

Herald 151

Chapter 151 End Of The Feast[Bonus]

The peasants were also overjoyed when they were informed that the body of the previous king was right there in the middle of the courtyard, to be viewed and paid respects to, and when they realized that it was only observable to the few lines close to the center, many attempted to switch queues, even at the cost of delaying their food collection, just to get a glimpse of a god, even of a dead one.

But soon the thick wooden clubs and the wooden lower ends of the soldiers' spears managed to break their determination and they had to be content with just getting food.

Though all the people did have the fortune of getting to see the divine face of the living god- Ptolomy, whom, they could not fully make out with all his distinct facial features, but could still make out his royal silhouette.

'How can god be so easily viewed in the flesh so up close?' The populace reasoned as to why Ptolomy sat so far away from them.

Time quickly rolled on, and dawn soon turned to noon, but the ocean of people seemed never-ending.

While the servers almost mechanically plopped off the liquid onto the bowls using a large ladle, a near-constant stream of people kept going in and out of the temple, to quickly replace the rapidly diminishing serving pots.

This was very natural as, at a rate of six hundred grams served per five seconds, the hundred-kilogram capacity pot would be empty in less than fourteen minutes.

And then multiply that number by fifty, the numbers produced would be truly horrific.

To the people carrying the heavy pots down the stairs and carrying back the empty ones, it felt like they were pouring food into the mouth of a bottomless abyss, as the previous one they just delivered would be empty by the time they bought a new one as fast as their feet would carry.

Alexander was also glad that he ordered those extra bowls, as he saw many without any bowls, being so destitute that they intended to carry the scalding hot porridge on their bare hands.

This made Alexander lampoon at the absence of the magic material called plastic and more specifically disposable containers, though Alexander doubted such a thing would exist in his lifetime.

As the serving was performed with almost machine-like repetition, amongst all of them, two incidents caught Alexander's eye.

One was when a small child tripped and splashed her hot food onto the foot of a guarding soldier, which got her kicked in the stomach, and caused her to vomit as she quickly tried to scamper off with tears in her eyes.

Seeing this made Alexander absolutely incensed and for a moment he even wanted to execute that particular soldier, but instead got Hemicus to reassign that soldier to carrying the food pots up and down the stairs, while he made sure that poor girl had two servings.

After that incident, the soldiers became a lot more behaved with the populace, reducing minor harassment by the soldiers.

The second incident was not one of action but a memory for Alexander, as he watched a thin, almost cadaverous mother with an infant tied to her chest, and with three, dusty, soot-faced children trailing behind her given the large, generous serving.

The mother had no bowl with her and when she held out her hand to get the porridge but was given a crystal bowl instead, her disproportionately big eyes seemed to be in danger of popping out of her skull.

That bowl was worth more than a hundred of hers.

And her shock intensified when several similar more bowls, all part of a set were given to her children as well, making her choke with sobs while she accepted the warm food.

She had only expected to be given a single serving as the only adult and could only thank king Ptolomy and God Ramuh in suppressed cries for being able to receive five servings, one for even the infant.

The mother and her children then gulped down the simple, piping hot liquid as fast as they could, not bothering to care one bit if they burned their tongue or throat, as they were afraid the food might be snatched by gangs or strong men when they left the safety of the temple premises.

Alexander watched this from atop his perch with interest and satisfaction, as even though he the orchestrator of the whole thing got no recognition, instead it going to Ptolomy, he was happy nonetheless.

Alexander, even in his last life, was a cold guy, but never cruel.

He showed little emotion on his face and body language, but that didn't mean he was cruel or mean.

He never enjoyed hurting anybody and would feel happy at others' happiness and sad at others' misery like any other normal human being.

And even though his edges had roughened over the last ten years, the core of his heart remained the same.

Alexander had also anticipated the problem that the mother and many others like her feared and had taken steps to ensure that.

So to ensure the queues were not broken and strong men and gang members could not cut places, he had made Grahtos and his men guard the lines from horses, catching anyone cutting lines and then sending them back to the very edge of the line, and in some case even beating the snot out of them.

After a few such demonstrations, these ruffians, under the threat of fist and steel, understood what was good for them.

Though the rich and the powerful ones, with high social skills, still managed to bribe some of the guards to get some favors.

Alexander was powerless to stop this kind of corruption as it was endemic and almost cultural and him stopping one here was futile and meaningless.

But this did make Alexander vow to make structural changes to crack down on these kinds of behavior.

The security at the back was also as tight as the front, with soldiers flanking the crowd as the latter made their way out through the back of the temple using the beaches, the guards ensuring no one hid themselves in the inner city or tried to cause any disturbances.

In this way, noon soon rolled over to dusk, and the inner city gates were closed under Alexander's orders to prevent any more people from joining the line.

The last service ended an hour later just as the fire braziers were beginning to be lit and finally,

the duo that had sat like statues on top of the staircase, save for the occasional bathroom breaks, at last, got to retire to the chambers, with both of them suffering from painful cramps.

Alexander particularly felt like his back was on fire and about to snap off, as unlike Ptolomy who got to spend the day on a cushy, comfy pillow, he had to sit atop a horse for the entire day.

He had had to even change horses multiple times as the beast had gotten hungry, while he ate his meal atop the animal.

And thus his next night was spent with aching back pain as there was no one to even rub some oil on him.

Cambyses and the others had been working themselves like dogs like yesterday and when the strong, tired girl had entered the room late at night, long after Alexander did, she could barely keep herself standing.

She had gone to bed later than Alexander yesterday and woken up before him, and this applied to almost all the servants and slaves.

And the royals were not left unscathed either.

Hellma, the Queen mother, and Ptolomy's family all helped out in instructing the servants all day long, while Ptolomy had never had to sit in one place for so long.

Many times he grumbled and even attempted to leave the seat, but a strong glare from Alexander was all it took to make the meek man sit down.

Another two notable royals that were hurt badly were Azira and Azura, who, it would not be inaccurate to say got their hearts figuratively crushed.

When they were made to say what had happened to two days, they spoke truthfully and although they repeatedly emphasized that they were tricked and threatened to do it, the people didn't seem interested in such excuses.

This broke the pure hearts of the two, as, during the drought, they had served temple food reliefs to many of these people, who had accepted it with joyful cries and proclaimed them as saintesses.

And now those same people were cursing them as fallen angels and witches.

How lamentable!

The twins would spend the night in their room crying, only holding onto each for comfort and kinship.

But while the day did have its few bitter moments, overall it was an almost unmatched, triumphant success.

There had been no large-scale disorder, no major food disruptions as the food kept smoothly pouring in, and no people that came went home with an empty bowl.

The propaganda piece worked flawlessly and thus, all in all, the day successfully ended.

Chapter 152 Ordering The Pilla

Alexander woke up the next day late in the morning, still tired from yesterday's hectic day, and was surprised to find Cambyses still sleeping like a baby next to him.

'The last two days really wore her out,' Alexander said looking at the sleeping beauty and gently caressing her face and then being careful not to wake her up, slowly got up and got dressed.

After freshening up, he was informed the artisans he wanted to meet were all waiting outside the palace which jolted his mind awake.

He quickly ordered them to be let inside the hallway and instructed the kitchen to give porridge to them, to which they complied by serving yesterday's leftovers.

Alexander then called over Theocles and ordered him to take inventory of the palace armory and take count of the weapons and armors left, so he knew the required amount he needed to order, as he feared the armory might be empty with all its equipment being in use with Amenheraft's army.

Alexander estimated that this would take two-three days, and so in the meantime, he got Menes to assign the few thousand artisans that had come drawn by the smell of food, new homes in the inner city previously owned by nobles.

They were then instructed to move in with their families as only then they would get the promised rations although this seemed redundant in many eyes, as most artisans had their workshop right next to the house and this order did nothing but increase the commute time to their work, Alexander had his reasons.

Alexander also remembered to send his captains and stratos out to start calling back all their soldiers and have them report back to their barracks, as the three days were up and if they didn't return soon, it would count as desertion.

He later met with the leaders of the blacksmith and carpentry guild, and after ordering as many as possible at most 4mm thick steel wires, he presented them with a few strange drawings, which he demanded to be made by tomorrow.

And at last, he went to the barracks, where the recruitment of fifty thousand soldiers was taking place under the supervision of Menicus and because almost every man that could hold a stick had applied, drawn in by the promise of food, the old man and the thousand soldiers under him were busy separating the wheat from the chaff.

The simplest way was making them walk under an elevated horizontal stick of around five foot two height, and anyone who did not need to lower their head to pass through it was disqualified.

This automatic failure caused many to plead to the supervising soldier to let them pass, but after a few exemplary strikes to the bum, such time-wasting practices largely disappeared.

There was also the simple strength test where a wooden, makeshift monkey bar had been placed and recruits were required to keep themselves off the ground for ten seconds to pass, though even this easy test proved to be a watershed for many of the malnourished commoners.

"Half these wastes are struggling to hold their souls in their bodies, where are they gonna find the strength to hold shields and spears?" Alexander could hear the loud, gruff grumbling of the frustrated mercenary leader.

Menicus informed Alexander that given the quality of the recruits, he would need at least a week to select, arm, and form formations using them, and only after could the training begin.

