

Herald 241

Chapter 241 Texas Hold'em

Alexander looked at the setting sun, its gentle orange hue cloaking the expansive, lush meadow with a rueful expression.

"Looks like the other two shops will have to wait till tomorrow," He commented, a bit frustrated that he let the day slip by so quickly, though he tried to be as fast as possible, even skipping lunch to make up time.

And this had the effect of producing a silent rumble, "Grrrr," from his stomach, expressing its displeasure over not being fed in ten hours.

"Do you wish to then meet them, tomorrow master?" Takfiz wanted to make time for him tomorrow.

"Yes, tell them, I will meet them tomorrow after lunch," Alexander announced the reschedule and then excused the old man after a few last pleasantries like telling him to take care of his body, not to catch a cold, and take care of his grandson.

And with all these done, Alexander rode back to his home, thinking back on the day.

From the pretty mundane morning council session to Camius interrupting him in the most inopportune moment, to the meeting with Mikaya that Alexander was sure would last with him for a lifetime, and at last to the two workshop visit.

And for Alexander personally, the highlight of the shop visit was the most mundane and insignificant thing imaginable, his envy of Gajopk's mustache.

Alexander at the age of eighteen had no facial hair, which was not unusual, and was not too out of place for his age.

But the big, burly, powerful, bear-like image that was conjured up when the title of grand title of pasha was uttered deeply contrasted with the face that was presented in front of them, one which closely resembled a boy.

Thus Alexander certainly wished for some facial hair, at least a stubble, or if even that was possible, even a light mustache would do.

With these 'agonizing' thoughts Alexander soon reached his house, and found a group of slaves manually lighting up the thousands of candles needed to keep the entire house and its front walkway lit.

'I need to invent gas lighting,' Alexander was reminded of another important invention to add to his list and he lampooned at the ever-increasing, seemingly infinite amount of stuff he needed to get done.

"My lord, welcome,"

"Good evening, master,"

"Your lordship,"

These maids and servants all bowed as Alexander made his way into the house, while Alexander politely smiled and nodded.

And after Alexander had a warm bath, changed into his comfortable evening attire, and had his dinner of roti with fish vegetable soup and salads, accompanied by the usual fine wine, Alexander invited, "Ladies and Your Highnesses, if you would please follow me to the art gallery, I have arranged a new kind of games for you."

Mikaya had given him the cards just before starting dinner and Alexander found them to be very beautifully painted, just as he wanted, causing him to exclaim, "It seems Miss Mikaya's skills are not only exaggerated but understated."

"Hehe, I hope the game pasha has devised is interesting enough to make me paint for four hours straight worth it," Mikaya curved her eyes into a crescent as she giggled.

.And Alexander would now have the chance to prove it to Mikaya as he led the women to the central hall and then invite them to his art gallery which was on the right side of the portico.

This art gallery had been renovated into Alexander's game night room with comfortable couches, soft chairs and cushions, small table stools with fruits and wine on top, and a few large circular wooden tables for playing all kinds of games, all placed above a thick lush yellow carpet and heated using a roaring fireplace at the end of the room.

With all the ladies seated around the table, Alexander took his seat at the head of the table.

And then introduced, "Today, I asked Miss Mikaya to paint me some playing cards. Here, they look like this."

Alexander then passed the cards around and introduced the names of the cards, letting the eleven girls familiarize themselves with them.

And then the next few hours went by in a flash, as Alexander taught them Texas Hold'em Up, with all the combinations written on a piece of parchment for the women to check anytime.

Alexander was naturally the dealer and after an hour of practice rounds, where Alexander showed them the ropes and told them some common terms like check, and fold, the next two and a half hour was played seriously, with the starting bet opening at one ropal and each maximum increase limited to just two ropals.

Some like Mikaya certainly groaned at the low amount of money, but since none of the ladies bought any coin with them, naturally it was Alexander who had to foot the bill and thus this restraining measure.

"Pasha Alexander, as a man who's got a billion ropal, a one ropal limit is unbecoming of you," Mikaya pouted in a fake voice, her glittering, gleeful eyes exposing her true intention.

She was a bit apprehensive at first about the game, finding the rules and more importantly the combination a bit hard to remember, requiring her to look at the chart repeatedly and causing her to lose concentration.

But once she got the hang of it, she loved it.

In fact, her love for it was probably second to her love for sex.

This is because she was a natural at it, with a natural poker face that made her bluffs almost unreadable from her real hands.

This was in much contrast to people like Mean and more evidently the twins, who very theatrically grimaced at any bad hands and lit up like a Christmas tree at any good ones, letting others read their faces like a book.

And what made Mikaya like it even more was that she was playing against some really good players, probably some of the best in the country.

The queen mother was a given, keeping that slight, sly smile eternally hanging off her wheat-colored face.

Then there was Hellma, who had picked up similar skills from her mother.

