

Herald 18

Chapter 18 Clash Of Words

"So, to recapitulate for Menes and Alexander, I have been to the headquarters and met with both Damious and Samaras. They said that General Agapios was struck by lightning but is alive and recuperating.

In the meantime, we are to counterattack and help the trapped soldiers break out of the cauldron." Nestoras concisely gave the summary.

What! Attack again? So soon?

Alexander was appalled by this. When he came in and saw the captains move the wooden figurines he thought they were planning an orderly withdrawal.

But to think that they were gearing up for a new offensive.

"We should be running you imbeciles!" Alexander wanted to scream.

Most soldiers could hardly stand, and command wanted to use them to attack?

Absurd!

"It's good that the rumors were false and both the commanders are alive." Menes sighed a breath of relief.

Seemingly he was unconcerned about the orders for an immediate offensive.

But contrary to the simple-minded giant, Alexander didn't buy that everything was fine and dandy.

Nestoras didn't see Agapios with his own eyes!

Like they were hiding him from others.

Alexander feared the worst.

But at this moment, the cogs inside Alexander's mind were turning rapidly to try and figure out how to solve the immediate crisis.

How to convince them to stop this insane offensive?

"Commander, do we have enough soldiers to launch such an attack? Most of us are too wounded or exhausted." Alexander tentatively prodded Nestoras's stance.

"I am well aware of our situation. But Samaras threatened to not pay us a single coin if we refused. 'Breach of contract for disobeying direct orders' he claimed." Nestoras sighed in exasperation.

"We have been only paid one month's coin. And we used all that up for this campaign. Now, we don't have two coins to rub together." A calm, mature voice explained.

This man was Theocles, captain of the fourth phalanx and more importantly, the quartermaster. He and Cambyses helped Nestoras keep the camp running.

"We are too exhausted. If we fight now, we won't be alive to spend those coins." Alexander cried.

"What, haven't had mom's milk today?" Pallidus mocked with a sneer.

"At least I ..."

"Alexander, do you see someone missing here?" A gentle, deep voice echoed across the tent. This was the last person in the room- Xanthine.

"Constans isn't here. The entire third phalanx isn't here....we have no choice here." He announced firmly, locking eyes with Alexander.

"If I could give a hand and a leg to save them, I would do it in a heartbeat. But Xanthine, are you willing to sacrifice all of us to save your brother?" Alexander passionately implored.

" *Slam* , how dare you, brat! I built and served this team even before you were born, you nose milk dripping pup." Xanthine cursed. smashing his fist fiercely and looking at Alexander like he wanted to swallow him whole.

The instant change from a gentle, amicable character to a hormone-induced raging bull was always quite a shock for any newcomer.

The old man could go from zero to complete bonkers at the drop of a hat.

"Heh, why is a coward like even allowed here? You are a shame to us all, boy" Pallidus sanctimoniously pronounced.

"He is here because Nestoras wanted him here. You think you know better than the commander, Pallidus?" Menes pointedly asked, stepping forward and shielding Alexander with his back, like a father protecting his son.

He wasn't at first opposed to this attack but started to sway after Alexander expressed his opposition.

He trusted the boy's intuition and insight much more than his own.

"Shut up, you low born n...." The raving racist started.

"*Bang*" Nestoras suddenly turned and in full fury squarely smashed Pallidus's jaw with a supreme uppercut, hitting him before he could utter the n-word.

Thud..*thud*..*thud*, Pallidus struggled to stay on his feet as started seeing stars and felt his entire world spinning.

He held his jaw and slowly lowered his head, becoming quiet as a church mouse and trying to be as inconspicuous as possible.

He knew he had crossed a line with that.

"Try and speak that word again, and I will sew your mouth shut, fu*ker" The enraged Nestoras threatened.

As the atmosphere in the tent turned heavy, Nestoras finally looked at Alexander and said, "Look, Alexander, we don't have to defeat the Adhanians. We just have to break the encirclement."