And with a helpless sigh, Alexander could only urge the veteran mercenary leader to do his best.

'Ohh, I remember that the Romans needed four months or seventeen weeks to turn a recruit into a soldier. So what can I do with just three?' Alexander lampooned heavily.

But it was what it was and thus the fourth day after his conquest of Adhan ended.

The fifth day was a special one for Alexander, as he had received the final tally of the total loot of the temple, which came to a grand total weight of two hundred tons, giving an overall haul of ten billion (10 billion) roplas.

Most of the coins were not in roplas but in a much bigger denomination called the 'intas', which was a thousand times larger than roplas.

This new coin was made of twenty grams of solid gold, unlike the roplas which was a smaller coin made of silver and bronze and just two intas would equal a farmer's annual pay.

In context, Adhania's yearly taxes were only five billion ropals, which was split among the temple, the twelve provinces, and all its nobility.

Even in his twilight years, when Alexander's nation would become known for its trade and commerce, this would still be a sky-shattering number to Alexander.

And now, this ridiculous amount of money was currently at Alexander's fingertips and he could only let out copious amounts of heavy sighs that he would have to give almost all of it away.

So, after cutting off the hundred million ropals as promised by Ptolomy to him and embezzling an additional fifty million as his 'salary', which would remain the record amount of 'salary' anyone took for a thousand years, Alexander ordered the rest of the literal mountain of coins to enter the belly of the royal treasury.

After personally supervising this, Alexander had lunch and then met up with Grahtos.

He then asked about Laykash and was pleased to know that the boy was well and walk using a crutch.

He afterward asked the cavalry captain to form a scouting party and have them ride south to detect and survey Amenheraft's forces.

He specifically demanded that the scouts be able to warn him as least a week before the assault began the true position and the strength of the opposing army.

He also wanted detailed reports about the terrain, about specific locations of brooks, streams, rivers, swamps, villages, and particularly hilly and rocky terrain where marching speed would be severely limited.

After seeing Grahtos receive the orders with a military salute, Alexander then went to meet with the blacksmiths.

Theocles was yet to give him the inventory list, but he still had other things he could have these artisans create.

He particularly intended to task the men into making mainly two things- the pilum and chainmail.

The pilum was a Roman-style javelin, around two meters long, consisting of an iron shank around 7-8 mm wide and 60mm long, attached to the wooden shaft using two nails.

Alexander designed the pilum to be attached by only one nail and replaced the other with a wooden peg, which weakened the connection and helped serve its purpose.

And what was its purpose?

To penetrate phalanx shields and make them useless.

This magnificent capability was achieved by manipulating several factors.

First, the javelin was thin, with the iron part being only 7mm in diameter, meaning it had more penetrative power with the same force as the area was less.

Next, the triangular tip was hardened using a technique called quenching, where the iron tip would be heated till it became red hot and then immediately dumped in cold water.

This would make the tip hard and brittle while keeping the rest of the iron shank soft and bendable.

Thus, when the thin iron piece would hit any hard surface, like a shield, the hard, thin tip of the pilum would slice through the shield and embed itself into the shield, pinning the arm of the soldier into the shield.

At the same time, the force of the impact would snap the thin wooden nail holding the shank to the wooden handle, destroying it, and causing the soft iron shank to bend at a ninety-degree angle, thus preventing the soldiers from simply yanking the stuck piece of iron off their shield.

The Romans had used this to great effect in their thousand-year history, especially during its early years, where this tactic devastated opposing phalanx formations that relied on their large, round shields to stave off opposing phalanx attacks.

With their crucial defensive weapon, the shield taken out of action, the phalanxes would be left naked and vulnerable, and much more susceptible to enemy attacks.

And although this alone would not win the war for Alexander, it would certainly help level the playing field a lot.

The rest would have to depend on the tactics at the battlefield and Alexander had already thought of which to employ.

But all these thoughts were unknown to everyone but Alexander, much less the confused blacksmiths who didn't know what to make of his half-spear, half-javelin thing.

But the design and manufacture were simple enough and so they assured him that with thousands of them working around the clock for more than two weeks, even a hundred thousand would not be an issue.

Alexander was very pleased by this, and though he would not need so many as he only needed to hit the front rows, he intended to take these extra supplies to Zanzan with him.

Pleased that his wonder weapon will be ready and be soon ready in bulk, Alexander then proceeded to present the blacksmiths of this time with a much more difficult challenge, making a chainmail armor!

Chapter 153 Chainmail And Last Minute Preparation

Chainmail was a superb type of armor made of interconnected steel rings that provided very good protection from sword, spear, and arrow strikes.

This type of armor had not been invented yet and it was also not something that was going to be used in the upcoming battle as it was too time-consuming to make a lot of in the short time they had.

On the contrary, this was more of a pet project of Alexander, as he wanted to have the presumably the best blacksmiths in the country try their luck on making this very good, but also prohibitively time-consuming piece of armor.

He wanted to see how viable it was to make such armor with the existing technology and the unforeseen challenges that existed.

So, he got a few blacksmiths together and first showed them the basics he had learned while he was working for a prop company sometime earlier in his previous life.

That company specialized in making accurate historical reenactments of medieval weapons and armor for movies, TV shows, and medieval hobbyists and Alexander had worked there for a few years as one of their steel makers and quality ensurer.

So, he knew how to make chainmail.

Which he was now demonstrating to the armorers.

First, he took the long, about 4mm thick wire and started passing it through a draw plate.

A draw plate was a small metal or in this case, wooden rectangular piece, which had several small holes drilled into them, ascending from bigger to smaller, through which steel wires would be drawn, first through the bigger ones and then progressively through the smaller ones, till the wire was the desired diameter.

Alexander wanted the wires around 1.5 to 2mm in thickness, and so using the tongs as a vice, he forced the steel wires through the smaller and smaller holes till he was satisfied with the size.

Afterward, he took an L-shaped wooden mandrel, about 8mm in diameter with a hole in the lower end of it, and put the wire through that hole, intending to make a spring.

Once he started spinning the mandrel using the L-shaped handle, the wire spun along with the mandrel, winding against it and becoming a spring.

After the spring reached around 10cm in length, Alexander removed the spring from the mandrel and then using the tongs started cutting the individual rings of the spring, while leaving an overlap.

Next came the real armor-making part, as Alexander took a ring, using the tongs to slightly open the cut ends of the rings, and then put four more rings through the center ring to make a 4-1 shape- i.e- One ring containing four others inside it.

This pattern could be repeated as many times as one would like, attaching additional rings to the side rings to make the structure bigger and bigger until a whole shirt of small rings or as they were called chainmail was manufactured.

Chainmail came in mainly two types- categorized by how the open ends of the rings were closed.

The first was one where the hammer was used to beat the two ends together and make them flat and just stick to one another.

This was called butted mail and it really was not good against sword or spear strikes or really anything substantial.

Though butted mail was historically accurate in Alexander's previous times, it was really not that effective and one might even be able to tear a butted mail using his bare hands.

The far better way to make chainmail was using the second option- by riveting the mail.

Riveted mail was made when after the two open ends were hammered flat overlapping one another, a small wedge-shaped hole would be punched through them using a chisel, and then a thin steel wire was put through the hole to hold the ends together.

The ends of the wire would be flipped up to prevent it from slipping out and thus would act almost like a nail, holding the ring together.

All the individual rings would have to be riveted like this, which increased the workload by a few times as opposed to just hammering the ends together, but also had the benefit of producing far, far stronger armor, many times better than butted mail.

And this was also what Alexander was making.

After Alexander showed the first few riveted rings and the mechanism to attach new rings to the existing matrix structure, the blacksmiths felt like they had seen the sunrise from the west.

They were all amazed by this innovative use of steel as the primary metal of this time was bronze, which couldn't be manipulated like steel as they would crack under large deformations.

Alexander gave his size and then ordered the blacksmiths to make as many full shirt chainmail as they could, knowing that it would be unlikely to be many.

A full shirt mail would have anywhere between thirty to fifty thousand individual rings depending on the size of the rings and would take an average person hundred and fifty hours to make one piece.

To put that into perspective, that was working more than ten hours a day for two weeks nonstop, just to finish one piece of armor.

And if one wanted to equip an army of tens of thousands, well, one would need a smaller army of blacksmiths to do it.

Leaving the blacksmiths to do their work, Alexander retired for the day, and the next day he met with another group of artisans, the sculptors to discuss the making of the statue of the goddess Gaia.

He presented them with a drawing of his statue, which he had made combining Ophelia's face, Gelene's breasts, and Cambyses' waist and thighs.

This produced a beautiful, but also incongruous body shape, but Alexander didn't seem to mind as he reasoned that a goddess shouldn't have the same proportions as a human.

The stone masons gave a deadline of a year for the statue which Alexander expected and thus accepted.

Alexander in the meantime had also convened a meeting between the mercenary leaders, where he announced the payment of a thousand ropals to everyone, an additional two thousand ropals to the fifteen hundred cavalymen, and ten thousand ropals to the captains, fifty thousand ropals to the stratos and two hundred thousand ropals to the mercenary leaders.