After that came Ophenia who learned to hide her emotions for years while in the Temple of Shiva.

Gelene similarly was a scheming woman who could lie through her lies like breathing air.

And lastly was Cambyses, Alexander's protegee and someone he had taught how to lie as actual classroom lessons.

This made a dynamic game of bluffs, calling bluffs and losing to bluffs.

Mikaya was very aggressive in her play, while the much more experienced Queen mother was much milder and cautious, Hellma being young was quite mercurial in her playstyle, and Ophenia preferred to think things over, whilst Gelene was the most ambitious and greedy, always trying to get the most money, followed by Cambyses, who was a balanced player.

The game really revolved around these six, newly inducted gambling addicts, while the other five were basically placeholders, and the girls played the new game to their heart's content.

At one point, they even invited Alexander join the game, with one of them offering to switch places with him, which Alexander politely accepted.

And then he promptly got thrashed by the Queen Mother and Mikaya, causing them to giggle, 'Hehe, so even the great pasha has weaknesses.'

'You bitches have masks for faces,' Alexander could only sulkily say, and then quickly went back to being a dealer.

This game went deep into the night and it took Alexander quite a bit of pushing to dislodge these girls from the table.

For the first time in more than ten years, Alexander was once reminded of the true meaning of the phrase, 'Just one more game,' which really meant 'Three more at least, much more if I lose'.

And with each of the girls separately shouting 'Just one more game,' it took Alexander close to four hours to finally end the game, with his ultimate threat being, "That's it, I'm calling the guards."

"Pasha Alexander, remember to claim your reward for showing me such a great game. We will show you a great time." Mikaya gave a sultry smile and a very suggestive wink as she swayed her butt suggestively while walking away from Alexander, leaving the room a very happy woman,

This was because Alexander had pronounced her the winner of the game night, with a grand total haul of twenty-five ropals.

Of course, twenty-five ropal was not even worth the dirt between her eyes, but what made it worth it was who she had won it against.

The victorious feeling she was feeling right now could almost compare to or even surpass the fun she had imagined she would be having back at Matrik.

"It seems Mikaya has taken a liking to you. Thank you for being patient with her," The Queen mother gratefully smiled at Alexander, thanking the heavens for the fact that Alexander was not a petty and vindictive.

'Oh, you have no idea, hahaha,' Alexander manically laughed inside his heart at the queen mother's innocent remark, but outwardly only said, "It was nothing, your highness. My pleasure."

None of the girls found Mikaya's suggestive poses the slightest bit surprising, as the white-haired succubus was always like that.

And once Alexander was alone in his bedroom with Cambyses and Ophenia, the latter there for her reward, he asked the former, "Is everything ready for tomorrow?"

"Yes, I instructed Bartholomew to arrange for a drill at dawn tomorrow and we will set out then," Cambyses naturally was referring to the killing of the Ramuh priests that was likely taking place as she spoke.

"Um, good, Remember to wear proper armor when you set out," Alexander again reminded Cambyses to be cautious.

And with all this done, his eventful day came to an end

Chapter 242 Temple Killing

As Alexander was having a fun night devouring the two thirsty minxes, their lovely voices turning the room into a carnival of carnal opera, at the same time, another more sanguinary opera was taking place in the center of the city, sanctioned by its very ruler.

Camius and his small group made joined in front of the temple at around midnight, their surroundings illuminated only by some distant fires and the few, small torches they carried.

The temple of Ramuh, being in the capital city of a very religious, conservative province was naturally very grand, arguably exceeding even the pasha's own residence in terms of cost per square feet, decorated ornately in frescos, murals, and tapestries, and made with the best building material available such as granite, onyx, and oak.

It was a huge two-story building, around ten thousand square feet per floor, and inhabited by exactly sixty-nine priests and priestesses.

(Note Author- Yea, I'm that childish.)

Previously it used to hold close to a hundred and fifty clergymen and women, but recently, some were transferred to other temples around the province, a handful drew disillusioned by the religion and secretly left, while most died, either from malnutrition, disease or even by participating in the war, with the vow to 'Bring justice to the infidels', referring both to the Tibisians and to Ptolomy and Alexander.

Previously, during the rule of Pasha Muazz, the temple would be usually guarded by some men, though even then it was seen as a waste because no one even dared imagine that there would be a fool foolish enough to anger the gods in such a way.

But with Alexander's ascension to power, these men naturally were relocated to more productive ventures, leaving the temple as defenseless as an infant baby.

But this drew negligible backlash, at least openly, mostly because the temple was in no position to haggle with Alexander over anything, as evidenced by the fact that Alexander had not even received a single priest from the temple personally, instead letting Theocles deal with them, and also because no in the city seriously thought the temple was ever in the danger.

Even when the literal biggest temple robber in the world was the leader of the city, this thought did not enter the heads of these dogmatic buffoons.

