

## **Herald 191**

### Chapter 191 Public Homes And Sewage System

The man Alexander addressed had a fierce scar on his face, a memento from a childhood bear attack, and a menacing, penetrative stare, making the man appear scary and unapproachable.

But in reality, the man named Diagonis was humble and soft-spoken and one who Alexander had appointed to oversee the lumber production within his territory.

"How are the tasks I assigned you?" Alexander lightly smiled at the man.

"We are on schedule. As you instructed, we have started collecting and processing the lumber. Once we have the cement, we can start building the new homes," Diagonis succinctly replied.

Alexander had decided to completely renovate the slums by replacing them with four-story buildings and he gave this job to Diagonis.

"Good, you will get your mortal in a month. For the time being, make the foundation and the scaffolding," Alexander told Diagonis to get everything else ready so that he could commence construction as soon as the cement was made available to him.

These slums had been made of wood and straw and offered few protections against the elements.

They were so prone to catching fire that the people couldn't even start a fire inside, seriously limiting their defense against the cold.

Alexander decided to rectify this by making a brand new residential district to the west of the city, right next to the nobles' estate.

Though no civil engineer, Alexander, with the help of the experienced artisans had come up with a design that he was quite pleased with.

The four-story buildings would be made of wood and stone or brick, with cement acting as mortar.

It would be sixteen by sixteen (16x16) in dimensions and eighteen meters high with a two-meter deep foundation.

It would be divided into eight flats per floor, each with a fifty square meter area, bigger than many Tokyo apartments.

Each of the flats would come with two bedrooms, a dining room, a kitchen, and a balcony.

The kitchen would be connected to a communal chimney running vertically through the four flats and thus all the cooking smoke would be taken outside through the eight total chimneys.

There would be two communal bathrooms on each floor, which would double as a shower and Alexander estimated that around a hundred and fifty people could be housed in the thirty-two flat house.

Alexander then remembered something vital, "Diagonis, each of the buildings are to have a well and to be connected to the sewage system. Have you considered that?"

"That...! That was...Uzak's job...so.." The fierce man stammered a bit.

Alexander then turned to Uzak to know his response and was pleasantly surprised to see that the man had one, "Worry not, lord pasha. The site you chose for the residential district has a very good underground sewage system as it is close to the high district. All we need to do is build the pipes to connect each of the houses to the network and make a few renovations such as connecting the water from the planned aqueducts to regularly flush the system and all the filth will end up into the sea."

Uzak had surprisingly given the project much thought.

Competent men always pleased Alexander and he lightly smiled towards the stonemason, "You have great insight, mister Uzak,"

"No, no, I'm just doing my job." Uzak humbly bowed.

"Good, then that's solved." Alexander said in a pleased tone, and then asked, "What about the wells?"

"My lord, I'm afraid the wells are not a good idea!" This time Diagonis was prepared.

"Ohhh?" Alexander raised an eyebrow as a gesture to elucidate.

"We have found many the groundwater here is too deep for conventional wells. I believe it will be far better to use the aqueducts to make water fountains from which people will be able to collect the water." He sincerely advised.

"Hmmm, okay, let's do that!" Alexander was persuaded.

Then he reminded Diagonis of another very important task, "Diagonis, the few hundred buildings to be made will all need doors, windows, chairs, tables, and much more. Have you thought about that?"

"That...lord pasha, that's impossible." Diagonis sounded a bit desperate.

"My men are already upto their necks cutting and processing the lumber, digging the foundation, and choosing the sites for the stone pillars, And soon we will start making the building. We don't make the time to make furniture." Diagonis repeatedly shook his head as he pleaded to Alexander to reconsider.

Seeing the man's vehement opposition, Alexander understood there really was no way to make this happen.

"Okay, okay, ..just concentrate on the buildings," Alexander ruefully said, deciding to leave the furnishing to the individual tenants for the time being.

"How long will it take?" Alexander at last asked the most critical question.

"As long as I can have enough stone, timber, and cement, the initial hundred houses can be done in a month," Diagonis promised, making a rough estimate that fifty people working twelve hours a day for thirty days should be enough to complete each building.

This was a bit of an underestimation, but it had to be reminded that all the workers were untrained and inexperienced, and even the artisans had never built anything like this at all.

There was also the fact that Diagonis did not want to over-promise and then fail to deliver, thus making himself look bad in front of Alexander.

The speed was something Alexander found a bit lacking as it meant that only fifteen of the fifty thousand would have adequate shelter when winter would truly set in, but understood that there was little more he could do to speed up the works.

"Okay, try your best," Alexander encouraged and with this, he was ready to declare the end of the morning session.

Or so he thought he was as Heliptos asked him with a bit of sourness to his voice, "My lord, are we really going to keep them giving free food, medicine, heat, and housing? That's too much!"

"Pasha, I too share Heliptos's sentiment." Melodias joined in, "Although it is true that we need to take care of them as our people, but the cost of everything we are doing and planning to do is astronomical!" He had a worried tone to his voice.

"Of course, it is not free. Nothing in this world is free," Alexander lightly refuted the men.

"This is an investment. And we will recoup everything by increased taxes and by using these men to claim more land." Alexander pointed out.

"Pasha, I can understand using these men to increase our military and then taking over other territories. But I'm afraid the small merchant tax will never be enough to cover the hundreds of millions of roplas we are spending. Not in this lifetime!" Theocles, who had a good sense of money advised Alexander.

"Theocles is right that taxation will never be able to cover these costs," Alexander frankly admitted.

Then claimed, "But it won't have to. Because there will be many sources of money, you will see,"

"We will use these men to make products that we will sell to the world. So, the world through trade will pay for all these expenses. Alexander said ambitiously.

"But these men can't work if they don't have good housing, heat, and health. So please be a bit more farsighted," Alexander asked his retainers to be visionaries and not miss the forest for the trees.

He then gave some examples, "For example, the house we are building will be free for the first three years and then a monthly rent of thirty ropas will be charged. There will also be a small yearly road tax and utilities like water and sanitation will also cost money."

"As I said, nothing in this world is free," Alexander repeated.

"The pasha is wise and prescient," Heliptos quickly praised Alexander for his money skills.

"Well then let's ...oh I almost forgot." Alexander suddenly remembered a piece of critical announcement.

"Remember that all the free workers will be paid a monthly salary of hundred and fifty ropas. Even the women," Alexander declared.

"That...." After just praising Alexander for his money sense, this announcement made the others not know how to react.

They already had zero income and this move would make them hemorrhage millions of ropas a month, not to even mention how many were flabbergasted by the thought that a woman could be paid the same as a man

"Pasha, we are already giving them free food and a three-year rent-free house. Do we have to give them money too?" Theocles tactfully expressed his skepticism.

"Pasha, these people might think you are too soft and generous, if you keep giving away such free stuff. And then when you will want them to pay, they will complain and cause trouble," Menicus who had seen and experienced how the general people thought warned.

And this was a legit concern.

Even in Alexander's time, some people begged not because of necessity, but because it was easy and lucrative,

But now, for Alexander this policy was vital.

"The reason we will give them is to jump-start the economy." Alexander smiled at his retinue, who were confused by Alexander's reasoning.

Chapter 192 Ten Commandments

Alexander took economics in his A levels and there he learned something called the multiplier effect and this was something critical to the functioning of an economy.

Seeing the understandably befuddled faces of the much senior men, Alexander decided to teach this complex topic in an easy-to-understand way to the men around him.

"Let me give you an example," He started.

"Imagine we pay a farmer a hundred ropals. He will then go and spend this money on things he needs. For simplicities sake, let's assume he goes to a blacksmith to buy tools worth a hundred ropals."

"The blacksmith will then will takes this new money to .., let's say buy clothes from a tailor. The tailor might then use the money to buy furniture from a carpenter. The carpenter might then buy pots from a potter, And at last, the potter might buy food from the same farmer."

"So, in this way, just one hundred ropals would change hands five times, and appear as five hundred ropals."

"And in this way businesses will thrive." Alexander finished.

If the economy was to be modeled like a human being, then the multiplier effect would be its beating heart, pumping money throughout the economy, keeping the cash flowing from one's hand to the other, and stimulating businesses.

The people around Alexander were reeling from this brand-new concept and they looked at him like he was the world's eighth wonder.

They didn't even know how to praise Alexander as they were still having trouble processing what Alexander had explained, though all of them could understand it was something bloody brilliant.

"Pasha, I...I think I'm not qualified to be in charge of the province's coin," Heliptos had almost a paradoxical tone to his voice, both admiring Alexander's grasp on matters about the money and also feeling a bit dejected at being so thoroughly thrashed at a craft he had known for thirty years.

But this was an unfair comparison as although Alexander knew much more about the theories of economics when it came to knowing the ins and outs of the daily operations when it came to street smarts, it was Heliptos who trumped Alexander.

"You can learn from me," Alexander lightly smiled and rejected Heliptos's resignation.

"Haha, yes, yes. It is truly envious that Shordar (Baron) Heliptos can learn from the great pasha himself," Menicus chuckled and was then joined by the rest.

And it seemed that Alexander's knowledge didn't only affect Heliptos, but another person as well and much more strongly.