This generous payment made the soldiers cheer and in general Alexander's loose purse soon made him very popular in the army and Menes even reported to him afterward that many Cantagenans and some even from the other mercenary groups were applying to join his mercenary group.

This pleased Alexander very much and he quickly instructed Menes to accept them all.

Alexander also gave an advanced payment hundred ropals to the new recruits, which was close to an average month's pay for the people of Adhan, and promised an additional two hundred ropals if they won against Amenheraft.

But that only added to up three hundred ropal.

Didn't Alexander promise Ptolomy a thousand ropal per soldier?

Of course, he pocketed the rest of the seven hundred as a risk fee.

He was after all taking a lot of risk by betting on the dark horse.

Alexander also told the mercenary leaders of his deal with Ptolomy and Zanzan, and asked if they wanted to join him and though Menicus and Melodias said yes, Petricuno, who was a Cantagenan and knew of its war with Exolas, politely declined as he intended to fight there next.

But, one surprising man that didn't immediately say yes was Heliptos, who had family in Thesos and was confused about whether to immigrate.

Alexander's days passed like this, in a blurry whirlwind as he would wake up early in the morning and then make his way to the barracks to train with the recruits.

He would mainly focus on teaching them to march in unison and how to throw the pilum.

He also made them perform a retreating or backing-up maneuver and this was done in the same place the three battles had taken place.

The soldiers would throw their pilums and then in orderly formation back up to the hilly slopes, all the while ensuring to keep unit cohesion.

This strange training tactic confused his commanders, but Alexander insisted.

Later in the day, Alexander would spend his time reading military reports, ensuring proper stock of supplies, listening to Camius's intelligence report about both the army and the city, and knowing about Amenheraft's whereabouts.

Alexander had also ordered the walls of the city be reinforced, its gates properly manned and any secret passages blocked or guarded.

Finished doing this all day, Alexander would then burn the midnight oil in the royal study studying Azhak and trying to grasp the new language as soon as possible.

And given its close resemblance to Thesian, within three weeks, he had grasped the basics well enough to hold a half-baked conversation

Eighteen days passed like this, after which his scouts informed him that Amenheraft was spotted near the city.

War was imminent.

Chapter 154 Brutal Contest

Alexander was notified of Amenheraft's coming about a week in advance, just like he wanted.

This was in part due to Grahtos's scouting, and also due in part due to Amenheraft not bothering to hide his approach, hoping to scare and exert some kind of physiological control over Ptolomy.

Alexander was given the size of the opposing army to be around seventy thousand with almost all infantry, just like Ptolomy had said, with all the cavalry horses being used up by the slingers in the battle a month ago.

Fifteen thousand heavy cavalry was an enormous number, as it is estimated that even the mighty Roman army only wielded ten thousand cavalry, and if Amenheraft had that many horses, Alexander could have only hidden behind the city walls and hoped that Amenheraft would starve first.

It would have then been a brutal contest of willpower and Alexander let out heavy sighs of relief that he would not have to deal with a brutal siege but instead could come out of the city and defeat the former king in a pitched battle.

Amenheraft led his army straight down the road, intent on reaching Adhan as fast as possible and this made Alexander deploy his skirmishers, as he sent all his three thousand cavalry (fifteen hundred horses were obtained from the nobles) to harass and disrupt the huge, lumbering army.

Under Grahtos and other similar Sycarians' leadership, they chose to attack the baggage trains, the supply wagons, and the pack animals, launching lightning-fast attacks out of the woods bordering the road and then promptly disappearing into them after killing a few.

This tactic continued for two weeks, turning Amenheraft's seven-day march into fourteen days and buying precious time for Alexander.

Alexander kept up the pressure constantly, dividing his cavalry into small teams and rotating the skirmishers into day and night assault troopers.

Aided by the Adhanians who knew the terrain, and the absence of Amenheraft's own cavalry meant the huge army was not able to chase off these annoying bugs and although this harassment had negligible casualties for the huge army on the whole, at best a few hundred dead and wounded, it achieved its intended effect- to slow them down and keep the entire opposing forces on edge.

By the last few days, the nerves of the soldiers had been frayed to a breaking point by thoughts of the sudden arrival of opposing horsemen and their rain of javelins.

The appearance of ghost-riding horses had occupied their thoughts as they marched, as they eat, and even as they slept, leaving them tired and panic-prone.

Alexander's night attack had even involved some flaming javelins that managed to set fire to a few tents and spread chaos and confusion throughout the army, meaning the soldiers got little sleep and rest before the fated battle.

"Who's leading the rebel army? Ptolomy? Barzan? No, such cowardly tactics are not their style," Manuk, currently, the apple in Amenheraft's eyes, and the leader of his army, asked in frustration.

The best way to deal with skirmishers was to ignore them, as they were rarely capable of dealing any real damage to the army on their own and could only annoy the opponent.

But being annoyed for two weeks meant Manuk's forces were not in the best shape.

Though, even then, Manuk and Amenheraft, while being concerned, were not beating their heads over this.

They were instead busy being surprised and then rejoicing over the fact that Ptolomy's forces had come out of the city to meet them in open combat, meaning that they would not have to engage in a lengthy siege.

"It must be that mercenary leader," Amenheraft replied from the side to Manuk's question, still recalling those cool, azure eyes.

Then he sneered, "The lowly mongrel thinks he can beat my divine army outnumbered and using a rabble of peasants? Heh. fat chance."

Manuk too shared this sentiment, as he could see no way to defeat these battle-hardened veterans with green recruits.

While he had lost his contacts with the spies in the city, but even then he reasoned that Ptolomy had likely not gotten any significant new armies from any of the surrounding nobles and likely had built it from the raw citizenry.

This produced a trace of disdain in Manuk's heart for Alexander, as he felt that using such people against a properly trained army in open combat was suicide.

And credit where due is due, Manuk was correct in thinking this, assuming that Alexander did intend to challenge them head-on.

So, where was Alexander currently?

He was camped atop a hill, around ten kilometers from the city.

He had marched out the day before and unlike his opponents, his soldiers were rested and ready for battle.

The city was left in the hands of Ptolomy, with two thousand of Alexander's men left behind to guard the city, along with five hundred to guard or more accurately keep Ptolomy hostage.

The leader of the palace guards was Cambyses, who had Alexander's secret orders to kill Ptolomy and his family if a revolt occurred and then light the palace on fire as a smoke signal.

With such guarantees in place, Alexander led his army flanked on both sides by the cavalry down the valley and into the open field, initiating the contact.

"Men! The devil rebel has appeared! Are you ready?" Alexander asked while riding his horse up and down the front lines, trying to motivate the men.

"Yes!" Came a thunderous roar.

"Good, show them what you got. God is with us," Alexander kept his speech short.

And the battle began shortly after, at around midday, as Amenheraft's army crossed a deep river to meet Alexander's forces head-on, shaking the sky with the cries of close to a hundred and fifty thousand men.

The centers and the wings fought each other head-on, as Manuk's tactic was simple- to use his experienced and battle-hardened warriors to snap the center of the enemy army and cause a rout.

To do this, Manuk, having the superior force number in addition to possessing the better-trained army, thinned out his flanks, with just enough soldiers to hold the flanks, and started to strengthen his center.

Alexander's center was around forty thousand strong and the wings an even ten thousand on both sides, while Manuk had fifty-five to sixty thousand in the center, while each of his two flanks were held by his most experienced veterans of five to seven thousand each.

The idea was to use his much thicker center to ram into Alexander's mostly evenly sized center, breaking it, and causing his army to be split in two, forming two unguarded flanks and thus initiating a rout.

And till now, the battle was developing exactly like that.

Although Alexander's novel creation the pilum caused some confusion and death during the first few minutes of the fight, Amenheraft's experienced troops soon understood that the opponents needed some distance to throw his new kind of javelin and so ran quickly to close the distance and initiate the hand to hand melee.

Amenheraft's forces decisively proved to be the better at this, as even when many soldiers were deprived of their shields, they still proved to present a deadly challenge to the fully shielded green recruit.

If Alexander hadn't sent his cavalry to reinforce his wings, thus forcing Manuk to move some soldiers from the center to strengthen his own flanks, the battle might have been over even before Alexander could have put his plan into action.

But even with the help of the cavalry, with was only enough to slow down the eventual defeat, not stop or reverse it.

This brutal contest stabbing contest quickly passed its two-hour mark, with Alexander's forces being pushed further and further behind.

And instead of standing their ground and fighting, Alexander's forces let themselves be pushed around, letting the enemy ever closer to their camp.

No one, not even Manuk found this strange and in hindsight, if Alexander was in his shoes, he would not have either.

After all, it was only natural for an army of green, outnumbered soldiers to be defeated by a much, larger, experienced force.

Alexander too did not seem concerned by the approaching defeat he allowed, as he freely allowed his soldiers to retreat to the hilly, mountainous terrain behind.

This was his plan, and to make it easier for the royalist army to press on the attack, he even began to recall his cavalry and thus thinning out the flanks.

As Alexander's forces retreat towards the hills, the royalist army naturally followed, eager to color their spear tips in the blood of the rebels.

And then it happened!