And even if it did, other than abandoning the temple, they would have little recourse anyway.

Alexander had a hundred ways to make the destruction of the temple look like an accident, one of which he was using right now.

'Right, you all know what to do. Let's go,' Camius wrapped in full black camo, had already briefed these men on what to do and so signaled the start of the special military mission.

These men naturally were all from Thesos, had participated in the sacking of the grand temple of Ramuh in Adhania, and were all believers of Gaia.

And so, they held zero reservations about killing priests and burning temples.

Hearing their commander's order, and knowing from whom these orders originally came, these blindly loyal fifty or so cloaked men rapidly spilt into groups of eight to ten, and then drawing their swords from their sheaths and equipping their shields from their backs, directly invaded the temple.

The temple's front doors were naturally always kept open to allow any believer to commune with Ramuh any time of the day or night, and so the men could simply barge into the temple with no problem.

The temple was dim and dark at this time of the night, with less than five clergymen awake and active in the main hallway, mostly praying or doing other miscellaneous chores, when suddenly some black-cloaked men wielding swords invaded their sanctuaries, causing one of them to cry out in terror, "Wh..who are you peo..argh,"

A simple stab to the stomach and a second strike through the skull was enough to shut up the priest.

The others were similarly cut to ribbons even before they would give a good cry for help, making some die confused at what had actually happened, the dim lighting by the candle providing the ideal environment for these assassins to hide under.

These men and women were not warriors and even if they were, caught off guard, they would have never had a chance anyway.

Once the awoke priests were sent to meet with death and reaffirm whether Ramuh really existed or not, the men rushed upstairs, where the bedrooms were.

Because the lighting was inadequate, some of the men lit their torches, which was just a rag soaked in animal fat tied to a piece of wood, and led the way, allowing all the men to see their targets.

The second floor started as a huge communal bedroom space and most of the assassins started their massacre here, pouncing on the sleeping, defenseless priests and priestesses like a pack of hyenas, killing many in their sleep with a simple slit of the throat, and letting them pass on to the next world peacefully and painlessly, no huss and fuss involved.

These were arguably the lucky ones, as some light sleepers were woken up by the heavy steps, bright light, or the muffled screams and grunts, only to have their last memories be of a masked, hooded, cloaked assassin, staring menacingly at them before slicing their throat open.

"Arghh.."

"Ohhhh.."

"Coughhhhhh"

The dull sound of men and women dying by the droves, unable to even scream properly because their throats had been severed, reverberated across the large room.

There was even no possibility of escape for these men and women.

This was because Alexander had given Camius the idea during the day to send a fake convert into the temple to scout all its entrances and exits, and Camius had already posted men to guard these entrances, with the orders to kill anyone attempting to escape.

If it was daylight and the priests were on the lower floor, maybe some quick ones could have escaped because Camius had the time to secure all the passageways, but the communal bedroom really had only two exits, one was down the stairs from which the assassins came from and thus crawling with them, and the other was a passage to their right, which connected the private chambers of the higher bishops and cardinals through a corridor, a corridor infested with soldiers led by Camius himself.

All the temple windows were also tightly locked to keep out the cold winter air so, unlocking the wooden windows and then, because the temple's first floor was naturally much higher than the regular house, jumping almost forty feet down to escape was also impossible.

Thus the soldiers slaughtered the men and women like pigs, showing not a hint of mercy, many of their hearts burning with pitch-black hatred as they recalled the memory of their comrades, their fathers, their brothers, and their kin being sacrificed under the direct supervision of their boss Manuk, just two months ago.

That wound was still fresh and stung when touched in the hearts of many of the men.

While the communal room was being cleansed, Camius and his group were busy busting down the doors of the private bedrooms past the corridor with a few well-placed kicks, barging into the room, and then swiftly offing the groggy owner of the room.

There were only a few occupied bedrooms and with the team split into multiple groups, this macabre act took less than five minutes.

In fact, the entire operation took less than fifteen minutes, as the men simply barged in, killed whoever they found in sight downstairs, ran upstairs, killed the sleeping and half-sleeping man by splitting up, and then got out.

Fast and clean.

They took no valuables, hid no bodies, and set fire to nothing

And once outside, the men dispersed along preplanned routes, and just like they were gone like the wind, as elusive as they came.

Camius and his men were fully successful in their mission, with not a single priest or priestess unaccounted for, though even if they did survive, Alexander had plans to try them as traitors using the lame excuse 'Since so many died, the only way you could have survived was if the enemy lets you. Hence you are saboteurs.'

And since Alexander was the judge, jury, and executioner in this town, who could have stooped him?

No one was left none the wiser to Camus's deed for the whole night and it would be only after the crack of dawn, once some of the more devout followers would start coming to the temple that this tragedy would be known to the world.