Harun was smitten by Alexander's scholarly talent and declared, "Pasha Alexander, I have been truly moved today by your sapience. Being so young and yet so erudite, I truly believe you to be the divine son of Gaia, just as the rumors claim."

Harun then solemnly vowed, "As such, I have decided to convert to your religion!"

This straightforward declaration caught Alexander momentarily a bit off guard, but quickly he smiled, "Welcome to the path to Elysium, Let the goddess's light guide you to salvation."

"Haha, welcome, welcome. Welcome to the path of enlightenment." Theocles was the very next to congratulate the man.

And then true to his status as the archpriest, invited Harun, "Please come to the temple at any time and we can discuss the virtues of the goddess and her son at length."

"I will be sure to make the time," Harun cordially accepted.

It had to be said that Harun's conversion was not driven purely by theological motives, but by some ambitions as well.

In his mind, he believed that believing in Alexander's religion would ease his way to the top and although he didn't know it yet, Harun's actions today would set a precedent where promotion among the high levels of government would not only depend on competency but faith as well.

This would produce both good and bad consequences for Alexander and his country, a problem he would have to solve in the future.

But for now, after Harun was given his complimentary pleasantries, Alexander decided to dismiss the council, at last, bringing the almost four hours long meeting to a close.

Well, almost everyone, as Alexander addressed, "Theocles, you stay. I have some more things to discuss."

After the two men found themselves in the now empty hall room, Alexander asked about a task he had given Theocles three days ago, "Has the temple location been chosen?"

Theocles quickly replied, "It will be done today. I have already checked some quite good manors, and I will pick one today. Does the Pasha want to join?" Theocles invited.

"Haha...sorry I'm far too busy," Alexander politely declined, thinking he had far better uses for his time than looking at some noble's abandoned house.

But then he advised, "Try to have it as close to the center of the city as possible, so it's easier for everyone to come. And have it as big as possible so it can fit a large crowd."

"Yes, my lord. I will bear it in mind," Theocles nodded in agreement.

Alexander then changed the topic, "So, has the temple of Ramuh done anything lately?"

"For now, nothing." Theocles said shaking his head, adding, "As you commanded we have not antagonized them and it seems they are smart enough to know not to pick a fight with us... for now."

The significance of Theocles's repeating and emphasizing the two words were not lost on Alexander, who too subconsciously repeated, "For now."

He very well understood that it would only be a matter of time before these priests clashed not only with Alexander's Gaia faith but also with Ptolomy's new religion, which was a branching sect of the original monolithic Ramuh faith.

This would be like the battle between the catholic and protestant states, or the crusades, brutal and merciless and Alexander knew there was no way to avoid it.

Also, Alexander was not really averse to such conflicts as this would allow him to gain more territory.

But not now.

He was not yet ready and his faith was too infantile to put up any resistance against the Goliath that was the Ramuh faith.

But as the city lord, he could do a lot of things to suppress other religions while promoting his own.

"The temple of Ramuh is a threat to us," Alexander stated, "not only because it controls the faith of a vast number of people, but because they can set these people against us at any time."

"Hmmm, does the Pasha wish to banish them," Theocles asked in a probing tone.

"No,...the people here have too a deep-rooted faith, The backlash would be too much," Alexander, though tempted, rejected such an extreme act.

Then he took out a scrolled piece of papyrus from his pocket and handed it to Theocles,

"Read this,"

As Theocles glanced down onto the thin scroll, he could see numbered points written on them, ten in total, with a new instruction written next to each of them.

Yes, this was Alexander blatantly ripping off the Ten Commandments, while also making slight modifications to adjust them to his circumstance.

The commandments read:

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not commit blasphemy.

3. Thou shall offer your prayers on time every time.
4. Thou shalt serve me with your soul, and with your devotion, not with extravagant offerings.
5. Thou shalt not kill the innocent and the defenseless.
6. Thou shalt not commit adultery. — a husband belongs only to his wife and the wife only belongs to her husband.
7. Thou shall not bear false witness, cheat, frame, or break promises.
8. You shall not envy or steal what is rightfully others.
9. Honor your father and mother and love thy children, sons, and daughter equally.
10. Thou shalt look after your compatriots and help the poor, needy and destitute.

Credit to Alexander, he did not simply copy-paste the ten commandments but had given it a bit of thought.

The first three rules were obvious and the cornerstone of any religion- belief, loyalty, and prayer.

The fourth was a way to prevent the temples from becoming too rich and decadent.

Alexander knew what the churches in the middle ages had become, funding wars, creating works of lavish art and architecture, and leading an opulent lifestyle by various exploitative means, which was a huge factor in leading to its decline years later.

Thus Alexander hoped that by discouraging spending money on the temples, such practices could be, though not stopped, at least curbed and his faith might escape the same decline the church faced.

The next four were simply illegal or immoral things that the people were barred from doing.

The sixth point was one that particularly stood out for Alexander, as he included it not only so that the familiar ties would be strengthened by following this commandant, but also because he hoped that soldiers would commit fewer atrocities after being reminded of this.

And the last two were familiar and social duties expected of any decent human being.

Chapter 193 Ongoing Renovations

Theocles read and re-read the piece of paper, holding it so gently that it was like it was his newborn son in his hand.

"Is...is this the goddess's revelation?" Theocles asked in a hoarse, shaky voice, excitement dripping out of his voice.

"....." Alexander only lightly smiled, sending a profound gaze at the man.

"I want you to start writing a bible regarding a new religion. It will be the faith of Gaia and these topics must be the centerpiece of the book." He instructed Theocles.

"Yes...yes, my lord. I will see it done immediately," Theocles literally jumped up from his chair and stood up, shaking his clenched fist in elation.

He looked as if he was going to start writing it right now.

"Wait, wait, calm down," Alexander gestured for the man to sit down.

"Ah,,,yes. My apologies, I got a bit distracted," Theocles quickly plopped down, a bit flushed.

"Haha, never mind. It is natural for a true believer to act like this when presented with a god's words. One of little faith could never have that reaction," Alexander genuinely praised the man for his alacrity, because this showed that Theocles was truly serious about his belief.

Alexander's unreserved praise also greatly pleased Theocles, evidenced by his wide-grinning mouth.

Alexander then told Theocles, "The nobles can use the temple and the priests to foment the people against us. But simply kicking out the priests will antagonize both the people and spur the nobles to unite against their theological foes."

Alexander then waved his hands, "The nobles are not our concern. They are destined to be our foes and conflict is inevitable."

"But we need the people. And it will be your job to convert as many people as possible as soon as possible." Alexander gave Theocles his task.

"Yes, pasha." Theocles zealously nodded.

And then cleverly asked, "Do you have any advice on how to do it?"

Theocles had picked up on Alexander's tendency to give detailed instructions on how to accomplish the task he would assign his retinue and in this way, Theocles made the conversation appear more natural.

Alexander certainly understood this little tactful play and nodded appreciatively, "I will allocate some food and money to you. For the first few weeks. distribute it normally, while preaching the gospel of the new faith."

"Then increase the food rations to three times a day for those who regularly come to the temple to pray."

"And remember to give a small amount of money to the really needy who convert to our religion."

Alexander intended to buy and bribe the faith of others, particularly those at the lowest strata of society.

"My lord, I don't think this giving free money away is a good idea. These people will simply swindle it out of you," Theocles pointed out a very obvious flaw in the relatively crude plan.

"That's your problem to solve, to find the appropriate people to give the money to, people who are needy and faithful," Alexander would not spoon-feed the solution to every tiny problem.

"I will try my best," Theocles heavily nodded.

"Also, I intend to force the priests to follow Ptolomy's branch of the faith. Once the cement production ramps up, I will order the creation of the goddess's statue which will be placed all over the city," Alexander declared.

"That's an excellent idea, Pasha," Theocles joyously cried, relieved that a problem that had kept him awake at night was solved.

'Without a form, how can the people pray,' Theocles had asked himself regarding the absence of the goddess's statue.

"Umm, it will be soon and is sure to stir up some trouble. We need to be ready," Alexander repeatedly emphasized.

"I will start writing the bible immediately," Theocles showed his willingness to work hard.

"Umm, I'm giving you two weeks to write the basics. Use the ten commandments I gave you as a guideline. And I will assign you Taiyin to help you. The temple needs a priestess after all," Alexander additionally informed Theocles.

"Taiyin?" Naturally, Theocles was not acquainted with Ophenia, their paths never crossing and so was confused by this new mention.

"You will meet her tomorrow," Alexander waved his palm, thinking that showing would be better than telling.

With all this done, and feeling that he had given Theocles enough homework for one day, he decided to excuse the man, "Well, that's it for today. Let us meet again tomorrow."

"I await our next meeting with bated breath, Divine son," Theocles reverentially prostrated and then saw himself out.

The reason why Alexander talked to Theocles separately was because theological conversations were a bit of a sensitive topic as Alexander's and Ptolomy's goals fundamentally clashed with one another here.

So Alexander felt the less the people knew, the lower the chance of anyone blathering anything out, either intentionally or by a silly slip of tongue

It was already midday by the time Alexander had finished with his meetings, and he was feeling hungry by now.

But he still had two other very important people to still meet.

'Argh, they can wait. I want lunch,' Alexander was feeling a bit heavy-headed with the endless talking and decided to take a recess.