He then nodded his head in agreement and said, "Yes, we are wounded, exhausted and demoralized. Yes, it will be dark soon. But", he sneered, "are you saying we are to leave our brothers to die because we are afraid to take on some slingers? That general believes that we are out and thus allowed his troops to break formation and chase the fleeing enemy. Ha, now, outside the formation, can kill these chickens in our sleep. Has one loss broken your resolve boy?" His question was dripping with clear sarcasm.

He was absolutely enjoying seeing the boy genius fail at something for the first time.

Suddenly, without giving Alexander a second to retort, his voice then turned cold and dictatorial, "The attack has already been decided. Command has decided it and it's not up to you or me to judge it. I will not tolerate any such cowardly defeatist talks, you hear. You were not summoned here to argue tactics. You were summoned here to receive and follow the orders we give you!" Nestoras declared, narrowing his eyes at Alexander, seeming to want to send laser beams out of them.

Alexander simply stared down the gaze, unmoved and unperturbed.

Because all that talk of 'we do what the higher-ups tell us' was complete bullshit.

They were mercenaries for god's sake.

In essence, they were businessmen pedelling their muscles for coin.

And as such, they would certainly disobey any command that directly threatened their existence- like this one.

So, Alexander kept asking himself, "Why is Nestoras so eager to commit suicide?"

"Now," Nestoras's booming voice cut off Alexander's thoughts, "for the reason why we called you, Alexander. You are to convince all the others to get ready and get in formation as soon as possible. You hold considerable esteem among the group and we believe, you, being much closer to the common soldier is the perfect man for the job. In return, we will make you captain of the third phalanx tomorrow." Nestoras spoke the last sentence with considerable honey mixed in.

"I thought the third phalanx...." Alexander tried to clarify.

"Constans is dead." Xanthine curtly cut off.

So that's why he went completely bananas just now.

By his previous wording, Alexander presumed Constans was either trapped or captured. But now it looks like Xanthine witnessed his brother dying.

The second Nestoras uttered the words "captain of the third phalanx", Alexander could feel the joy and excitement radiating off every pore in Menes's and Cambyses's bodies in the back.

They could hardly stop themselves from congratulating him in advance.

He particularly felt the girl's fiery gaze scorch his back in delight.

He could tell she could barely hold herself from screaming and hugging himself in joy.

"Dangling a carrot and a stick. Not bad Nestoras, you are less of an oaf than I thought. Did you think of all by yourself, or did Aristotle help" Alexander sneered in his mind, keeping a poker face.

Credit where credit is due. It was a pretty big carrot to dangle. Captain of a phalanx was realistically the pinnacle one could attain in this mercenary group through hard work.

Becoming the leader or quartermaster needed a lot of elbow grease.

For a slave to become free and reach the apex of his career in a single day was a feat unheard of in history and will remain unheard of in the future.

If Alexander was not a transmigrator but a simple slave, no matter how talented, he would have swallowed the bait hook, line and sinker.

"You think I was born yesterday, you rotting coots. You think I don't see the loophole." Alexander sneered disdainfully.

He started coolly, "Commander, you called me cowardly and defeatist. Do you mean the person who charged alone headfirst into the Adhanian ranks and killed their captain is a coward? Do you mean the one who singlehandedly stabilized a collapsing front line is a defeatist?"

He then changed his tone to an inquisitive one. "Oh, why did the front collapse you ask? Is it because of the fierce enemy attack? Or, it is because that phalanx's commander left his post to save his son and leave all his brothers to die? That cost us thirty-three good brothers. Thirty-three. And now, that very same commander is saying that he wants to save all our brothers. What a joke!" Alexander openly jeered, a disdainful sneer plastered on his face.

... Silence. Pindrop drop, absolute silence.

Everyone, even Pallidus, looked at Alexander wide-eyed and mouth slightly agape, as if they had just seen a ghost.

Cambyses was even worse. She had literally gone from sanguine rosy to deathly white.

No one and I say no one dared to taunt a commander this openly and live to tell the tale, much less a mere slave.