"Guards, guards, the temple, the temple." One old woman, who was a regular patron of the temple, ran to one of the city guards, leading a group of similar distraught-looking crowd.

And then in broken sobs and pants, finally managed to report to him, "De..dead, dead. The priests and prestresses in the temple are all dead! All dead," she howled in ululation.

And thus began another eventful day for Alexander.

Chapter 243 Cambyes's Investigations

The tragic and totally not already known report of the old woman soon trickled up the chain of command until it reached the ears of Bartholomew and Cambyes, who were conveniently about to start a drill and thus had all five hundred men ready to go.

"Chief, we must inform the pasha at once," Bartholomew suggested to Cambyes, performing his role immaculately.

"*Sigh*, yes, send a messenger immediately," Cambyes too performed the rehearsed play, putting on a fake voice of trepidation.

With a runner sent to inform Alexander of the commencement of the play, Cambyes then addressed the men, "Guards, there has been a change to your schedule. Although this was supposed to be your orientation today, it seems that the gods are too impatient for your service. Now gear up! We have a job to do!"

This speech had been written by Alexander and practiced by Cambyes and thus the play moved on to its next scene.

The five hundred men infantry, equipped with shields and short swords, axes, and daggers, all suited for close-quarter street melee, soon made their way through the narrow winding streets, led by Cambyes and Bartholomew on horseback, until they arrived at the scene of the crime.

"Bartholomew, get all the civilians out of here and ask them what they saw." Seeing the place by now crawling with devotees, Cambyses gave the order that Alexander had taught her to give in such a situation.

"Yes, at once!" The short black ex-mercenary then quickly got to clearing the crowd from the temple, while Cambyses took a part of the force, and ordered, "Men, into the temple!"

And once inside, she found that most of the things had remained intact, the people not daring to violate the sanctity of the place, while the most obvious attraction being the five dead bodies.

"Gather them in a pile," Cambyses ordered to two of her men and then led the rest of the men upstairs.

The scenery here was much more hemic, the floor and bed sheets imbrued with the dull color of blackened blood, the sticky, red liquid giving the sacred place an unholy feeling.

By an eyeball estimate, about fifty corpses lay strewn in this communal bedroom, some leaning over the bed, a scant few laying somewhere around the floor, and most 'sleeping' peacefully on the bed, the last group all sharing a thin, long, necklace of dried up of blood around their black.

'The poor bastards never knew what killed them,' Cambyses half-pitied the clergymen.

"Open the windows, it smells disgusting," Cambyses then ordered, pinching her nose in revulsion

Though the recentness of the murders and the cold weather meant that the bodies didn't smell too bad as decomposition was yet to set in, the blood spilled certainly gave off a metallic smell.

But the primary source of the smell was the fact that some of the corpses had soiled them, either in fear or because the muscles that held back their wastes had slacked due to death, giving the stuffy room a putrid, stinky, ammonia smell.

And after letting the outside air circulate the room for some time, Cambyses told the men, "Gather the corpses and take them downstairs. And keep your eyes open for any type of clues."

Thus began the clean-up, as the men not only dragged the bodies from the communal bedroom but also from the private one.

"Chief, we found something interesting," After a little while, one of the men approached the red-armored girl, showing a torn piece of bloodstained cloth with an insignia on it.

"Hmm, where did you find it?" Cambyses asked, taking the linen cloth into her hand and slowly rubbing it between her fingers.

"There," The man pointed to a bent-over corpse lying next to a bed, "He was clutching it between his hands."

"Mnn, good work, soldier." Cambyses lightly smiled at the discovery of this critical clue, and then raising the evidence above her head, shouted, "Men, look! A clue has been found. Keep your eyes open more."

And just like magic, soon a few more different insignia, and two blood-stained daggers were recovered from the crime scene.

Naturally, all these were placed by Camius's men as incriminating evidence against the city's various gangs.

This cleanup, from dragging the bodies down, to 'collecting' evidence, to burying the bodies in the backyard took close to two hours, after which Cambyses asked Bartholomew, "I have something to tell the crowd. Use the men to let them know."

"Right away," Bartholomew then quickly got to preparing the crowd, making them gather together and drawing their attention to the front of the temple.

And a few moments later, Cambyses addressed the crowd, "People of Adhania, devotees of Ramuh, I am Cambyses, the wife of your Pasha."

The moment Cambyses gave her identity as the mistress of their lord, the crowd, who was still a bit murmuring among themselves after seeing a woman, no, a girl, speak, instantly turned quiet as a church mouse.

The title of pasha naturally held much reverence for the people, and after the project that Alexander had undertaken, especially giving them free food and a job, the people had gained a special respect for him.

And along with him, by extension, the people close to him too shared in that respect.

Cambyses was still speaking, "The moment your lord heard of the news, right at the crack of dawn, he immediately placed the matter as his greatest priority.