The phenomenon that Alexander had described and asked the stratos and captains to look out for had begun to manifest itself in the opposing army, especially on the sparely manned flanks, which contained Amenheraft's finest.

These were the cream of the crop of Amenheraft's army, consisting mainly of nobles and heavy cavalrymen who had lost their horses and were being forced to fight as infantry.

They were highly skilled and extremely motivated, and in their zeal to stamp out this rebellion once and for all, they soon began to recklessly chase the flanks of the enemy that seemed to be returning.

And this was the phenomenon Alexander tasked his officers to look out for.

Chapter 155 Phalanx Vs Terrain

The phalanx was a magnificent formation in many ways.

Made of around two hundred and fifty men, the soldiers would be usually armed with a bronze helmet, a bronze cuirass, and leather hands and legs greaves, while being packed as tightly together as possible to enhance unit cohesion.

They would be armed with around two meter-long spears and large, around a meter in diameter, shields, making their frontal attack capacity devastating.

The spears from the first four to five rows would point out of the front of the formation, intended to skewer the enemy, while the rest of the rows would point their spears upwards at a slanted angle, in an effort to ward off any incoming projectiles.

This bristle of spears were nigh invincible in frontal attacks, except against other phalanxes and the formation proved so effective that it was the standard and mostly the only infantry formation of the time.

But like any and all other things in the world, this thing also had its disadvantages.

While it was unmatched in frontal combat, the tight packing of the soldiers meant that it was virtually defenseless against flanking and rear attacks.

It was also not possible to reduce the packing of the soldiers as it would dilute the forest of spears and thus lower its deadliness.

Of course, the people wielding these formations were not stupid and knew of these shortcomings, and to compensate for this, they made sure to add more and more phalanxes together, to cover the flanks and make the whole army act in concert and with cohesion.

And that was the key word- cohesion.

Because while a phalanx with cohesion was one of the deadliest military formations of its time, a phalanx without cohesion was like a pack of loose sands.

And this phenomenon where the phalanx started losing cohesion was what Alexander asked his subordinates to look out for.

As the royalist army was lured into rocky, uneven terrain, the individual phalanxes were unable to maintain the same kind of packed cohesion with their neighbors as they would on flat ground, and soon, gaps began to appear between separate phalanxes.

This was particularly evident in Amenheraft's flanks, which were composed of zealous nobles eager to hunt the 'fleeing' enemy down quickly.

To encourage this chase, Alexander had purposefully thinned his wings by recalling his cavalry and instructed the rest to orderly retreat like they had practiced, giving the impression that they were close to routing and only needed one last attack to break them.

And the enemy took the bait, hook, line, and sinker, as soon the bloodthirsty nobles began to veer off on their own, leaving the safety of their brother units and opening their soft underbelly or more accurately their soft flanks to the enemy.

And though most in Amenheraft's army missed this, as all were on the same level ground as the others, the captains of Alexander's army, with their elevated positions on top of a horse, did not.

Two particular people who had been hawkishly looking for gaps and spotted them immediately were Grahtos and Remus, who were the leaders of the two cavalry wings Alexander had created.

After Alexander had called them back from the flanks to regroup, they were instructed to wait and then on their initiative lead their cavalry into the opened gaps of the phalanx and jump on the defenseless sides of the soldiers.

Remus recalled Alexander describing the phalanx as an 'armored fist' that is used to punch through the enemy, with its strength being derived from how closely the units or in this analogy the fingers are clenched tightly together.

Alexander said that if the fingers were tight and compact, it would be a devastating punch, but if the knuckle became loose or gaps formed between the fingers, just like how a punch would lose its power, similarly, the phalanx would become vulnerable.

And to Remus, it appeared that the phalanx, at least those in the flanks of the enemy had become just that - vulnerable.

So he took his fifteen hundred horsemen in a lightning charge towards the right flank of the enemy, while Grahtos followed suit with the left flank, slipping in between the gaps of the enemy's 'fingers' and slicing each down.

And the result of all this was as Alexander had expected.

These horsemen appeared to the royalists like hyenas pouncing on them, smashing into their undefended flanks and cutting them down by the hundreds per minute.

Many died without even understanding how they died, by what magic their brother units that were supposed to protect their side had disappeared, or even where these horsemen had come from.

While the massacre of the flanks was occurring, the center of the royalist army had also begun to lose cohesion.

Because of the large concentration of soldiers, it had taken them a bit longer to become sufficiently spread out, but once they did, the individual captains of Alexander, from their horses, recognized the weak points immediately, and then skillfully led their men through these narrow gaps, causing devastating losses to the royalist army.

The royalist commanders and especially Amenheraft watched this horror show unfold with stunned disbelief as he repeatedly urged his commanders and particularly Manuk to find a way to save his army.

But the king...former king, only got a wall of silence and a look of terrified, dejection from the latter as Manuk informed the king with a slow shake of his head that there was nothing he could do.

Manuk was truly helpless to stop the collapse of the army, as, from his perspective, the events of the war folded like this- they were winning one moment, and then suddenly a bunch of horsemen had somehow got in between their phalanxes and now they were getting mowed down.

As Manuk confirmed the enemy penetrating themselves within his own army's ranks, he understood the battle was over and with Amenheraft's permission, blew the horn of retreat.

Though it was largely redundant by that point, as the army had already begun to rout.

Amenheraft, Manuk, and his royal entourage then swiftly evacuated the battlefield, soon crossing the river and running not south toward Zanzan but east, toward Ankoot.

But while this small amount of people on horseback could run away without much problem, the rest of the army could not.

Alexander's army, especially the light cavalry had a field day chasing down the fleeing infantry, they being spoiled for choice on who to stab in the back next.

But it was not Alexander's men that claimed the most lives- it was the deep river that Amenheraft had crossed to meet Alexander that did most of the killing.

Soldiers in blind panic waded into the deep, river in full armor, only to be swept off their feet by the blinding current of the mountain river.

Three days later, Alexander would be informed of a dam formed of metal, leather, and rotting human flesh that had built itself downstream and he would order the clearing and proper burial of the deceased.

But that would be later, as currently, the soldiers were erupting into jubilant cries of ecstasy.

They won!

They had finally won!

The Cantagenans rejoiced at finally having vindicated themselves after their two consecutive defeats and the Adhanians rejoiced at being able to drive away the 'evil rebel.'

Alexander too breathed the biggest sigh of relief to date as he felt becoming a landlord was just around the corner.

In his eyes, the battle was closer than it appeared and there were a few times he feared the battle might be lost.

Amenheraft's wings, even when outnumbered had threatened to break his own multiple times, and only by sending his best units, the mercenaries along with people with Menes and Menicus to inspire the troops could he hold the line till the fated time.

Alexander could find little fault with Manuk's strategy as using a stronger center to break the opponent's one was a time-tested classic.

His decision to put his most experienced troops on the flanks was also practiced regularly, the idea being to use the experienced soldiers to break the opponent's flanks and then clamp down on the flanks of the center, launching a three-pronged- left, right, and center attack and destroying the enemy

The only small criticism that could be laid on Manuk was not using his best troops in the center, or not giving the flanks enough support to scatter Alexander's.

But the latter could be countered by the fact that if Manuk had done that, his center's attack power would diminish, meaning Alexander could redeploy some of his troops from the center to the flanks, balancing the forces out.

The arguments against the former could be that elite units work best in small numbers.

For example- a knight could kill a similarly armed and armored peasant any day of the week, a hundred percent of the time.

But if that number would be increased to hundred vs hundred, it is likely the knights will suffer some casualties.

Change that to a ten thousand-man battle, the battle would be much more even, as the peasants together would be able to far better make up each other's deficiencies.

So, ultimately Manuk lost this battle, not because of poor tactics, but poor terrain.

Chapter 156 After Battle Celebrations

The basic mopping up took until dusk, as the killed were gathered and buried in a giant pit.

To kill or capture any fleeing stragglers, Alexander sent out his cavalry to hunt them down, which he estimated to take a few days, while he and the bulk of his victorious army made their way into the city, along with their captured slaves and loot.

He and the soldiers entered the city under a cacophony of cheers and joyous cries by the jubilant public, and even Ptolomy and the royal family had come out to congratulate Alexander, flanked by his new palace guards led by Cambyses.

The long procession of soldiers, along with the new slaves and the huge number of carts full of grains caused the crowd to shout in rapturous elation as they watched their victories brothers, fathers and friends enter the sacred city with their heads held high.

In their minds, this victory signified the son of Ramuh emerging triumphant over the evil kingslayer and thus restoring the kingdom to its proper inheritor.

A further reason for their celebration was Alexander's announcement that to celebrate the win, the day after tomorrow free food would be given at the temple, which made the populace chant his name.

Yes, his name.

Not Ptolomy's name but his name, i.e- Alexander's name.

This caused a frown to form on Ptolomy's face, but remembering that this dangerous fiend would be voluntarily handicapping himself with that waste of a territory, Ptolomy decided to let go of his treasonous action.

The root of the people chanting Alexander's name was the result of the hard, back-breaking work of Camius, who had worked tirelessly the last month to form at least the basic skeletal framework of an embryonic spy network.