He then exited the hall room and spoke to Hemicus who stood outside as guard, "Tell Camius and Cambyses to meet me for lunch in my study. And ask Taiyin to join me there too."

"Yes, commander," Hemicus had yet to throw out the outdated address, not that Alexander really minded.

As Hemicus began to instruct people to go and deliver Alexander's message to their intended recipients, the pasha himself was strolling through the hallway and down the enormous spiraling staircase, surveying the renovations that were taking place.

Yes, as the new owner of this place, it was only natural for Alexander to renovate the huge place.

Slaves could be seen taking down all portraits of Pasha Muazz and his ancestors, leaving only the ones with beautiful landscapes or still art, and safely storing them inside wooden boxes.

"I wonder if I can sell them to Pasha Muazz?" Alexander seriously considered swindling some money off that rotten man.

Much to his chagrin, he had found the manor treasury to be mostly empty, the handiwork of the pasha's goons no doubt, and so Alexander was very much eager to 'take back what was his'.

He had also decided that he didn't need a literal thousand-roomed house and vast parts of the house were ordered to be closed off and locked.

This was done to save costs on repair and maintenance as Alexander calculated he would need an army of a few hundred servants just to keep rooms operational, with having to regularly clean and dust them and keep away any bugs.

It was said that owning a castle in the medieval ages was almost as expensive as building it and Alexander was experiencing that saying firsthand.

'It's far too wasteful to have his massive palace as a house. Once I build a suitable house, I will turn it into an administrative building or a university,' Alexander decided as he made his way into the central hall.

Even here the renovations were taking place, for more extensive renovations in fact.

In addition to the various paintings being taken down, the one particular act that stood out was how the huge Ramuh statue that gallantly stood in the center of the portico was being smashed.

Yes, smashed.

Not being taken down or removed, but being smashed into pieces by large hammers.

This was because Alexander would certainly not tolerate a statue of another god in his home, especially not one with whom he was directly competing for faith.

But even then he would not have destroyed a holy symbol if he could have helped it, much preferring to sell the beautiful sculpture to the temple for a pretty penny.

The problem with that though was that the statue was much larger than the doors, them being built after the construction of the statue had finished.

And so, Alexander was left without much choice.

The slaves that were destroying the statue naturally produced thunderous booms each time the iron hit the granite and Alexander understood that it would be impossible to be in the study while this 'deconstruction' work was going on.

'Darn, I forgot they were doing it today,' Alexander lampooned.

Then he turned to go back when suddenly a thought hit him.

'Do I send servants again to tell of them the new location, or do I wait for them here?' Alexander asked himself.

And after a bit of rumination, he decides on the latter, while also lamenting, 'Oh, how I wish there were a cellphone.'

These types of thoughts were frequent for Alexander, as it was only after coming here did he begin to truly appreciate the privileged life and lifestyle he had.

Even basic things like tissue paper and wet wipes produced fond feelings of nostalgia inside Alexander.

While Alexander was immersed in his bubble of comfort, Alexander's first guest quickly made himself available -Camius, soon followed by Cambyses and a bit later Ophenia.

"Let's have an outdoor lunch," With everyone present, Alexander decided to have a lunch party in the backyard garden, while also intending to discuss the future of this city.

Chapter 194 Faith In Thesos (Mass Release)

Alexander and company sat around a small table in the garden, enjoying slices of bread, cheese, and meat, with a bowl of salad dressed in olive oil, complemented by fine wine from Pasha Muazz's storage.

"So, how are you liking Zanzan?" Alexander asked a generic question while he slathered some butter on his bread.

"Plague," Came Cambyses's monotone and tired answer, as the girl took a sip of her wine.

She had her hands full with running the clinic for the past two weeks, treating the sick, and overseeing the operations, which required her to work almost fifteen to sixteen hours a day.

"Well, the good thing is that's almost gone now. And it's all thanks to you," Alexander appreciatively smiled at her.

"Hope your policies work and we don't have to deal with another one ever again," Cambyses spookily sighed.

She never wanted to deal with what she had to deal with in the first weeks.

"It will, it will," Alexander reassured her.

And then turned to Ophenia, "How are you liking it in Zanzan? Are you having any difficulty settling in? He asked.

"No, everything is fine. Mistress has been taking good care of us," Ophenia sweetly replied.

"Good, that's good," Alexander nodded pleased.

And down with the small talk, he moved to the real topic.

"Taiyin, I assume you studied a lot of religious scripture?" Alexander looked expectantly at the beautiful woman.

Ophenia was a bit taken aback by this question.

This was not anything secretive but she failed to see its relevance in this context.

But nevertheless, she said quickly, "Yes, I was taught quite extensively."

"Good, then I have a vacant job for you," Alexander lightly smiled at Ophenia, who had sat up straight upon hearing there was a job Alexander wanted her to do.

"The temple of Gaia is currently in need of a sacred priestess. Are you interested?" Alexander dropped a bombshell of an offer at Ophenia's feet.

The sacred priestess would be in charge of all the priestesses and more importantly, would be tasked with conducting the various rituals and ceremonies of the temple.

It was a supremely prestigious position, above all but the pope and the archpriest and Ophenia didn't know even know how to respond to such an honorable offer.

Such a position was usually given to priestesses in their twilight years, those that had served the temple faithfully for decades, or to a king's blood kin, like how Azira and Azura were made saintesses.

Ophenia never even in her dreams dared want such a position and so when this pie fell from the sky without any warning, she lost her voice momentarily.

"So, will you?" Alexander lightly asked again as he was yet to get a response.

His mild voice finally broke Opehnia out of her stupor and she quickly faced Alexander, her eyes bulging and lips shaking, "I...I don't dare. That position belongs to mistress," Ophenia cried.

This produced a hidden but light smirk from Cambyses.

The amount of adoration and respect a sacred priestess would get from the populace was something very hard to resist.

It would be a lie if Cambyses said she didn't want it.

"I'm not asking Cambyses. I'm asking you. I want you to become the sacred priestess," Alexander this time did ask but stated.

"That..." Ophenia sneakily glanced at her mistress to see her reaction but saw her only nonchalantly nibbling on her bread.

Then a moment later Cambyses let down her food and gave her approval, "I know nothing about religion or rituals. So you take it."

"Yes, I chose you for your experience," Alexander gave his reason.

"Then...although I'm unqualified, I humbly accept, my lord," Ophenia then stood up and fully bowed at Alexander, finding it difficult to keep her emotions in check.

When she had come to Alexander two months ago seeking refuge, it was an act of utter desperation and the best scenario in her mind at that time was just being able to eke out a living.

She had accepted her life would be brutal from then on, with hard, back-breaking labor from dawn till dusk and with hunger, disease, and death a constant threat around every corner.

So who would have thought that not only her master would become a pasha almost overnight, but even choose her to be one of the leaders of his religion?

'My lord is truly the divine son of Gaia, infinite in his grace and mercy,' Ophenia cried in her heart at Alexander's trust toward her, while warm tears of joy and gratitude streamed down her perfect face.

"Hahaha, no need to stand on ceremony, sit, sit," Alexander lightly chuckled as he gestured for the girl to return to her seat.

"Congratulations, your grace," Camius too greeted Ophenia on her new status, who quickly rubbed off her tears and returned a smile, "Thank you, captain Camius."

"Our faith is still only infantile. I pray sister will work hard to spread it," Cambyses also paid her compliments with a light smile, though she made a point not to congratulate the girl, a subtle hint that she was not pleased by the arrangement.

"Thank you, mistress. Rest assured, I will spare no effort," Ophenia grinned a reply, not catching the hidden wordplay.

"Taiyin, you are the sacred priestess now. From now on, you have no mistress, only a master. Be mindful of your words," Alexander lightly chided.

But although these words sounded like it was directed at Ophenia, in reality, it was a way of getting back at Cambyses.

Because even though Ophenia had missed the clues, he certainly didn't and Alexander did not like when others questioned his appointment of people.

So, he decided to punish Cambyses a bit by stripping her of this little title.

"Yes, master," Ophenia seriously nodded.

"Umm," Alexander then instructed, " I have already chosen the arch-priest, Theocles. You will meet him tomorrow. And help him write the bible that I instructed."

"Bible? We are writing a bible?" Ophenia was both surprised and a bit confused.

It had to be noted that the religion of Gaia was not anything new or unique.

It already existed in many parts of Thesos, with thousands of temples and millions of followers, making it one of the biggest beliefs in the region and also why everyone related Alexander to it.

Ophenia had thought Alexander would just follow those scriptures with a little tweaking.

But it seemed that her master had much grander plans! The people in the city-states of Thesos were very varied in their beliefs, with hundreds of city-states believing in a myriad of pagan gods and deities, each with their own cultures and rituals.

Sometimes the differences were huge and apparent, while at other times, they were utterly inane, like one faith drinking wine from a round goblet and another from a tapered one.

This meant that many of the practices were very opaque and impenetrable and many were shared among multiple religions, which made it very hard for theologians to get any accurate information about any religion.

In fact, this job was made even more difficult as priests of one religion tended to copy or emulate another religion and after a while, that practice would be made canon, meaning the pagan religions were always evolving, growing like the branches of a tree.

And that's why it was very hard for the Thesisans to export their religion as different missionaries would speak different things about their different gods following different editions of their scriptures, and any potential convert would find himself too overwhelmed.