"And then appointed me to gather five hundred men and ordered me to come to the temple as soon as possible to investigate the crime scene."

"And I can tell you with confidence that we have found evidence to the identity of those responsible for these heinous crimes."

As soon as Cambyses said this, the crowd's emotions reached a boiling point, as they shouted,

"Who? Who?"

"Names! Names"

"Kill! Kill!"

They were out for blood.

But Cambyses, with the help of the on-the-ground police officers, soon placated the crowd, "Calm, calm. We will apprehend the culprits in the shortest time possible." Cambyses loudly claimed.

And then gave them a deadline, "Gather here tomorrow morning, and you will have your answers."

This calmed the surging waves of grief and indignation in the crowd and then, under Cambyses's orders they dispersed, many going to their work.

As the temple premises became a lot quieter, Cambyses ordered to get maids to clean the place up while she and her men moved to catch the 'culprits'.

The men formed swiftly and in formation, many carrying bundles of ropes and even some manacles with them, their destination- the more shadier parts of the city.

Once there the men broke up into small groups and started to arrest all the men in the entire neighborhood

"*Bang*, *bang*, open up, city guards," One of Cambyses's men smashed on the door of the house known to contain the city's biggest kingpins.

It was a small inconspicuous house, but Camius had somehow managed to get the address.

"Wh..who?" The door was slightly opened by a thin lanky lad, peeping cautiously out the small crack, when suddenly the entire door was kicked open with a mighty boot strike, sending the boy flying.

And the men swiftly barged into the large expansive, expensive room, its interior completely contrasting its decrepit exterior, and found their target.

"Yo..you..who are you, people? Do you know who I'm?" This thunderous voice belonged to one of the men Cambyses was here for, a pot-bellied, muscular man, who was currently naked, with three women laying beneath him in a similar state.

Cambyses bravely stepped forward from the crowd and showed him the evidence "This piece of cloth was found clutched between in the hand of a dead priest, today. Can you explain?"

As the huge man laid eyes on the design on the piece of cloth, a design he would recognize even if he were to become blind as it was his gang's insignia, his body trembled both in fear and fury.

'This..this is too fast. How did he react so fast?' The kingpin shivered, vaguely understanding the kind of plot he was being framed for.

'Dammit, I shouldn't have taken the temple's side,' He then intensely regretted his choice.

"You..you..who are you, people?" He stammered the question, though understanding very well who these people in front of him were.

The fierce look in their eyes, their armed to-the-teeth get-up, and with a woman as their leader, all were telltale signs.

"City guards. Now come with us," A very strong-looking man stepped in front of Cambyses and fiercely ordered the gangster.

"Heh, if you want to take the boss, you will have to go through us," One of the fat man's bodyguards, twirling a dagger menacingly threatened the men, and was joined by three others.

But his threat actually produced the opposite of the intended effect.

"*Sling*," Taking out the short sword, Cambyses ordered, "I only need the fatso alive. Kill any other who resists,"

And this was repeated multiples time during the day, in multiple places, until all the wanted men were either killed or captured.

Chapter 244 Camius Demoted

Cambyes took her third life today.

She personally charged the menacing bodyguard using her quick feet to close the distance from the right, intent on striking him with her right-handed short sword, and when the man tried to go for a

horizontal slash towards her head, she swiftly ducked, while simultaneously flicking her sword from her right to left hand and then brought the weapons into his chest by using a wide, left-handed arc, putting all her mass and momentum into the sharp steel point by using her heel as a pivot and driving the steel point all the way into the heart.

"Arghh..." The man fell in disbelief, his brain still processing how he went from being a healthy, strong, living breathing man just seconds ago to now dying.

Cambyses was that fast.

The ten men behind her also charged and soon the four bodyguards were killed and the gang leader captured.

While Cambyses was busy cleaning the streets, Camius, who had so graciously given Cambyses the name of the street was being grilled.

The 'assistant police chief' sat on a hard lone, chair in front of a large table, being stared at by Alexander and the military brass.

"Camius, what happened at the temple?" Alexander growled, staring pointedly at the man.

"I have no excuse, my lord," Camius only lowered his head in shame.

"Darn right you have no excuse." Alexander snarled, "How could you let unknown assassins into the city and kill the priests? What am I going to say to the people?" Alexander smashed his fist on the table with a dull thud.

"My lord, I will resign from my post as assistant police chief," Camius in a guilty voice announced.

"Heh, resign? You think you are fit to be a police chief after this fiasco?" Alexander sneered, his eyes turning with a crescent of rage and ridicule.

"My lord, Camius is new to the city and is still getting the hang of things..so..." Menes, the man's good friend tried to intercede on his behalf.

But Alexander naturally brushed his top general off, "No, the temple is too serious, The people will want someone to be held accountable. And it must be important enough!"