He had arranged for criers in the town square to repeat what was said in the temple, he helped the people know more about the commander of the army- Alexander and he bought gangs and street rats under his payroll to better control the city.

And under this incessant propaganda, the fruit of that labor finally materialized itself as the populace now put Alexander just below Ptolomy.

After Alexander led the soldiers into the city and had them return to the barracks, he immediately called for a tally of today's loss and got an initial estimate.

Further, more accurate reports in the preceding days would make Alexander that today's battle had not been just the defeat of Amenheraft's forces, but it had also significantly hurt his political standing, crippling him in the fight against Ptolomy as a lot of the nobles that supported him were in the flanks of his army and got cut down to ribbons.

The losses suffered by Amenheraft, in general, were catastrophic, out of the seventy-three thousand he had come with, he had only managed to take with him a paltry five to six thousand, with forty to fifty thousand dying by Alexander's hand or drowning in the river, while the rest, numbering around twenty thousand were captured as slaves, with Alexander's losses numbering less than a thousand.

But what was worse was how the losses were disproportional for Amenheraft.

The six thousand that escaped were mostly green recruits who had run earlier and faster than most, while Amenheraft's creme la de crop- his nobles, his heavy cavalymen, his experienced officers, and captains got either killed or captured.

And Amenheraft's misfortunes did not end there as his losses were not just limited to personnel, but material too.

Particularly, as evidenced by Alexander, Amenheraft had left behind massive amounts of grain that Alexander oh so graciously accepted.

A total tally later would reveal the number to be close to fifty thousand tonnes of grain, enough to feed the city of half a million for six months.

The origin of this grain was it being looted from Tibias and also forcibly requisitioned from the populace of the Zanzan province, along with the generous donations by various nobles, which Amenheraft had the intent to use to feed the starving capital once he retook it.

And now all this had landed in Alexander's hand.

The night after the battle was a joyous one for Alexander as he held a private feast and drinking binge with the mercenary leaders and his captains.

They all congratulated him on his genius, sang songs, and generally made merry.

The celebrations lasted till the crack of dawn, and everyone there woke up the next day, by earliest at noon, with none spared the massive aching headache that came accompanying such reckless drinking.

But although these people were spared more pain drinking pains, Alexander was not, as he was immediately invited to another great feast, in the evening, this time thrown by the royals, inviting him, his close family, and the few nobles still alive to eat, drink and enjoy themselves.

The nobles present there all congratulated and spoke platitudes of cajoling flattery, first to the king and then to Alexander, particularly thanking them for executing all those palace guards, and once again taking their oath to their liege.

Speaking of 'liege', the one currently being referred to one- Ptolomy, had drunk himself till he was wasted, becoming so inebriated by the end of it that he even started professing his love for Alexander.

This prompted the Queen mother to quickly and forcibly remove the king from the dinner table and escort him to his chambers before he could humiliate the royal family any further.

Though some might forgive Ptolomy for letting his hair down as the man for the past month had lived in constant fear and anxiety.

He had vehemently protested Alexander's decision to launch an attack on Amenhearft, even when he had been provided with ample reasons why it had to be done, instead insisting on using the walls to repel the attackers.

Alexander had unequivocally shot these down, which he could do as he was the sore military commander in Adhan, and then to keep the king busy, made Ptolomy personally write hundreds, if not thousands of letters to send to every tin-pot noble out there, explaining the 'real' situation to them and then tempting them to switch sides by promising rich rewards.

Though the reception then had been lukewarm at best, now Ptolomy drank like a fish knowing the nobles understanding how the winds have changed, would soon come flocking to him, to pledge their allegiance.

But the one offer that made Ptolomy particularly happy was the offer sent by him to the pasha which proposed to give each pasha a one-time, cash payment of five hundred million ropals if they swore their allegiance before the battle with Amenheraft.

And though that particular offer wasn't taken, causing Ptolomy to let out constant sighs of regret, now he was drinking himself to high heaven at the thought of how those pashas must be kicking themselves.

After Ptolomy was removed from the dinner party, many of the serious and fake smiles got removed as well, as many began to mingle among themselves.

Alexander noticed that the light smile Hellma had had disappeared, replaced by a flat, almost unfeeling look as she probably contemplated her fate having been changed from being killed by Amenheraft to being abducted by Alexander.

'Zanzan is a wasteland. Perhaps it would have been better to have my head chopped off than die slowly and in agonizing pain after being struck with a disease.' Hellma lampooned while cursing her mother for not fighting with Alexander to revoke his absurd proposition.

On the other hand, the triplets - Afsarah, Afsanah, and Afsahah and their mother were in the complete opposite mood of Hellma, with huge grins plastered on their faces that seemed to threaten to tear their cheeks open, as they immersed themselves at the thought of being from now on called queen and princesses.

While Azira and Azura had a distinct air of awkwardness around them, not knowing if they should feel sad about their father's loss or rejoice that the man that didn't care for them any longer didn't succeed.

Alexander left these people to their own devices, as after the sumptuous feast, he was soon treated to a different kind of feast- a carnal feast consisting of Cambyses, Ophenia, and the most surprising of all, Gelene.

The three hungry succubi quickly drained Alexander, using their various orifices to pleasure Alexander and bring him to release after release.

Ophenia had dressed exactly like she had done before, but this time, under the hands of the experienced Gelene, she was brought to even greater heights as her piercings were pulled with just enough force to make the girl experience both pleasure and pain.

Ophenia sang with unrestrained roars as Alexander pounded her tight hole while her clit and nipples were pulled and twisted by the other two.

Cambyses seemed even wilder than before as after sucking out Alexander's release from the other girls, she then shared it with them via hot kisses, letting Alexander have a clear view of the milky fluid being swirled inside their mouths.

But there were two special highlights of the night for Alexander.

One was when he received a double titjob from Ophenia and Gelene.

The white pure angelic face of Ophenia contrasted perfectly with the dark, devilishly beautiful countenance of Gelene, and the two girls' skillful use of the tongue, made Alexander release the fluids multiple times in their mouths.

The second was the girls lining up with their butts toward Alexander and shaking them toward him, tempting Alexander to choose them.

This made Alexander have a nosebleed, as the sight of three huge, magnificent asses- pure white, tanned, and black, all tempting him to choose them, made his blood boil.

And he enjoyed all three with unrestrained zeal, drowning himself in prurience till the crack of dawn.

Chapter 157 Pasha Farzah [Bonus]

The next day proved to be a busy one for Alexander, as he was informed midday of a five thousand army making their way toward Adhan.

Alexander immediately ordered the gates to be strengthened and then asked Ptolomy if he could identify the forces as friendly or hostile.

Both were possible, as they could be either friends who came to pledge their allegiance to Ptolomy, or they could be hostiles who intended to reinforce Amenheraft but had not managed to join the king in time.

Ptomloy soon confirmed them to be the former as he identified by symbol as Pasha Farzah's coat of arms, which made Alexander comment to Ptolomy, "Revealing himself just after all the fighting has been settled. Heh, what a snake!"

Ptolomy gave a silent reply.

Alexander soon ordered the gates to be opened and though he was reluctant to let five thousand soldiers loyal to someone else enter the city, Alexander understood that his free reign over the city of Adhan was coming to an end as more and more nobles with their forces would come to support Ptolomy.

Pasha Farzah had bought a lot of food with him, which pleased Ptolomy greatly as both he and Alexander received the great noble from the palace doorsteps and cordially invited him inside.

But the most pleased to see the close to seven feet, thick bearded, very muscular man were none other than the twins Azira and Azura.

They sped towards the thickly padded man, giving him a mighty hug and shouting joyous cries of "Granddad, granddad."

"Haha, I'm so glad to see the two of you safe," The giant bear-like man let out a burst of uproarious laughter as he hugged and then effortlessly took the two adult girls up in his arms.

'He's strong.' Alexander remarked as he scanned the famed schemer.

Tall, wearing a heavy jacket with fur boots, with a heavy mass of silver hair on his head and face, the square-shaped, chiseled face emanated strength and stability.

Alexander failed to find a wrinkle old wrinkle on the man's face and unless he had seen it for himself, he would not have believed that his man had two adult granddaughters.

While Alexander was sizing his potential adversary or potential friend up, the shrewd lord naturally detected the curious gaze and launched his own curious gaze.

It didn't take a genius to figure out who Alexander was, as he could think of no other who would be standing beside the king to greet him.

But what did surprise the lord was how young the armored man looked.

Farzah had read the reports, but even then he was surprised by baby fat still hanging off the man, or more accurately the boy.

'He's younger than Azura and Azira,' He commented in his heart, which made him all the more impressed by the boy's accomplishments.

Even if everything else was false, just how he managed to win against Amenheraft with an outnumbered and outmatched force, impressed the tall, white man.

"Your room is ready, Pasha Farzah." Ptolomy gestured for him to enter the palace and soon his entourage of eleven people were seen to their rooms.

A large feast was arranged to be served at night, where the Pasha mingled with the nobles and got to know the true situation of the city.

And once these were done, instead of going off to bed, Farzah arranged for the king and Alexander to have an informal discussion.

'The man sure has energy,' Alexander lampooned as he had spent the whole day arranging everything, from placing the soldiers in the barracks, to ensuring the security of the palace, to overseeing the food relief he had promised the populace today and was now eager to hit the bed.