Thus the faith in a particular god usually tended to stay restricted to that region, unless that region's influence expanded primarily via conquest and the citizens of the newly conquered lands were forced to change their belief.

And this lack of depth of knowledge about a particular religion was what Alexander was looking to exploit.

Ptolomy had permitted Alexander to be able to preach and practice the religion of his choice, which Alexander claimed as the faith of Gaia, which was already prolific in Thesos.

But what Ptolomy did not permit was to allow Alexander to set up a new religion with him as a god.

And this was what Alexander was attempting to do.

Knowing the fact that no one in Adhania really knew much about the faith of Gaia, other than that it was a foreign religion, Alexander intended to create a whole new branch of that religion, one where he was divine and a godkin- the son of Gaia, with an entirely new book, rituals, and practices.

And given that Adhania's conflicts with Cantagena were not theological but trade and territorial, with disputes mainly over trade routes and contested islands, coupled with the general ignorance, was confident in his ability to get away with inventing a new religion and passing it off as the Faith of Gaia,

Alexander also recalled that Theocles had asked no questions regarding this which clearly demonstrated that man's IQ and Alexander remarked, 'Looks like Theocles is better than Ophenia,'

But this also made him feel better that he had chosen his archpriest well, who was tasked with overseeing the entire temple and the faith that it wielded.

Chapter 195 Prayer And Ritual (Mass Release)

Ophenia was still looking at Alexander expectantly, waiting with bated breaths for his answer.

And so Alexander decided to elucidate, "The goddess has spoken to me and decreed all other branches of this faith is null and void from today. Only our faith and our faith now is the one true path and

through the revelation of Her Ten commandments She has ordered the creation of the holy scripture," Alexander grandly declared.

This new information produced a variety of reactions from the three surrounding humans, intrigue from Camius, surprise, and a bit of sourness for not telling her about it first from Cambyses, and naturally ecstasy from Ophenia

"That....that...has the goddess really sent her revelations down? May..may I see it?" Ophenia's body was literally shaking in excitement as out of sheer delirium, she was having trouble even forming coherent sentences.

"I have given the text to Theocles, but it said this..." Alexander then repeated his ten commandants.

"Ahhh, so the goddess has really spoken. And so clearly! Ohhh, master, you will be the ruler of the worlds," Ophenia cried in ebullition, her face flushed and her eyes glowing with fire, her heart ablaze with absolute conviction for her new religion.

Cambyses and Camius were also very surprised by the detailed instructions and by how the rules were simple and easy to understand and follow.

Usually, religious scriptures would be winded and vague, with their laws being scattered all over the place.

Thus such clear and concise commandments also impressed the two.

"So, can you write the book using them?" Alexander smiled as he asked.

"Yes...Yes, this is enough. No, more than enough. I had thought that I would have to write everything from scratch. But with this, with the ten commandants, I can write ten books no problem," Ophenia spoke so quickly that she was almost foaming out of her mouth, her excitement being almost infectious.

"Good, there are a few more details I want you to include," Alexander said, which made Ophenia immediately give her utmost focus to the man.

"It's mainly about the prayer time and ritual." He began, "People are to offer prayers twice a day, just after dawn and just before dusk. The prayers can be offered at home but praying at the temple in congregation should be encouraged. And a grand mass will be held every Thursday at dusk," Alexander detailed.

"Does master have any specific phrases you want them to recite?" Ophenia wanted to know.

"Nothing particular. The usual exaltation of the goddess and her deeds will do." Alexander wasn't particularly interested in the exact text.

But then Alexander suddenly remembered something.

"But don't make any mention of me, it's not time yet." He warned.

And Ophenias immediately understood the implications and cleverly added, "Yes. We can add it in later editions."

If Alexander was to publish a book that so blatantly made himself equal to Ptomoly, by that point, Alexander was just asking to be struck down.

"Umm, I will also show you how to perform the ablutions and prayers later," Alexander promised.

"Ablutions?" Ophenia understanding was that ablutions were done during only ceremonies, by only priests and priestesses, so was confused by Alexander's wish to place them before prayers.

"Yes, ablutions. The goddess is pained by the frequent recurrence of the plague, caused by uncleanliness, and general lack of hygiene, and thus has decided to advocate ablutions for all her followers." Alexander covered his own reasons using the name of a god.

"Praise the goddess and her benevolence," Ophenia crossed her arms in reverence.

Her faith in Alexander had already been boosted when he cured an incurable disease like the plague so easily, as she believed only the blessed of the goddess of life could know how to treat such a deadly disease, so it seemed natural to her that the goddess would want to eradicate this pestilence.

"Praise the goddess and her benevolence," Alexander too repeated the phrase.

Later that day, Alexander showed Ophenia how to perform the ablution, which was just simply washing one's hair, face, mouth, nose, and ears, the back of the neck because it helped one drive away fatigue and drowsiness, and the arms and feet.

He also decreed that followers would need to take a full body bath at least every three days and girls needed to take one every day during their period.

Alexander then went on to show Ophenia how to perform the prayer, how to stand, sit, bow, and kneel before the goddess, and how to lead a congregation.

But these were done later, as for now, finished instructing Ophenia, Alexander turned his attention to Camius.

"How are things in the city?" Alexander asked his chief intelligence officer.

"Stable. The people have food, medicine, and work, so their moods have improved." Camius gave a concise report.

"That's good. When we first came to the city, they seemed one step away from rebellion," Alexander recalled.

"Yes, the gangs and street rats are also mostly quiet. It seems they too want the free food and medicine," Camius knew Alexander what topics Alexander wanted to know about.

"The free food and medicine will not last forever. What then?" Alexander had a small frown on his face.

"\*Sigh\*, I tried approaching some of them. But it seems they are not much interested. And from what I can gather, they want their old job back," Camius let out a heavy sigh as he recalled his small failure.

"Their old job is gone. The city has a new ruler and he will appoint new law enforcers," Alexander curtly made his position clear.

"So, how does the lord intend to deal with them?" Camius probed.

".....I intend to make a brand-new city guard, called the Police Force. You will be in charge. And your first job will be to arrest these hooligans!" Alexander ordered.

"That....executing so many natives might cause some problems," Camius opinioned.

"Execution? Who said execution? Why would I execute good, strong men?" Alexander asked incredulously, as he wondered where Camius got the absurd idea from.

"Huh? Ummm, aren't we going to kill them after capture?" Camius was also a bit confused.

Locking up men and giving them free food made no sense to him.

"No! We will send them to the mines. Harun is complaining to me every day that he has no men, so we will give them to him," Alexander waved his sturdy hand as he said this.

"Ohh. Well if it's only enslavement then there should not be much unrest," Camius breathed a sigh of relief.

"Unrest? What unrest? We are giving them free food, medicine, and housing, Which lord has ever done for them? Why will there be unrest?" Alexander pointedly asked why the populace would still want to rebel after he gave them so much.

"That...there have been whispers that you are the devil, and that's why you could cure the plague. And they say the food is dead human meat magically transformed to look like grain." Camius avoided eye contact with Alexander as he said this.

'Wow, human meat magically transformed to look like grain, that's some creativity,' Alexander didn't know whether to laugh at this absolutely bonkers claim or be impressed by the sheer outrageousness of it.

"Is it the temple?" Alexander lowly growled, his eyes turned dark and menacingly.

Words like 'magic' and 'devils' were almost trademarked and copyrighted by them.

"That...I'm not sure. I am still new to the city," The time Camius was in Zanzan was too short to form a good spy network.

But quickly added, "These are just rumors and murmurs. Crazy talks by a few lunatics. You know how people like them always exist. It's nothing." Camius attempted to brush it off as nothing.

And it could very well be nothing, just some harmless grumbling.

But it could also be that the temple of Ramuh and the various gangs with affiliations to many of the surrounding nobles, were trying to stir up trouble.

And for Alexander, he had to assume it was the latter.

So he went silent for a while, his face cold and expressionless.

And everyone at the table understood that he was thinking up a new scheme.

"Hmmm, I have changed my mind about your appointment," Alexander said after a while, looking directly at Camius, "I will create a spy agency named National Intelligence Agency or the NIA for short. And you will lead it."

"Na... National Intelligence Agency?" Camius could understand the essence of what Alexander said, but still not grasp its exact meaning.

"Yes, this intelligence service will be responsible for domestic and foreign espionage, including both civilian and military, and will be directly under me." Alexander intended to make his own all-in-one spy plus secret police force.

He hadn't intended to set this up so soon because he thought that he didn't need so immediately.

But it seems he was wrong.

He had barely settled in and yet, the snakes were already bearing their fangs.

"Sure," Camius gladly accepted his new assignment.

Chapter 196 Police And Secret Police (Mass Release)

Camius was in fact much happier with what his new job entitled, as he much enjoyed snooping around and collecting intel than leading the city guards, which would likely be monotonous and involve more paperwork.

'God, I hate paperwork,' Camius ruefully remarked.

While Camius assumed he had escaped the dredges of paperwork, Alexander filled his spymaster on his duty.

"The NIA will start with fifty men. And you have till tomorrow evening to recruit them." Alexander gave Camius a deadline.

"Okay, that's easy," Camius certainly knew fifty competent men he could turn to decent spies.