"But.." Just as Menes was about to try and convince Alexander, he was cut off by Menicus, "I agree with the pasha's decision, Although the death penalty seems a bit too harsh, I suggest demoting chief Camius for his negligence."

Menicus certainly found the situation too bizarre, with Alexander being unnaturally strict for a place that he never really cared about before.

When did the love for the temple of Ramuh ever grow in Alexander?

"Lord Menicus read my mind." Alexander was happy that at least someone could keep up with the play and he would not have to waste time convincing his generals.

And then turning to Camius he pronounced, "Normally I would have executed someone in your position. But taking into account our past friendship and your services to me, you will be demoted to the leader of a small patrol unit. Do you accept?"

"The lord is infinitely magnanimous," Camius deeply bowed his head, thinking it was here Alexander would ask him to leave the room and thus end the play.

Or at least that was how the script in the rehearsal ended.

"Mmm, and because you are my friend, you will be made Shordar (Baron). Work hard as a patrol officer,"

Alexander casually dropped a bombshell in a seemingly mercurial twist of mood, making everyone there, even Camius, open their mouths agape in shock.

'This was not part of the play, doc!' Camius lampooned at this curve ball and knew this was Alexander's way of making a bit of fun.

"I thank the lord for this peerage. And I swear to work hard to keep the streets clean," Camius quickly adjusted himself and bowed, with the addition of the second sentence said as a euphemism, the clean streets referring to enemy spies.

"Um, you are excused," Alexander said with a light smile and Camius quickly dismissed himself, relieved that he would not have to be stuck behind a desk.

This little play did not fool any of the military commanders.

Camius's fame as Alexander's spy was already well known among the higher-ups, having seen him work in the camp, in Adhan, and even in Zanzan.

And hence they would have never believed that Camius was just an ordinary retainer under Alexander.

But it was also not meant to.

This play was not done for them but for Alexander's enemies, who would not easily know the ins and outs of his relationship with Camius and thus draw prying eyes from him.

With Camius removed, Alexander then asked his council, "Camius's post will have to be filled,..what do my lords think about Bartholomew?"

"I think he is perfect," Menicus jumped up at the suggestion, understanding that Alexander had already made the decision.

And following his approval, the others too gave their support.

"Um, good." After giving a small nod, Alexander then informed them. "As we speak, my wife Cambyses is leading the police in the investigation. And she has just informed me that she was rock-hard evidence to show that it was the hostile nobles of Zanzan using the various gangs as their arms are responsible."

'When did your wife get to inform you? You were here with us the entire time.' This simple thought ran through all the men's minds and was coupled with the fact that they remembered it had been just a few hours since the crime was reported.

Alexander's wife might be fast, but this was too fast.

So, either she was a prophet with presage as her ability or the more likely explanation, this was all likely staged.

"Excellent! As expected of the pasha's consort, she is as extraordinary as the lord himself," Melodias felt he too had to join the flatter train, as he nodded heavily at the news, smiling wildly.

And the others chimed in too, each with their individual quips.

"We must attack these scoundrels the moment we are ready," Menes bellicosely declared.

"Our fights should be on the battlefield. To think these men are so low," Menicus said in a disgusted tone.

"We must teach them a lesson soon," Heliptos shouted while rolling up his sleeves.

Alexander's little play fooled no one, but it did not need to, as the men played along nevertheless.

Thus even when it was full of holes, because no one had the guts to point out these holes, the story remained airtight.

"Mmm, this vile act will not go unpunished. And we will attack as soon as we are ready," Alexander loudly claimed in an indignant voice.

And then he turned to his archpriest, "Theocles, Cambyses has told me that the Ramuh temple is currently lacking in security. So, please move the coins from the temple to the temple of Gaia. The wealth of the people must be protected."

'Another temple heist!' Alexander's intention was clear to everybody as they all asked, 'Why not deploy some guards to the temple itself'.

"At once, pasha." Theocles too naturally understood the meaning behind Alexander's command and eagerly agreed.

And with these issues addressed, Alexander then moved on to the general situation and after listening to them say that everything was going according to schedule, the meeting was called to an end.

"So, what do you think about today?" Melodias asked as he walked quickly to keep pace with the old man Menicus.

"What do I think?" Menicus seemed uninterested in the conversation.

"I mean attacking the temple, it's becoming a habit of his," Melodias sounded like he was complaining.

And then pointed out, "And then there was Camius, what was that all about? We all know he is his spy."

Menicus simply kept silently walking, seeming as if he was deaf to Melodias's words.

But after a while, in a gravelly voice asked, "Are you dissatisfied with the pasha?"

"Wha..what! No! No, no, no. no. Who said that? I never said that" Melodias seemed very defensive about this grave accusation.

And quickly buttressed that by saying, " Alexander is the one most fit to be pasha, I don't dare have such thoughts."

"Then why are you complaining?" Menicus asked in a raspy voice, by now the men that exited the house and were standing in front of their personal carriages.