'Instead, now I have to lock heads with the possibly most dangerous man in Adhania,' Alexander complained as he found himself in Ptolomy's personal study with the other two men.

Pasha Farzah spoke first, in a pleased diffident voice, "Your Majesty, let me again congratulate you on your victory. Adhania finally belongs to its rightful ruler!"

"Yes, thank you. Too bad you could not have joined us in our fight," Ptolomy's acidic tone was not lost on Farzah.

Though this particular allegation was not fair toward Pasha Farzah, as even though Alexander and Ptolomy would never believe it, Pasha Farzah really did want to come to Ptolomy's aid.

But bad weather and initial confusion on who really held the city- Ptolomy or Amenheraft or the Cantagenans caused inevitable delays which made him unable to come to his king's aid on time.

But the pasha had lived long enough to know these excuses if spoken would be treated like water under the bridge and so the man only lightly smiled at the accusation, "Your Majesty should be aware of my difficulties. We had discussed them before, and hence why we asked for Cantagena's help."

Then he turned his head to look at Alexander and said, "And thankfully our friends have not disappointed us. Though were there a little hiccup in the way, everything worked out perfectly in the end, haha."

"All by the grace of His Majesty," Alexander humbly smiled, till now content to feel the opposing man out.

"Yes, everything worked out just like Pasha Farzah said," Ptolomy nodded approvingly.

And then added, "But, you're mistaken on the assumption that they were Cantagenans. Instead, they are mercenaries."

"Ah yes, yes, my mistake," Farzah apologized with a smile.

Of course, he was aware of who these forces were and just wanted to figure out Ptolomy's stance on them.

'Looks like he wants to use the boy to balance me. The brat is unlikely to have come up with this. So is it Seelima?' The noble contemplated in his heart.

"Yes, it was Alexander and his mercenary forces that helped me get and defend Adhan," Ptolomy repeated.

And continued, "So, I'm thinking of rewarding them with Zanzan. What do you think?"

Pasha Farzah understood that that was not a question.

The king wasn't asking, he was telling.

"Excellent! Excellent! I think that is an excellent idea," Farzah stood up excitedly while shouting cries of approval and consent.

Alexander was surprised by the alacrity displayed by the noble as he had expected the high noble to be snobbish and disdainful at the idea of an ex-slave being thrust into the highest echelons of nobility in one swift step.

But from Farzah's point of view, he understood that the king had already made up his mind, and since there was no point in arguing with him, he reasoned that he might as well express his full support for the decision and try and win some brownie points.

Pasha Farzah even added, "Your Majesty is truly a genius. With Pasha Muazz's betrayal, it is certainly an apt punishment to strip him of his rank. And with Tibias bordering Zanzan, having one of our own will mean that region of the country will once again become peaceful.

This was a naive and foolish thing to say and the trio in there all knew about this, but as this was just Farzah paying lip service, none bothered to point it out.

"Thank you for your acceptance, Pasha Farzah. I'm truly honored," Alexander sincerely bowed.

He had at least the lord to grumble that the land being offered was a bit too much and was so really surprised by how well the lord took it.

'A flexible man,' Alexander evaluated, though he understood that no schemer can be a hard stick.

"Haha, no, no, it's only natural. For Pasha Alexander to achieve the things he has done at such an early age puts his old man to shame. You deserve it, you deserve it." Farzah roared loudly as he praised Alexander.

For him, it was really not that much of a concern if Alexander became a pasha or not.

Zanzan was a poor, underdeveloped region, while Matrak was called the second capital of Adhania.

They were also literally two thousand kilometers from each other, with two other provinces Adhan and Rusti in between them and so it would be unlikely that they would have any conflicts with each other.

And last of all, Zanzan was already supposed to go to Cantagena, so Pasha Farzah was a bit happy knowing that now it would still belong to them.

And since they were already short on allies, having a new friendly pasha was not something he was averse to.

"Pasha Farzah flatters me. Compared to your legendary exploits that His Majesty has recounted to me, I'm nothing," Alexander lightly smiled.

And then humbly asked, "I'm very unlearned of the ways to navigate the Adhanian nobility circle and I very much hope Pasha Farzah will be able to offer his insightful guidance in the future,"

"Haha, of course, of course. Just ask, just ask anytime," Farzah swung his strong arms as he repeated.

"Hehe, it pleases me greatly to see my two most important retainers getting along so well," Ptolomy had a fake smile on his face.

And then he turned to Farzah and asked, "I believe my two retainers should be joined by blood. In order to achieve that effect I'm thinking of getting Azura and Azira married to Alexander! What do you think?"

As soon as the words left Ptolomy's mouth, the warm, cordial atmosphere instantly disappeared as to Alexander it felt like a heavy blizzard had started emanating from Pasha Farzah's body while his face hardened up.

"What?" A low, piercing growl escaped his hoarse throat, indicating that he was clearly not amused.

Chapter 158 Meeting Of The Young And Old

Azira and Azura's mother was Farzah's eldest daughter and his favorite.

Being the pearl of his eyes, Farzah hence pushed for her to marry Amenheraft, who was the crown prince, intent on making his daughter the queen.

But tragedy struck when under the machinations of the previous mad king, she was burnt to death.

It irrecoverably soured the relations between the two houses and was one of the primary reasons for his rebellion, along with the desire to snatch and protect his granddaughters who looked the spitting image of their mother.

So for Ptolomy to suggest that the twins be snatched from him when he had finally obtained them naturally incensed him.

He spoke in a low, menacing voice, "Ptolomy, I didn't come here to congratulate you. I came to gloat over that rotting piece of shit they called a god and to witness how well that waste I'm forced to call son-in-law has been thrashed!"

The sneer and disdain with which he said it and the scorn that the man displayed for the king seemed to surpass even Alexander, as even the latter was not so vocal about his thoughts.

This level of derision surprised Alexander, as he started to understand that maybe getting those twins would not be so easy, while Ptolomy became like a wooden statue, the shock sending him to a stunned silence.

But the fifty-five-year-old was not done yet, as, after lambasting Ptolomy, the huge man turned his attention to Alexander, pointing his thick arms at Alexander and cursing, "You pathetic cur that swam out of the sewer. You think you low-born low lives deserve the right to even breathe the same air as us. Do you think you have reached the moon after winning just a single battle? How dare a toad like you have the gall to even think of tasting swan meat? Go back to the shit hole you climbed back from, you delusional fool, you waste of space."

Farzah launched a torrent of vituperation against Alexander, insulting him and all his fourteen generations and displaying in clear terms what he thought of the proposal.

Alexander, however, unlike Ptolomy was not really offended by the tempestuous screed.

On the contrary, he was elated because the strong emotion shown by the man meant he truly cared about the girls and this meant he had a weak spot.

After the brimstone of insults had ended, Alexander lightly chuckled and calmly said to Ptolomy, "Your Majesty, please forgive Pasha Farzah. It's just that he is very tired after his long, perilous journey and he is not thinking straight. He did not mean anything by it."

He then quickly turned to the pasha and chuckled, "Haha, the lord's love for his granddaughters is really heartwarming. I'm sure the esteemed pasha has not been able to spend much time with the princesses since he got here and must be eager to know about their well-being."

Alexander then gestured the man toward the door, signaling the end of the meeting.

Farzah was also not in the mood to talk anymore and so, swiftly picking up his body, he got up and then slammed the door behind Ptolomy, leaving without showing any courtesy to the king.

Alexander sent a silent, placid look at Ptolomy, who returned a rueful smile.

'I'm truly a pathetic king,' The young king lamented on his powerlessness.

With the man actor gone, Alexander also chose to see himself off, performing a perfect bow toward the king and then retiring for the night.

He slept like a baby, unconcerned and unbothered by the recent harangue or the insults, as he knew that this was just Farzah venting.

Reality had made Farzah all bark and no bite as the great pasha would have no choice in the matter.

And this proved to be the case, as the next day, Alexander was called to a private meeting with the pasha alone in his room.

There the man of great stature sat alone, wearing a simple, linen shirt that seemed to be under the threat of being torn apart by the massive, bulging muscles underneath.

"I have gotten the gist of the situation from Ptolomy and Azura and Azira. It seems I have underestimated you," Pasha Farzah greeted Alexander with these words from behind his chair.

Alexander humbly bowed and smiled, "In front of a warrior who dared to fight a god, I'm nothing."

"Hahaha, good, good. They did tell me your tongue was something else." Farzah roared a pleased grin.

Farzah's smile then abruptly stopped, and immediately his aura turned menacing, "It would be a shame if someone were to cut it!"

Alexander didn't take this threat with one iota of seriousness and only smiled, "My lord is being too courteous, He only needs to say the word, and I will cut it myself."

"Hah, you have a quip ready for everything," Farzah sneered.

Then asked in a serious voice, "What do you want here?"

Alexander knew he had to give a good answer as the noble was sizing him up, and so he gave a frank and mostly true, but a rather succinct version of his ambitions, "For now I want to use Amenheraft's and Ptolomy's infighting to make a name for myself and cement by position in Adhania. Next, I want to expand my territory, and take Kuleef and possibly Abu Hamam. Lastly, I want to become a strong enough lord that the crown, whether it's Ptolomy or Amenheraft can't replace on a whim."