"Choose carefully. You will have to train and turn these people into spies that serve our interests. So they must be competent and loyal, not just people you get along with well," Alexander warned the man about his cavalier attitude.

"...I will take notice," Camius sobered up a bit after Alexander's warning and slowly nodded.

"Umm, I trust in your ability," Alexander said taking a sip of the wine.

And then he gave the NIA's first task, "Tomorrow night you will lead an attack on the temple and.....well you understand,"

Alexander didn't bother speaking the whole thing out.

"That...okay," Camius seemed like he wanted to say something but ultimately swallowed it.

But Alexander was interested to hear what he had to say and urged, "Say it. Say what you were going to say."

"It's nothing. I had a question and found the answer myself," Camius shrugged his shoulders.

"Okay, then. Perform it well and I will officially declare you as a shordar (Baron)," Alexander flashed a smile at Camius.

This naturally motivated the former street tout and pickpocket, who kneeled and vowed, "I swear to serve you with my heart and soul,"

"Haha, get up, get up. There's no need for such formalities among friends," Alexander chortled and gestured for Camius to return to his lunch.

Then he started, "The existence of the NIA will not be known to outsiders. Officially you will be the deputy chief of the police force. Unofficially you will lead the NIA and be my eyes and ears," Alexander gave Camius his cover story.

"Deputy... of the police force?" Camius repeated the name of his new post, thinking about who will be the chief then.

After all, if he had a superior, that person would want to know where his immediate sub-ordinate was, which could be problematic.

Alexander had already thought of that and gave Camius his answer, "The Police Force will be led by Cambyses, with Bartholomew as her right-hand man. So, one will question your absence."

"Me?" Cambyses yelped in astonishment before anyone could say anything.

She was feeling a bit let down after losing to Ophenia on the priestess position and so Alexander's announcement came as a bit of a shock to her.

She had assumed Alexander wanted her in the house to manage his harem, but that didn't seem to be the case.

"Yes, you," Alexander confirmed, adding, "Originally I wanted you to be the chief judge. But from today, you will lead the new city guards- the Police Force. And not only the Zanzan police force, once we expand our territory, all our police force in all our cities!"

Cambyses was a bit taken aback at the amount of promised power and stared at Alexander a bit goggle-eyed.

Even by her lowest estimates, just Zanzan would have a hundred men, and likely much more.

Multiplying that with more cities that she had no doubt they would conquer, she estimated she could wield a small army.

This realization wiped away the small dissatisfaction she had with Alexander's appointment and she sent a coy smile toward Alexander.

'I will reward you later,' Her mirthful eyes seemed to say.

"Congratulations sister. I have no doubt our lands will be the safest in all of Adhania under your command," Ophenia was the first to chirp her goodwill.

"Haha, Your Grace, please go easy on this poor sub-ordinate," Camius chuckled a joke about his official posting.

"Hehe, but Shordar Camius, as my deputy I need you 24/7," Cambyses too joined in on the fun with a light smirk.

"It's good that all of you are eager," Alexander smiled.

Then ordered, "Cam, have Bartholomew pick two hundred good, obedient men from my mercenary group. After tomorrow Camius does his thing, you will need to lead these men the morning after to capture all the gangs in the city."

"Okay," Cambyses succinctly replied.

After Cambyses finished, Ophenia spoke the words that were in all three's minds, "Master, what to do with the temple after its priests are kil...gone?"

This was a dilemma, which was why he opposed doing any harm to the priests when Theocles eluded to it.

But the situation had changed now and Alexander managed to come up with a patched solution, "Until replacement priests can be found, the temple will be run by volunteers and led by the saintesses Azira and Azura."

"This...but the princesses have been excommunicated..that's.." Ophenia was hesitating to openly say the exact word, as it would make his master look bad for suggesting it.

And that exact word was- blasphemy.

Letting anyone who's been excommunicated into the temple, let alone have them lead it was blasphemy.

And Alexander knew this, which is why he hadn't thought of it before.

But hard times called for hard choices.

"If they have been excommunicated, they can be un-excommunicated," Alexander waved his hand to blow away Ophenia's concerns.

And added, "These people don't know that they have been excommunicated. And they don't need to. They will be told that the saintesses have come to Zanzan to preach and that's that."

Alexander finished the sentence with an air of finality to it and Ophenia could only nod and agree.

But not everyone was meek like the blonde bombshell.

Like Cambyses, who loudly voiced her concern, "Even if we decided to reappoint the twins as priestess without Ptolomy's knowledge, will Azira and Azura agree? They seemed to be pretty sticklers for the rules, especially the religious ones."

This was a concern for Alexander as well, which is why he didn't want to do this.

Even if he could reinstate them into the temple, the amount of time he would need to write a letter, sent it to Ptolomy, and get a reply would have been too long, much longer than the two days time limit of Camius.

And Alexander didn't want to wait for a second longer to stomp out the snake that was already spewing its venom.

"I will convince them....somehow," Alexander said slowly, his sentence lacking the same level of confidence and strength that it would usually have.

"Well, anyway, we will do it when we do it," Alexander then instantly perked up, not bothering to wreck his head with anxiety, and changed the topic.

"Camius, do you remember the information you read about Zanzan?" Alexander asked.

"Yes, according to the records in the royal library, there are four major cities around Zanzan, ruled by their individual nobles." Camius quickly endeavored to answer the question.

"To the north is the nearest city, Jabel, about thirty kilometers from us and ruled by Talukder (Viscount) Kisham. It's a small city, less than ten thousand, and that was before the drought. I talked to some of the natives and they say that now it might not even have two thousand inhabitants," Camius flaunted his homework.

And it worked as Alexander was pleased by this additional information.

Camius then continued, "East to us lies a lot of farmland, marshes, and forest. There are a lot of scattered villages, hamlets, and small manors and towns. that's all Pasha Muazz's personal lands, i.e- all ours. We don't know exactly who's in charge of them but I can do it in a week. The nearest city west is Bashana, two hundred kilometers away and ruled by Matbar (Marquiss) Uhmek."

"And last of all, there are two large cities to the west, one northwest about seventy kilometers, called Harki, under a Jamider (Earl) Yuusiq and another a bit south, eighty kilometers from us called Kquem, also under a Jamider(Earl) Tikba." Camius finally stopped reciting his memorization.

"Umm, good," Alexander was pleased with Camius's display of mental acuity, a vital skill for any spy.

Then gave him his medium-term goal, "I want you to find everything about these places. Their population, their defenses, their army, their trade produces, their alliances, everything,"

"Yes, pasha," Camius easily accepted.

"Umm, okay, that's it for now I guess," Alexander slowly stood up from his chair, announcing the end of the meeting.

And along with his rise, the others did too.

"Cam, you go to Bartholomew and start recruiting," Alexander handed out some last-minute orders.

"Okay, see you later then," Cambyses then waved and simply turned and headed towards the barracks.

"Camius, you start too," Alexander dismissed his spymaster.

"Umm, look forward to tomorrow," Camius promised.

"And Tayin, come with me so I can show you the prayer and ablution rituals" Alexander gestured Ophenia towards the house.

"Yes, master," The girl followed.

Chapter 197 Kitchen Fiasco (Mass Release)

Alexander spent the afternoon showing Ophenia how to pray and do ablutions, using a mixture of practices he had observed in his previous life.

He also chatted with her about the various theological beliefs held by the Temple of Shiva and made suggestions about what to include and exclude in his own scriptures.

And by the time they were done, dusk was approaching and supper was near.

But this time, when the thought of supper came to Alexander's mind, the same monotonous menu of bread with cheese, and meat induced a bit of loss of appetite within Alexander.

'God, I'm so sick of bread,' Alexander lampooned about the absolute state of the culinary cuisine of this word.

It was hearty and filling but also bland, their skill in using spices lackluster.

Most dishes were just made by putting everything in a huge pot and boiling it, with a bit of salt and pepper added at the end as seasoning.

'Sigh, well if I'm gonna revolutionize everything else, might as well do it for cooking as well,' Alexander thus decided to make himself one of his favorite dishes, one that was simple yet elegant- carbonara,

And with that thought in his mind, he excused himself from Ophenia and made his made towards the kitchen.

He found the 'hidden' door that led to the kitchen underneath the staircase and pushed it open and immediately found himself inside what he thought was another world.

Because the hustle and bustle here was almost a complete antithesis of the peace and quietness that ruled the outer hall behind the heavy oak door.

Literally hundreds of slaves and servants were running to and fro across the room, all carrying or moving something, as screams, shouts, and orders shot across the massive room, making the huge kitchen reverberate with the clamor and din of life and liveliness.

Off in the distance, Alexander noticed the leader of them all.

Wearing a simple red chiton and leather sandals, the girl's petite body had no ornaments or embellishments, and only a golden hairpin tied her raven hair in a bun, a present Alexander had given her after his victory against Amenheraft.

To make up for her short stature, the short girl was standing on a stool, and what she lacked in physical imposingness more than made up for using her shrill voice, screaming and pointing orders constantly at a manic pace.

The scene reminded Alexander of those cooking TV shows that showed just how chaotic the back kitchen of a restaurant could be, while making the dining rooms be calm and still like the waters on a pond.

