh,"

"Mercy, mercy...urgh,"

"...our crime. What's our crime?"

"Mad! The king has gone ma..argh!"

"Urg...you insane lunatic. Ramuh will not let you off fool." An old priest kneeled on the ground clutching in bleeding stomach as he gazed fiercely not at the golden armor, but at the royal seal, held up high in the air by Alexander as he kept shouting, "By I, King Amenheratf's orders, die!"

He had picked up the last word while listening to the Adhanians charge at them, and because of his infantine grasp of Azhak, the grammar was wrong.

But these priests were too busy dying or running for their lives to actually give one hoot about why their king was suddenly speaking in half Azhak, half nonsense.

Alexander watched impassionately as the people and priests inside and around the temple screamed and run in horror at the white floor being given a fresh coat of paint, their routes disorderly and chaotic, many even jumping into the life sea and trying to swim to the other side for safety.

Some of Alexander's men seemed eager to hunt down these stragglers but Alexander ordered, "Let them go. They will spread fear and panic among the populace."

Then he got off his horse and shouted, "Into the temple, come men!"

And so the sky under Alexander soon changed from a clear, sunny day, to one lit by huge, golden candle chandeliers as Alexander was dumbstruck by the sheer opulence on display.

Thick luscious red carpets draped the floors, making one feel like he was walking on snow as the red fabric hugged and kissed one's foot, lovingly taking away all the pain and exhaustion. Luxurious golden curtains with strings of rubies flowing off them decorated the side walls and huge golden chandeliers containing hundred of thick candles swayed gently in the wind let in by the four huge doors placed on four sides of the temple.

And then, there was the center masterpiece, right in the center of the temple.

A huge ten feet statue made of solid gold, depicting a strong, muscular man with a long beard, holding an orb in one hand and a lightning bolt in the other.

'The god of lightning, thunder, and rain- Ramuh,' These words subconsciously appeared in the mind of even the most illiterate soldier there and for a brief moment, the greed in their eyes was suppressed by the sheer magnificence of the scenery.

But only a moment, because their eyes not only detected the golden statue but also the enormous, literally hundreds of tonnes of ropals that were piled up around the feet of the statue, creating a stack that rose up to cover even his ankles.

This was the collective acclamation of the Adhan and the Adhanian royal family!