Alexander made some grand claims.

"Haha, Zanzan, Kuleef and Abu Hamam- that's two thousand kilometers long. Your ambition is sure not small." The pasha half praised, half mocked.

'You have no idea,' Alexander remarked in his heart, as the goal he revealed was just a tiny fragment of his grand ambition, while outwardly he just smiled and nodded.

For Pasha Farzah, the ambitions of the small mercenary leader, of the boy, of the peasant slave, seemed like the ravings of a deranged fool, as he could never see how the boy who had no administrative experience, would be able to achieve the things he said with such a poor territory and such a low population.

But the prudent man did not simply brush off Alexander's dreams into the wind just yet.

He was very well aware of what a skilled general could achieve with even a small army, as evidenced by the history of Adhania.

This was evident even in Alexander's previous life, the most famous example being when Alexander the Great started with around ten thousand men and in the next thirteen years, went on to conquer a territory spanning from Greece to Afghanistan- a length of three thousand miles.

And here Alexander was proposing conquering just half the distance, which was very much possible, even within a decade.

So although a bit dismissive, the ever-cautious pasha pointedly asked, "If that was your goal, then why ask for the ability to annex other kingdoms?"

This time Alexander gave the answer truthfully, though only half of it, "It's three against nine." Here he was referring to how it was Ptolomy, him, and Farzah against the others.

Then continued, "I want to conquer and annex Tibias. That region has always been a throne on the side of Adhania, and conquering it will greatly boost His Majesty's prestige."

Alexander said it like he was doing it for Ptolomy, conveniently leaving the fact that the land would belong to him out.

This irony was not lost on Farzah, who burst out into his characteristic loud bombastic pleased roar, "Hahahaha." as if he had heard the most amusing joke.

He was not just laughing at Alexander's lame excuse, but his naïve thoughts as well.

'Hah, the little pup has won two battles and now thinks he can take on Tibias. Truly the young cubs are the most fearless...and ignorant,' Pasha Farzah remarked in his heart.

The reason for thinking this was not just out of hubris and underestimating Alexander, but because of knowing the true difficulty of the task.

Tibias was a peninsula, with a very narrow and quite mountainous terrain connecting it with the mainland of Adhania.

This made fighting in large numbers generally difficult, with the effective use of phalanx formations being almost impossible, and made Adhania unable to deploy its greatest weapon- its heavy cavalry.

And that was not even going for the fact that the whole region was heavily fortified, with various large forts dotted from the land, containing high thick walls manned by large forces.

Adhania had never been able to break through that choke point and its navy was never strong enough to siege the coastal cities.

Knowing these difficulties, Pasha Farzah tried to offer Alexander some words of guidance, "Haha, it's good for young ones to dream. But let this old man be the party pooper and remind you that one's means and methods should match."

'Give up on Tibias,' was the main message the giant, buff man was giving to Alexander.

Alexander gave a little nod and smiled, "Thank you Pasha Farzah for your advice. I will surely heed it."

Though internally he commented, 'You guys used phalanxes and no siege engine to try and take such a defensible position? Huh, of course, you were going to fail.'

Alexander's concern wasn't if he could conquer Tibias, only how soon.

Chapter 159 Pasha Farzah Educates Alexander

Conquering Tibias was the dream of many an Adhanian king, and most new kings would launch at least one expedition in their lifetime to try luck but reality would soon bring them crashing down every single time.

Tibias was to Adhnia what France had been to England or what Vietnam once was to the Chinese.

In fact, the act of conquering Tibias was turned into almost a meme in the language of Azhak, as there was a saying, 'Go conquer Tibias,' which basically meant 'fuck off.'

Thus one could forgive the pasha for his thoughts on Alexander's ambitions.

After giving some genuine advice to Alexander, the pasha started using his thick, right index finger to gently tap on the grey Cornell wooden table as he slowly spoke, "I have ambivalent feelings about you, you know. On one hand, I'm very glad by how thoroughly you thrashed that waste Amenheraft. I don't know if you know but the people you killed in the battle has almost decapitated his high command, crippling him for years, if not decades."

Pasha Farzah, with his vast intelligence network, naturally knew much more about the specific losses suffered by Amenheraft than Ptolomy or Alexander.

He continued, "Even if Amenheraft does somehow manage to take back Adhan now, he would have a very difficult time gaining control over it any time soon. The base of loyal nobles he had inherited is gone and he will need decades to build it up again from scratch."

The pasha then stopped tapping his fingers and sharply looked at Alexander, "This is a result even I didn't dare dream. And for that, to show my appreciation, I'm willing to overlook how you killed Fatrak...if you give up on that stupid proposal."

Alexander was impressed by how quickly the pasha was able to get his hands on Amenheraft's casualties.

This was not the twenty-first century with its satellite communication, meaning spies must be buzzing around Amenheraft like flies.

But what he was not impressed by was pasha's insistence for him to give up Azira and Azura.

That was a no-go for Alexander.

And he made it clear to the pasha, "I'm a poor, weak mercenary with no roots in Adhania. As such I might very well be thrown away like garbage once I have lived by usefulness. To safeguard against that, I need some guarantees. I need Azira and Azura"

He then emphasized, "I can't compromise, not on that."

"You don't trust the words of your king and his retainers?" Pasha Farzah changed his tone to a hard, harsh one.

But Alexander gave his usual, memorized reply, "Of course, I do. With all my life, But I also believe in the words, 'Trust but verify'."

"Heh, words to live to by," Pasha Farzah sneered back.

Then his tapping on the wooden bench returned as he asked an off-hand question, "Why did you kill Fatrak? I liked Fatrak."

Alexander returned the question with one of his own, "Do you know how he died?"

This caused a frown to form on the noble's face as he was still unclear of the details.

So Alexander decided to fill him in.

"The fool confronted the king and me along with five of my soldiers in a dark corridor alone, demanding that I take my sword off and then 'surrender' myself for punishment. And when my soldiers apprehended him and held him down, instead of taking the name of the king who was literally there pleading on his behalf to me, the idiot instead shouted your name, saying how you will kill me the moment you entered the city."

Alexander then shrugged his shoulders, and said nonchalantly, "So yeah, I killed him. I killed him for the sin of being stupid."

After finishing, Alexander had expected the pasha to shout and roar.

But to Alexander's surprise, Pasha Farzah showed no anger.

There was not even a scowl on his face over Alexander's frank admission.

Instead, Farzah only sniggered, "You think the boy's true nature was unknown to me? You think that haughty, pompous idiot could have gotten anywhere without shitting all over the place?"

He answered his own question shaking his head, "No, the reason I wiped his ass, the reason I liked him...well pretended to like him was because of his father."

"His father?" Alexander was intrigued.

Alexander could think of only a handful of positions that could draw a pasha's attention.

'I will bet a million dollars he is related to the royal family.' Alexander swore.

"Yes, Djoser. He is a pasha and Amenheraft's eldest brother." Pasha Farzah confirmed Alexander's suspicions.

And then gave him a bit of history lesson, "Alozmer had many boys. But other than three, all others are either dead or married to the daughters of other pashas. They have the title of Emir and some land but are generally weak, holding mostly ceremonial positions. There are two exceptions but generally, that is so."

"But that is not the case with Djoser, who is almost as old as me and is the pasha of the biggest port in Adhania. And that should be of particular interest to you as he is your neighboring pasha- The ruler of Kuleef!" Pasha Farzah finished his sentence with a bit of dramatic flair in his voice, hoping to see some kind of amusing reaction on Alexander's face.

But only got a thoughtful, almost poker face, causing him to curse in his heart, 'Fool, doesn't even know how fucked he is!'

But Alexander didn't think himself screwed.

Instead, he was rejoicing over the fact that he would not need to generate conflict with Kuleef, they would come to him, giving him a perfect casus belli.

Though Pasha Farzah was disappointed to see Alexander's nonchalant facade, he still continued, "Djoser, is a good man. And a caring father. But he has always been bad at showing this as he had always been strict with Fatrak, placing a lot of expectation on his successor."

Pasha Farzah here paused to let out a small sigh of pity, "This excess pressure might have twisted the boy, making him become rude and confrontational, always throwing a tantrum if not getting his way. And this caused a fracture between the father and son."

Farzah then said with a small smirk, "I coincidentally saw this crack when I went to visit Kuleef on a business trip and decided to exploit it. I indulged my grandnephew's tendencies, allowing him to do what his heart desired, which forced his father into many embarrassing and at times even difficult positions for his son's recklessness. Haha, I managed to get quite a few trade concessions from Djoser that way." Pasha Farzaah fondly recalled.

The frankness with which Pasha Farzah revealed these secrets astonished Alexander, as he was not anyone close to the man.

Alexander also noticed how although the other pasha did not directly participate in the rebellion they tacitly and indirectly showed their support, as evidenced by the fact that a successor of a pasha was in the retinue of Ptolemy.

'Looks like this rebellion has many layers to it,' Alexander took a mental note.