Mean's tiny body shook and swayed every time she used her dainty, small arms to direct someone to somewhere, and given how the chair underneath wobbled everything she turned her body, Alexander was worried if it was safe for her to do this.

Nobody had yet noticed that the master of the house had arrived among themselves and got on with their own work, feeding the royals and the two thousand exclusive slaves was no small task.

These servants worked constantly from dawn to dusk, with little rest in between.

The moment one service ended, they would start preparing the next meal, almost as if they were the heart and blood of the estate, constantly feeding nutrients to the ever-hungry cells.

Although Alexander had come here with the intention of making pasta carbonara, he didn't know even where to begin.

Where were the ingredients, the flour, the eggs, the bacon, the cheese?

Where were the equipment such as the rolling pins, the flat table, and the knives?

Where was even the stove?

With all these questions in mind, Alexander decided to ask to help.

And the only person he knew to ask for help was standing on a chair way over there- Mean.

And so, under the illuminance of heavy candlelight, Alexander made a beeline toward the girl in charge.

"Hey, brat, get the fuck out of the way,"

Or he was about to as the moment Alexander started to make his way towards Mean, a rough, gravelly voice hit him, its owner, as Alexander turned left to see, a buff, squared-faced woman, holding a large boiling pot of something, likely porridge.

Seeing this, Alexander quickly leaped back to make way, but the lady didn't seem to pass.

Instead, she just narrowed her eyes and looked at Alexander full of suspicion, "Hey...you...I've never seen you before. Who are you?" The strong woman asked, no, barked at Alexander.

"I...." Alexander became a bit tongue-tied at her question.

'Will she believe me if I said I'm the pasha?' Alexander lampooned at his not-very well-thought-out excursion into the kitchen.

This servant or more commonly known as mama likely had never seen Alexander before and because he had worn a simple jacket over his tunic and pants with no distinctive features, she would not likely believe him if he told her so.

Instead, she might become more hostile if he said such an 'outrageous' thing.

While Alexander was racking his mind on how to introduce himself, the mama was getting even more and more suspicious.

'Madam Mean warned us to look out for unknown individuals. She said there could be devils and spies intending to poison the great pasha.' This mama name Julkain recalled.

And so she, seeing Alexander was looking at her awkwardly and a bit uncomfortably, screamed at the top of her voice, "Intruder! Guards..there's an intruder!...Spy!"

The mama then flung her earthen pot away to her sides with abandon, letting the boiling gruel coat the stone floor, while she pounced on Alexander, grabby his right arm by both her hands and trying to pin him in place till the guards could come to capture him.

Such an abrupt change caught Alexander completely off-guard and he subconsciously tried to free his hand from the surprisingly strong grip, which only served to validate the mama's thought that this was a no-good-for-thing person.

And so Julkain clutched even harder, kneeling and almost hugging Alexander's entire arm as she tried to bring Alexander down to the floor.

And all this time she had not stopped screaming for a moment.

The crash of the large earthen pot and the shrill cries of the 'distressed' woman immediately caught the attention of all the hundreds of the servants and they all turned their focus to see one of their own kneeling on the ground, screaming and hugging a boy, while the later tried his hardest to set himself free.

'Fuck...Cambyses and Mean will laugh at me for the next three months," Alexander cursed at the thought of what will happen next.

And events unfolded just as he had predicted.

"You...who are yo...yach...Alexander. ...I mean commander!... I mean...plop!" The guard captain who had dashed towards the commotion with his sword drawn, intent on killing the so-called intruder, literally jumped up with fright when his eyes fell on the face of the man accused of such, so much so that he called Alexander by name out of habit, and once he realized his mistake, he became, even so, more scared that he couldn't even fully correct himself, and simply kneeled to the ground as an apology.

'Which idiot called the pasha an intruder. If he's an intruder, then what are we?' The kneeling man cursed in his heart.

After all, among the thousands of occupants in and around the house, the one person that could not be called an intruder would be Alexander.

The reason why the guard captain could recognize Alexander was obvious.

The guards posted inside the kitchen were certainly among Alexander's most trusted ones, selected from his original first phalanx and thus knew him by face.

Which was proving to be a both boon and bane for them now.

Boon because they knew the pasha by face meaning they were close to him.

Bane because if they didn't know him, they could have just chalked this situation up as being just ignorant.

"What! You guys look like you have just seen a ghost." Alexander sneered at the rest of the standing guards who were equally shelled-shocked the appearance of their leader in such a place.

Alexander didn't sneer to mock the soldiers, but this was a way for him to vent, as he dreaded the ridicule that would inevitably come from the merciless Cambyses and to a lesser extent by Mean latter.

"Alex, what are you doing here?" The tweet of a graceful bird graced Alexander's ear which he recognized as Mean's, who had immediately identified the familiar silhouette.

"Hello, Mean. Is everything okay?" Alexander flashed a fake, professional smile as the girl quickly hopped down from her table and rapidly rushed towards him.

"Alex, has something happened?" She asked quite concerned.

After all, why else would the lord of the house be in the kitchen, a place unfit for a noble to enter?

"No, no, everything fine," Alexander flashed another smile again, finally managing to wrestle his right arm out of the slacked grip, though the awkwardness in his voice was palpable.

'Ohh god, the faces Mean will make when I tell her the truth,' Alexander racked his brain on how to explain this awkward situation without embarrassing himself.

Chapter 198 Making Carbonara (Mass Release)

The awkward situation today would go on to teach Alexander some realities about his house.

He would learn that without the proper escort or any identifying features, even he could not access all parts of his own house and this would lead him to introduce some uniforms and color codes, particularly the use of the color purple to represent this family.

But those were his future plans as for now Alexander was trying to think of a way out of this situation.

And to that end, he tried to make small talk, "So, how are things at your end?"

"It was okay. Until now," Mean put her hands on hips as she raised an inquisitive eyebrow towards Alexander.

She wanted to know what he was doing here and why he was being called an intruder in his own house.

"Hehe, well it's a long story," Alexander awkwardly chuckled.

"Julkain, you can let go of him. He's Pasha Alexander," Menes let out a small sigh at the shell-shocked woman, who had gone pale as a ghost, aghast and appalled at her own offense.

'He...he's the pasha. I...I...physically assaulted ... assau...ohhhh,' Julkain didn't have the mental strength to finish her own sentence as she felt the world around her go all dark, the light in it all sucked away, and then she lost her vision completely.

She had lost consciousness out of sheer fright.

'I'm not that scary am I?' Alexander remarked as he heard the head hit the solid stone floor.

"All of you, what are you doing gawking? Return to work you lazy assholes!" Mean swung her tiny fists and barked her order.

Though she very much wanted to mock Alexander, Mean used all her strength to hold it back so as to not humiliate Alexander publicly.

'Wait till mistress hears about this,' Mean's eyes twinkled as she stared down Alexander like a hawk eyes it's prey, causing Alexander to easily understand the meaning.

'Oh, god!' Alexander could only lampoon.

Mean's scream seemed to un-pause time in the kitchen as its workers immediately lowered their heads and returned to their work, fearful of drawing their boss's wrath.

Or at least pretended to as the same thoughts ran through all their minds, 'Why is the pasha here? Did we do something wrong? Are we gonna get punished? What did we do?'

None could concentrate on their work until such questions could be answered.

"Juminus, think nothing of it. Now, go back to your post." Alexander too gave his command as he waved his hands as a 'you are excused gesture,'.

And added, "Oh, and take this lady with you and sprinkle water on her face."

The guards didn't need any more encouragement to escape their faux pa and after saluting and wishing Alexander well, the guards endeavored to make themselves incognito as soon as possible, eager to forget the time they raised their swords against their own lords.

'Thankfully Ale...the pasha is magnanimous,' The leader of the guards Juminus said in his heart, relieved that Alexander didn't even say anything to him for blurting out his name, which was almost a capital offense against the nobility.

And with all this done, Mean gestured for Alexander to follow her to a quiet part of the kitchen.

"So, why are you here?' Once there, the tiny girl imperiously asked him, with her nostrils flaring and chins pointed up.

'How do I feel like she's gazing down at me, when in reality she's looking up?' Alexander asked himself.

"I wanted to make a new dish," Came Alexander's simple answer.

"New dish? What is it?" This was not the first time Alexander created a new cuisine and so Mean didn't discredit the man.

Instead, she was actually quite intrigued.

Alexander's dishes were either very useful like smoked sausages, or very tasty like the beetroot juices.

"It's made with flour, eggs, bacon, cheese, and water," Alexander gave a very rough and a bit wrong description.

"Okay, come with me. I have all those," Mean signaled Alexander to follow her,

And so under the watchful eyes of the curious and frightened servants, who lowered their heads the moment Alexander laid eyes upon them, Alexander was escorted to a bit of clean, small table with two earthen stoves next to it.

"What do you need first?" Mean inquired.

And after hearing Alexander's answer, presented him with some ground flour, eggs, olive oil, and a small wooden spoon.

"Watch. The dish I'm about to make is called carbonara," Chef Alexander instructed Mean, who was very curiously standing beside him.

"First, we will make something called pasta," Alexander started.

"We will take the flour, make a little hill out of it and then make a little well in the center." Because there were no measuring tools, Alexander decided to go by feel on the amount of flour.