"That...I'm not...I just wish he told us a bit more. The temple business.."

"Is none of your concern," Menicus interjected, finishing the sentence for Melodias and then saying, "Whatever Alexander has done till now, he had shown to have the best of intentions for us. If you don't doubt that, then shut up and do what he tells you to do."

And Menicus then finished his speech with the words, "And show some tact from next time. You're badmouthing the lord in his own house, are you stupid? Next time, if you can't keep your trap shut, I'll sew it shut for you."

With these threatening words, and a *hmmp*, Menicus then got on his carriage and headed off to his work.

Chapter 245 Soap Making (Part-1)

Melodias did not mean anything when he was discussing Alexander.

It was just some lighthearted banter and a way to bond between colleagues.

After all dissing one's boss was always a true and tested method to form bonds between workmates.

'I was just making casual small talk, old man.' Melodias gave a wry smile as he watched Menicus's carriage speed away and then decided to forget the insignificant incident.

"Time to test out the legion's performance against spears," Melodias murmured his plan aloud as he too quickly got on his carriage and sped off to the barracks.

Alexander, done with his morning work, found that it was already close to noon, and thus asked the meal to be served, which was revealed to be a kind of meat curry with beans, taken with bread.

'All these people know to do is put everything in a pot and boil it,' Alexander complained in his heart as he ate his meal, not at all satisfied with its quality, as all the tastes became blended together through this method of cooking.

The thing that Alexander missed most about his last life was a proper bathroom.

But the second thing that he missed was the good food.

'I should get on with the design of the new kitchen and get Takfiz to start on it,' Alexander made a mental note and then decided to finish that shop visit he could not yesterday.

After meeting with the old man and the usual small talk, suddenly Takfiz informed Alexander, "Oh, master, I wanted to tell you earlier and but today at dawn some of the men while working the fields found a mass grave in the field over there," he pointed to his right.

"Mass grave? Soldiers?" Alexander did not find the discovery too surprising, thinking it might have been the corpses of some rebels or invaders.

"Perhaps. But there were also children," Takfiz additionally informed.

"Hmm, where are the bodies now?" Alexander's curiosity was drawn at the mention of children and so soon he was led to a shed that was being filled with skeletons, while next to the shed large, deep proper graves were being dug to soon house them.

The skeletons, in addition to having broken or pierced bones which were likely their cause of death, also had other various marks on them, showing just a trace of the large abuses they must have suffered while they were alive.

And this made Alexander think back on something the fat Pasha Muazz had said to him, 'I hunt your kind you know'.

"Pasha Muazz used to hunt slaves and the townsfolk for entertainment. And the skeletons are all his and his cronies' victims," Alexander said this loudly, letting the fifty or so slaves working around him all clearly hear it.

And then he loudly proclaimed, "This is why the pasha lost the mandate of heaven and lost his land. He is an evil man and the heavens demand justice,"

Alexander said this in such a way because he wanted these slaves to talk and spread the vileness of the previous lord and thus in contrast make him look good.

"That's right, that's right. And the heavens have sent the lord to punish this degenerate," Takfiz then loudly added, nodding his head strongly as he did.

Alexander then quietly told the old man, "Mmm, send three skeletons to the manor later, Takfiz," thinking up of a new way to use these tortured bones.

And then after dealing with this little distraction, finally, sometime later, Alexander was at last taken to his third shop.

This shop was much further than the other two, about two kilometers from the manor, and a few times larger, the wooden shed having been converted from a secondary servants' quarters.

The reason for this was because the production process demanded a large space and also because one of the raw materials used was very stinky.

Yes, this was a soap factory and the stinky material was animal fat.

It might sound weird but as a metallurgist, Alexander knew how to make soap.

He knew it very well.

In fact, he knew more about soap than many soap makers knew about the stuff.

This is because soap was a critical ingredient in ore extraction, particularly in the step where the ore is separate from dirt.

This step can, among other methods, use the method known as the froth floatation technique and what this technique did was basically put all the ores and dirt in a giant washing machine, add water and soap to them, and then spin it.

This separated the lighter dirt that floated to the top from the heavy metal ores that sunk in the bottom, which can then be easily collected.

But for this process to properly happen, the use of the correct soap was vital as different types of dirt reacted differently with different soaps.

Sometimes even custom-made soap just for that extraction sites with its unique dirt composition would be used.

So Alexander knew not only how to make soap, but also the mechanism of how soap worked, its individual ingredients, how each of the ingredients worked, and even some of the thermodynamics of the stuff.

And thus, Alexander had decided to start a soap factory using this esoteric knowledge.

The basics of soap making were very simple, use any kind of fat and mix it with a type of alkali while using water as a mixing medium.

When this mixture is heated, the fatty molecules react with the alkali to make soap molecules and glycerin.