Pasha Farzah, then finished his speech, "So as I was saying. Djoser was a man who showed tough love for his son. Even though they appear estranged, he would not have made the sacrifices he made if he didn't truly care for his son. He will come for your blood." Pasha Farzah warned.

And at last, added sarcastically, "Also, you killing the boy has removed a card I could have played against him and Kuleef. So thanks for that."

'Darn, I could have used that boy. I was too hasty with the sword,' Alexander understood that even he was not immune to the corrupting nature of power.

He swung the sword recklessly because he could, not because he should.

But soon he recovered and smiled at Pasha Farzah, "Well the past is the past. There's no use crying over spilled milk, or in this case cut head."

Alexander spoke cheerfully, in a breezy, light tone that seemed oblivious of the danger ahead.

"Haha, that's not a bad thing to have, an easy-going spirit," Pasha Farzah chuckled at Alexander's ability to not agonize over past mistakes.

And then got to the main point he was trying to make, "So, boy, in return for the valuable lesson I gave you, I was hoping that you might cancel that ridiculous arrangement with my granddaughters. I'm requesting...Again."

The tone with which this giant man said the word 'hoping' and 'requesting' did not mean those words, it meant he was ordering.

The man's eyes had narrowed into a crescent, like that of a wolf and his whole body had tensed up like an animal ready to attack his prey.

'He isn't going to take a blank 'no' very well,' Alexander concluded.

So he made small talk, "Pasha Farzah, your obsession with your granddaughters, surely you cannot be oblivious to how vulnerable that makes you. Is it really prudent for you to be showing such weakness during negotiations?"

Alexander was truly curious about this as the noble did not strike him as stupid.

Chapter 160 Fight Over The Twins

"Tap, tap, tap," Pasha Farzah silently tapped his fingers at Alexander's question.

Alexander soon figured out that the pasha would subconsciously tap his finger when he was thinking or saying something important, the sound acting as a kind of beacon for the audience to focus their attention on him.

"Do you know why I rebelled?" Pasha Farzah asked Alexander a straight question.

"No, I don't," Alexander gave a straight reply.

And Alexander really did not know why the man rebelled.

He had theories and conjectures, but not one single solid evidence.

Pasha Farzah then turned his head away from Alexander and looked out of the window, gazing into the horizon beyond, "Then let me tell you!"

"Many think that I instigated the rebellion because I wanted to replace the royal family and that's why invited foreign powers into the country."

He perfectly caught on to what Alexander and the others were thinking about him.

And he expressed a mocking sneer toward them, "Heh, the fools. They have no idea what the royal family means to the nobles and the populace. The faith of Ramuh has penetrated deep into the marrow of every citizen in the country and I'm not that big of a fool that I would attempt to supplant them."

Then he congratulated Alexander, "And on a side note, that's why I'm so impressed by how you were able to get concessions from Ptolomy to practice your faith of Gaia in Adhania. In addition to getting the right to build temples, you even managed to put a statue of the goddess in the Temple of Ramuh. Impressive youngster, impressive." Farzah praised

Alexander only lightly smiled at the applause as the pasha then proceeded to snigger at the king, "That fool Ptolomy is too overconfident in the hearts of the people. He thinks that they will not switch beliefs when given the choice out of loyalty. Well, time will tell how true that is."

'Very impressive insight,' Alexander remarked as he recalled that the problem the pasha could foresee just by his years of experience was something that had historical precedence in Alexander's previous life.

'The Japanese learned it the hard way.' Alexander recalled how in the 15th century when Christian missionaries were first coming into Japan, the Japanese emperors seemed unconcerned about it.

They failed to see the danger of the populace being converted from Shintoism, which proclaimed the emperor to be the god on earth, to Christianity, which believed in the son of god, Jesus.

They finally woke up to the danger in the 16th century, realizing the kind of threat the new religion possessed to the royal authority and they promptly banned it in 1614, brutally persecuting anyone found practicing it afterward.

Pasha Farzah however was naturally unaware of these and instead continued his speech, "Well, going back to the topic. The reason why I rebelled was to kill that pig and punish that waste." He was referring to Amneheraft's father and Amenheraft respectively, the disgust for them almost solid and opaque.

"And now, that has been achieved. I am satisfied with the current result, and now, I only want to return to Matrak with the only two people that have Layla's soul in them, Azura and Azira."

Then gave an ultimatum to Alexander, "So, this is the third time I am asking. Give up on Azira and Azura and I swear by Ramuh that I will not touch you. And I will also not let Ptolomy touch you."

'Heh, I'm sure you took a lot of oaths to the previous king as well. I would be a fool to trust even half of what you said.' Alexander sneered in his heart, still unconvinced.

If the pasha's true nature was so frank and upright, he could not have rebelled.

But the pasha's stubbornness was proving to be an obstacle for Alexander, who then reminded, "You must have heard how the king got his hand on a few billion ropals. Azura and Azira are involved. How do you intend to deal with that?"

"Haha, yes, Ptolomy did tell me about that." Farzah first lightly chuckled. "He claims that you got him five billion ropals. Which means you got him ten billion ropals." The pasha knew his king well.

"But," The pasha spoke, "If you think that, that little trick will get you anywhere, you are deadly mistaken. You called Azura and Azira my weakness. And you were right. Which is why I'm going to take them with me to Matrak. What kind of an idiot would I be if I left my weakness at the hands of others when I was so close to securing it?" He scoffed.

He made a very convincing, which made Alexander put on an intrigued face, and ask, "Oh, then the lord is not concerned about the backlash from the nobles? Do you think they will accept their lord sheltering temple thieves?"

The pasha did not appear offended by Alexander calling his granddaughters thieves. But only mocked Alexander without disguise, "Heh, whatever backlash I receive, do you think a weak, poor man like you can protect them better than me? Will they be more secure than in my own territory?"

Alexander gave the answer with a light smile, "I think the pasha is misunderstanding something. The king can pardon Azura and Azira's life with the excuse of them being young and being tricked. And as a punishment, he can then banish them to Zanzan, which is a wasteland. This, along with hefty bribes will be enough to placate the nobles."

Then Alexander pointed out, "What will not appease the nobles is if the girls are sent to Matrak, the province of their doting grandfather. So, you see they 'will' be more secure with me."

Alexander put an emphasis on the word 'will' to answer the pasha's rhetorical questions.

This sound argument put a deep scowl on the noble's face.

'Looks like Seelima wasn't exaggerating when she said that I might have met my match,' Farzah bitterly complained at Alexander's eloquence.

And so, with his hands almost empty, he played his last card, "I might cut a deal with Amenheraft to become neutral in the war in exchange for amnesty."

But instead of feeling threatened, this only managed to cause an involuntary guffaw from Alexander, "If you are seriously suggesting this, then go ahead. I have nothing more to say."

He then slouched back onto the chair and just kept smirking at the man, indicating that the conversation was over.

But Alexander spoke more volumes by not talking than he would have done by doing so.

Because only a fool among fools would actually try to do what Pasha Farzah was suggesting.

The noble had committed regicide.

No, it was worse.

Because he didn't kill just a king, but a god-king.

He killed a man who was supposed to be a god in flesh.

The entire royal family's authority was based on the fact that they were god kin and thus untouchable.

But this man had broken that illusion, he had shattered that myth, and if that man was allowed to go not only scot-free, but also get an official pardon, it would shake the royal family's entire legitimacy to the core

And Pasha Farzah knew this as his face turned a bit pale for the first time when after a while Alexander broke the silence, "Do you think Ptolomey will ever forget you killed a king? Do you think he will fear that you could kill him just like his father?"

The question was rhetorical as both men were smart enough to know the answer- 'Yes. Absolutely.'

'They told me he was a slave just a month ago. So how does he know so much about us nobles? Why am I struggling so much against an illiterate?' Pasha Farzah was both annoyed at himself and felt a bit cautious of the boy.

After noticing the subtle change in pasha's facade, Alexander spoke in a soothing tone, "Pasha Farzah, seems to be misunderstanding something. I'm sure you are apprehensive about your granddaughters' well-being if they go with me. Which is understandable," Alexander said understandingly.

"But," Alexander pointed out, "Please recall that I did not harm your granddaughter when I first met them inside the temple. I did not even know of their identity at that time, so if I wanted to hurt them, that was my greatest chance...."

"Because you didn't hurt them then, you won't hurt them now." Pasha Farzah finished Alexander's sentence for him in a flat, monotone voice, indicating that he was not moved.

The muscular white man roughly retorted, "You not hurting Azira and Azura is not a credit. It's only natural."

He then pointed his thick index finger towards Alexander and in a low voice snarled, "If you had laid a finger on them, it would have been war. So, your reward for keeping them safe is the conversation you are having with me and the fact that you have me as an ally, ..for now,"

He then slouched back on his chair, as if to say 'The ball's in your court, brat.'

Alexander understood that the whole alliance with Pasha Farzah was hinging on the placement of the two and he was seriously contemplating whether it was worth it to pursue the twins.

'Yes, it is. I will forever regret this if I let go of his dangerous man's Achill's heel," Alexander determined.

And thus he too slouched in his chair and smiled, "Well, it looks like we have reached an impasse."

Both understood the girls' importance and neither was willing to back down.