"Then we add three eggs into the well and add a dash of olive oil, and then we beat it real well," Alexander then used the small wooden spoon, though he would have liked a fork, to thoroughly mix the yolk and whites together,

"And then we knead for a solid ten-fifteen minutes," Alexander said as he then proceeded to squeeze the two ingredients thoroughly, using his hands to evenly coat the flour with the eggs.

"And once the dough has become smooth and elastic, we let it rest for about thirty minutes," Finished kneading he placed the large dough aside.

Usually, Alexander would plastic wrap the dough to prevent any contact with air, but he had no such luck here.

Instead, he decided to wrap it in a clean piece of cloth which was better than nothing.

"While the dough rests, we can move to make the other stuff. Get me some ham and cheese, and lots of ground pepper please" Alexander asked and after some time, Mean personally procured them for him.

"The dish usually uses cured poked jowl (Guanciale) but the belly (Pancetta) can also be used. I like both," Alexander informed Mean as he cut both pieces of meat, in a fifty-fifty ratio into tiny, bite-sized chunks.

Cured meat was a bit hard to find in Alexandre's time, but here, in this time period, such meat was a penny a dozen.

"Then we make the sauce." Alexander then grabbed some cheese and started grating it with a wooden grate.

Usually, pecorino or Parmigiano was used in carbonara, but Alexander used whatever cheese he had on hand.

"And once we have enough grated cheese, we add four egg yolks and three egg whites to the cheese. This will make our sauce richer," Alexander cracked and dumped the eggs into the cheese mound while taking the time to separate the white from one of the eggs.

"And then we mix the whole thing together, remembering to add the black pepper. Lots of black pepper, like a lot!" Alexander said it thrice to emphasize just how much pepper he was gonna add as he added a copious amount of the powder.

Alexander then put a pot of water on the stove, saying to Mean, "The water should be as salty as the sea," as he added almost a fistful of salt.

The dough by then had enough time to rest so it was just a matter of rolling it into thin sheets using the rolling pin and then using a knife to cut it into thin, vertical pieces, thus making the world's first pasta.

"We will cook our pasta and the pork at the same time," Alexander said as he put the pasta into the boiling, rolling water while he placed the pork on another stove next to it, advising Mean, "We cook until the meat is fully cooked, letting the fat out, but not making it too crispy,"

Once the pork was cooked, it was taken off the heat and then the cooked pasta was added to it, as Alexander added, "You will want to work quickly now. Vigorously stir everything so the pasta soaks all the nice porky fat."

"And add a bit of pasta water if you think it's too dry," Alexander said as he added half a cup of hot water.

"And then quickly add the sauce and stir even more quickly. It will be the residual heat of the pasta and the pork that will cook the egg and cheese slurry so it's vital to work quickly," Alexander again emphasized on speed as he worked the wooden spoon, mixing everything together.

"And then, after tasting for salt, we add even more black pepper, to top it all off," Alexander finished his dish by transferring it to a large bowl.

"Have a taste," Alexander gestured and handed Mean a spoon, while he himself spun the pasta noodles around his spoon and took a large helping.

It was good..ish.

Because he didn't use the right cheese, it felt a bit weird, and the charcoal fire gave it a smoky, barbeque feeling that seemed to clash with the cheesy, eggy flavor.

But it only didn't taste good to Alexander because he had a different flavor in mind.

Mean on the other hand had yet to make her comment as she was too busy going to seconds and thirds.

She liked this new dish.

No, she loved it.

The rich saltiness of the pasta perfectly balanced the spiciness of the black pepper, while the creamy richness of the egg and cheese and the chewy, meaty flavor of the guanciale and pancetta made her tongue dance in joy.

'Alex does have some good points,' Mean said to herself, as she wolfed down huge portions of the meal.

Chapter 199 Dinner With The Guests (Part-1)

Alexander watched quietly Mean wolf down a large helping of the pasta, only taking the time to briefly blow at the steaming hot dish so as not to scorch her mouth.

She had been working non-stop from midday and it was already time for supper, so few could blame her for her ravenous appetite.

Finally, after taking close to ten large spoonfuls of the carbonara, Mean finally let out a content moan, "Ahhh, Alex you sure know how to make some good dishes."

"I'm glad it's to your liking." Alexander sent a light smile and then gestured, "It's already getting late. So let's make enough more everyone."

And so, an hour later, the duo along with some additional help managed to produce enough carbonara to feed his family and the guests.

Then under the expectant and curious eyes of the eight awaiting ladies sitting around the table, Alexander and Mean entered the dining hall, carrying a very large bowl of streaming carbonara.

"Sorry for the wait," Alexander smiled apologetically at the delayed dinner service as he placed the large bowl at the center of the table, letting everyone indulge in the rich aroma.

"Hehe, it seems Pasha Alexander is a man of infinite talents," The most senior of the group, queen mother Seelima praised Alexander as her eyes fixed themselves on the heaping pile of pasta in front of her.

"That's right. That's right. The smell is heavenly. And it looks delicious too" Across the table, the white-haired succubus Mikaya, as Alexander had labeled her, nodded with a big smile, her eyes twinkling with anticipation at the beautiful food.

And it was indeed very beautiful to look at.

From above, the golden pasta looked like a rich and luscious dome, being gorgeously decorated using large amounts of pork pieces, seasoned heavily with pepper, and sprinkled with tiny, cut parsley.

The colors of gold, black, charred red, and green all adorned its piquant crown, making it a delicious spectacle and the heavenly aroma that wafted out of it tingled everyone's appetite.

"Well serve us then. We have all been waiting for a long time you know,,," Cambyses excitedly smashed her fist on the table, holding forks in both her hands and salivating at the hot dish.

'This girl....' Alexander couldn't help but let out a little guffaw.

"Master, let me," Ophenia, the obedient girl she was quickly stood up to help with the service.

But Alexander simply smiled, "It's okay, Taiyin. There's a technique to serving this."

So, Ophenia quietly sat down, though she still had an uncomfortable look on her face, feeling distressed by the fact that her master was serving her food.

But such concerns didn't enter Alexander's mind as he took a large carving knife and by spinning it around, wrapped a large portion of the pasta around it, then quickly deposited it onto the plates below.

"Ahhhh, being served by the great pasha himself. Even my husband will not treat me so well," Mikaya giggled as Alexander filled her plate with the dish.

"..." Alexander only smiled and quickly went back to serving the food.

To be honest, Alexander was a bit scared of this half-unhinged, absolute stunner of a woman.

He was not of course scared as in 'life is threatened' scared.

But as in socially scared.

Mikaya was so different from all the women he had met and so free with her speech, that Alexander found her difficult to talk with.

And this was coupled with the fact as Pasha Farzah's youngest daughter, the apple of his eyes, she was basically untouchable.

So, Alexander tended to avoid her at all times if possible.

"Thank you," Fortunately Mikaya's two nieces were much more behaved and mannered than their aunt and sweetly thanked Alexander for the meal, though he could still feel the coldness from Azira and Azura's voice.

Alexander noticed that when the twins sat on the flanks of their aunt it produced an interesting picture for him.

Because while their aunt was white to the point of being pale, almost with a pinkish complexion that made her skin look like a beautiful diamond, the twins were almost obsidian black, their smooth skin absorbing all light falling on them.

This was a racial contrast impossible to miss.

Even their grandfather was white as fallen snow and although he had never met their father, judging from Ptolomy's complexion, he was also pretty sure Amenheraft was not black.

But this did not make Alexander question the twins' lineage for a second.

Pasha Farzah wasn't a fool to such an extent that he would launch a rebellion just for two unknown brats.

And besides, the twins still had the characteristic white, silvery waist-long hair that Pasha Farzah seemed to have.

'So their mother and grandmother must have been black,' Alexander came to the logical conclusion.

Alexander's service did not stop while such thoughts ran through his mind, and soon everyone was served, including Mean.

Alexander then took a large helping of his own and then urged, "Please start. Please start."

He said this because everyone was waiting for Alexander to take the first bite, and so he instead gestured not to bother with such etiquettes.

And thus the meal began.

As the girls imitated Alexander spinning the silver fork and twisting the pasta around it, they let out a chorus of praise and pleased moans when the rich, creamy pasta finally entered their mouths.

"Mmmmm, it tastes better than it looks. So rich, creamy, and spicy. Mmmm," Mikaya was the most vocal about her praise, twirling her fork with her flawless jade fingers and taking in large mouthfuls of the large pasta as she flashed a wide grin at Alexander, seductively using her small tongue to lick the tiny droplets of the sauce off her lips.

'\*Sigh\*', she's truly beautiful,' Alexander didn't miss the signs as he commented in his heart about the silver-haired, flawless beauty, sitting there gloriously wearing a heavy, golden dress with a set of silver jewelry on her.

In Alexander's mind, of all the women he had met till now, he felt that the only girl that could compare in beauty with her was Ophenia.

No one, not Azira, Azura, Nanazin, or any other, including Seelima who was the previous king's favorite concubine, was as beautiful as the mature silver-haired bombshell.

'Ohh, if only she wasn't....like that,' Alexander lampooned as he could never forget what the real Mikaya looked like.

"Pasha Alexander might really be blessed. Because I doubt anyone but the gods can produce something this good," The queen mother Seelima was the second to express her pleasure, shooting Alexander a pleased smile as she took another mouthful of the creamy pasta.

For the inexperienced, this praise was just high praise.

But for shrewd people like Alexander, this was a direct probe into his deepest strategic plan, religious autonomy.

'Bringing her here might have a double sword,' Alexander remarked in his heart.

Outwardly Alexander let out a large smile, "Hahaha, I'm flattered that you like it, Your Highness. But it's a simple dish of flour, egg, and a bit of pork and cheese. I doubt the gods will bother looking at it twice," He easily brushed off the claim.

"Ohhh, Pasha Alexander is truly humble. So young and accomplished, yet so modest. Truly a model for us nobles." Seelima sang his praises.

But Alexander had no idea if the queen mother was being genuine or sarcastic.

This was because she and Alexander did have a little tiff on the first day they landed on Zanzan after the news of the plague had reached her ear.

She was one of the staunchest supporters advocating to return to Adhan, and after unsuccessfully spending almost an hour with her trying to convince her, Alexander had famously said, "If you die, rest assured we will give you a proper burial. But we are not leaving."

This predictably produced a very displeased queen mother, who had huffed and puffed away from Alexander and in fact, today was the first time she was talking to Alexander since that incident.

"This food is really good. Even our chefs would struggle to make something half as good," The queen mother's daughter Hellma too heaped on the praise.

Like her mother, she also had vehemently opposed staying in Zanzan.

And Alexander even heard that when he called their ship back ten days later to port, she had thrown such a tantrum hearing it that the captain seriously considered stopping the ship fearing the royal might do something foolish like jumping overboard.

But ultimately it was Mikaya that had somehow managed to convince the extreme VIPs to dock at Zanzan.

'If she's anything like her father, she no doubt will want something from me in return at some point,' This was another reason Alexander wanted to avoid Mikaya.

"That's right, that's right," Mikaya also strongly nodded her head at Hellma's praise.

And then mocked, "Pasha Alexander, if you ever need a job, I am always willing to hire you as my personal chef."

The cheerful atmosphere around the table instantly froze at this rude joke.

Chapter 200 Dinner With The Guests (Part-2)

Despite her cheerful and lively exterior, Mikaya loathed being here in Zanzan, being forced here by her lord father.

Even after she had thrown a tantrum about Zanzan being a dump, her usually indulgent father remained adamant, leaving her no choice but to board the ship.

And true to her words, she found Zanzan to be one huge dump if there was one.

In fact, it proved to be even more of a dump than she had originally thought.

She had nothing to do here, no friends, and no fellow nobles to talk and chat to and the new pasha and his family were all hicks who did nothing but work, even freely mixing themselves among the servants, which she found disgusting.

Even now, seeing how Gelene and Mean were sitting at the same table as her and eating the same food out of the same plates made her skin crawl.

But these were not her biggest grievances.

What she dearly missed were all her boy toys back in Matrak.

And she especially regretted the time being wasted right now.

Because, as her father was made prime minister, it meant that he could no longer be in Matrak to supervise her, meaning she could have been having the time of her life right now.

Winter was the time to party and her heart ached at the thought of missing out on all the lavish feasts, huge hunting competitions, extravagant costume parties, and gorgeous balls that were taking place, all accompanied by wild sex orgy parties for days.

Usually, her father would curb her prurience to some extent, but without him she could have gone completely wild, even running through the streets naked if she wanted to.

Just thinking about how those strong, powerful men would melt under her coy look, how they would crawl and kneel underneath her please their Queen just at the flick of her finger, how they would lick and kiss her shameful holes to gain a tiny bit of flavor from her, and how they would hump like monkeys against her, their strong rods filling both her holes, their long, hard spears hitting her deepest point each time they thrust inside her, making her roar and roll her tongue out in pleasure, the thick phalluses almost rubbing against each other as they moved in and out of her two holes with just a thin membrane separating them, their large sacks smashing against her wet cunt, their muscular thighs colliding fiercely with her fleshly ass, and at last the feeling of being topped up with the white, thick goodness in both her holes, just thinking about all these made her almost cream herself.

But instead of taking part in such pleasures of the flesh, instead of repeatedly having her mind fucked out of her for days by men she wouldn't remember the faces of, she was sent here of all places, forced to nanny her two nieces.

Worse still, the men here seemed like wooden blocks, dickless and spineless wimps in her opinion as all the guards would run away or simply outright refuse her advances saying it was the Pasha's direct command.

The palace guards here were after all Alexander's most trusted ones and they did not want to ruin their bright future because of one ill-advised fling.

They were also fearful of Mikaya as Alexander, remembering Mikaya's proclivities, had held a special meeting for his guards and male servants, informing them who Mikaya's father was and telling them that he had a tendency to kill all servants that did such deeds with her precious daughter.

"You are not to respond to any advances that the noble lady makes towards you. Even if the act is consensual, remember that nobles are unreasonable and so if her father finds out about you, I cannot help you. This is your one and last warning," Alexander gave them an exaggerated warning,

And it worked as evidenced by Mikaya's displeasure.

'Arghh..I need some strong, thick cocks to destroy my pussy and ass or I'm gonna lose it,' Mikaya was almost going through a withdrawal syndrome as she felt as if her body was always kept on the edge but never able to have a release.

It was driving her crazy.

Then she swore, 'Hmmp, just wait till I write next month's letter,' as she made up her mind to write her heart out in the letter, almost trying to make it look like that Zanzan was a dead city with shambling plague zombies roaming the streets.

After Miyaka's rude comment, comparing Alexander to a simple cook, the warm atmosphere around the table felt like it had turned into a frozen snowscape.

Like Cambyses and Mean, who were in the middle of taking the stringy pasta into their mouth were made frozen as they looked quite comical with their mouth wide open and their eyes bulging.

Ophelia was much worse, as the girl went almost deathly pale, then almost instantly later, color returned to her face in the form of hot red rage.

"Your lordships, Mikaya didn't mean anything..." The Queen mother quickly spoke up in a bit of a panicked voice.

There was being spoiled and then there was being rude.

But she was quickly cut off by Alexander's boisterous laughter, "Haha, to be able to cook for the princess is the greatest honor of this small mercenary. Once this civil war is over, I will certainly try to take that post. I hope Your Grace's offer will still stand till then."

Instead of being offended or defending himself, Alexander just shamelessly accepted the offer.

And this made Mikaya stumble for the first time as her smile froze for a fraction of a second and her lips twitched in astonishment.

'So shameless. Lacking any honor of a noble,' She swore in her heart as she flashed an awkward smirk and then quickly went back to eating, becoming quiet as a church mouse.

Alexander's reply also helped to destroy the tense atmosphere as his own self-deprecating comment was followed by Cambyses's, "Your Grace should be careful. Alex is a very disobedient slave. That's why I let him go."

"That's right, that's right. Alex always acted like he was the master when he was under mistress. He's incorrigible," Mean too happily dumped on Alexander.

Mikaya only silently her meal, the creamy dish feeling like rubber to her.

The sarcasm thrown at her felt like the biting winds of winter and she couldn't remember the last time she was humiliated like this.

The only reason why she was still sitting there was because the Queen-mother had sent a deathly glare to her, signaling her to stay put and she didn't dare antagonize that dangerous woman.

After this 'light-hearted' banter, Alexander decided to move the conversation elsewhere.

"How has it been settling in Zanzan Queen-mother? Any problem?" Alexander asked Seelima.

"Oh, everything's been fine. Not to mention the hospitality, just the fact that the great pasha is cooking us such heavenly dishes is enough to overwhelm us. We are honored beyond words, beyond words," The Queen-mother exaggeratedly praised Alexander, only she privy to the knowledge of how much of it she actually meant.

"Where, where, this is too poor. Too poor for god-kins such as yourselves," Alexander let out some empty puffery.

He then turned to Hellma to ask the same question, and only received a wall of silence as the girl pretended to be engrossed in her meal.

"Pasha Alexander, I do apologize. It's just that everything is so new to her," The Queen mother quickly said to Alexander, flashing an awkward smile.

"Haha, no, no, it's okay. It's my fault for serving dinner so late. Of course, she will be hungry. My apologies, my apologies," But Alexander made it look like he was at fault for not getting the answer to his question.

This humbleness both pleased and a little embarrassed Queen- mother Seelima.

They were supposed to be nobles who were supposed to be teaching Alexander the virtues of being a noble- valor, courage, and humility.

But up until now, it was him that was teaching them humility.

Alexander treated such cold shoulders as harmless breeze, nice to brush your skin against but nothing more.

The reception he was receiving was everything he had thought it would be and in fact, everything he was hoping it would be.

After all, even Alexander would feel a bit bad backstabbing a good friend or ally.

With these thoughts, he turned to the last of his guest, the twins.

"Are the twin Highnesses having any difficulty fitting in? Any problems with the weather? Or troubles sleeping?" Alexander asked in a concerned voice.

"No, we are fine," Azira curtly replied.

"Yes, we are fine," Azura emulated her sister.

"That's good, that's good," Alexander nodded happily.

And then raised a topic he was angling towards, "Do the two Highnesses miss the temple? Do you want to return to the temple of Ramuh?"

The moment Alexander said that the twins froze in place in shock, as moments later their eyes looked at Alexander with a burning hatred.

'How dare he says that to us?' They screamed in their heart.