And the type of fat used determines the kind of soap one made.

Alexander had decided to make both two types of soaps, an animal-based soap, and a plant-based soap.

The animal-based one used animal fat, mainly lard from pigs, but any large mammals could do.

The plant-based one came from olive oil, though any plant oil was viable.

Alkali was usually gotten from ash.

In fact, alkali is an Arabic word that comes from the word ash.

But in addition to using ash, which contained potash (potassium carbonate, K_2CO_3) and was extracted by dissolving it in water and boiling it, Alexander had decided to go fancy and use four other alkalis to get a total of five different types of soap.

These other four alkalis were sodium carbonate (Na_2CO_3 or soda ash), which we got from the mineral-rich streams running through the ore-rich hills of Zanzan, limestone, lye (sodium hydroxide, $NaOH$), and caustic potash (potassium hydroxide, KOH).

The last two alkalis were derivatives extracted from the potash and soda ash using basic high school chemistry.

First, limestone was heated till it decomposed to form calcium oxide, CaO , while the carbon-dioxide flew away.

Next the calcium oxide CaO was mixed with water to make calcium hydroxide $Ca(OH)_2$, also known as slacked lime or limewater.

And when this lime ($Ca(OH)_2$) reacted with potash (K_2CO_3) and soda ash, (Na_2CO_3) they produced caustic potash (KOH) and lye ($NaOH$) respectively.

"Master, all these things that the men are doing, what it is?" Takfiz asked curiously, pointing to the men doing all types of various, in his eyes, weird things.

Some were throwing large amounts of limestones into a huge earthen pot and heating for an hour or two.

Then it was being taken out and dumped into separate pots of water by others.

Potash and soda ash were then being added to the desired pots and the water was seen turning from clear to murky.

This was happening due to the formation of the precipitate of calcium carbonate (CaCO_3), with potassium or sodium hydroxide (KOH and NaOH) dissolving in water.

This waste precipitate was then being strained with a piece of fine cloth and separated, while the water with the product in it was being added to a vat of boiling, either animal or plant oil, and then stirred.

Alexander really did not know of a good way to explain these 'complex' reactions to Takfiz and only said, "Making soap."

'I have seen soap making, but nothing like this,' Takfiz said to himself, but outwards only smiled, "As expected of master, even the simple soap you make is using divine knowledge. This old man's eyes have been opened."

Alexander ignored the usual bootlicking and moved on to the real topic, wanting to know how his soap-making was going on, "Who did you put in charge? I forgot his name."

"It's Haquim, my lord. Here let me lead you to him," Takfiz quickly trotted ahead to find the man, though the anger and frustration at the soapmaker for not coming to meet the pasha by himself was evident.

'Wait till I size you,' Takfiz swore under his breath.

He had informed the man that Alexander would be coming today, and to be prepared to greet him immediately, but it seemed that advice went over the workaholic head.

And so finally, a bit later, he led them to a cleaning a bit away, to meet the man who was personally stirring a huge pot.

Chapter 246 Soap Making (Part-2)

Haquim had a huge imposing stature, being a tall black man and chiseled to the point he looked like a statue carved from granite.

His upper body was bare, and glistening with sweat as all the toned muscles worked the pot.

Just by looking at his body, it would seem to be a waste to put him anywhere else but the military.

But the man was a born pacifist and because he refused to enlist in the army under Amenheraft's levies, he was sold to slavery.

"Haquim, get here, the lord is here to meet you," Takfiz fiercely ordered and soon the half-bare man stood in front of Alexander.

"My lord, I was just showing the men how to stir the pot, hehe" He reasoned for his tardiness with a foolish smile showing all his pearly whites.

"Haha, it's great to see such an eager worker, good, good," Alexander did not hold anything against the honest man.

And then asked, "So, how is everything doing?"

"Fine, fine. We have just started the heating yesterday, and like master said it will take another day of cooking." Haquim enthusiastically replied.

"Are the pots kept heated and stirred?" Alexander inquired next.

"Oh, yes, we are working in shifts to always keep the pot always stirring. We change men every hour so they don't get tired." The muscular men grinned the reply.

"And firewood is always kept nearby so the heat does not die," He added.

"Umm, good, so which pots have which alkali?" Alexander asked and was shown ten large pots, the same kind of pots Alexander used to make food for hundred people, two of each containing the same alkali.

"Mmmm, when done remember to spread each of the solutions separately over a clean floor about an inch thick. It will take a day to cool and then you cut it into two inches by one inches rectangles." Alexander gave the soap dimensions.

"Yes, master," The man nodded.

"Mmm, and remember to use a scale when you cut the soaps, we want all of them to be identical in size," Alexander further told the nodding man.

And with this, after a bit of talk about the operations and inquiring about his demand for men and materials, Alexander let the man get back to work.

Soap making was a very time-consuming process and Alexander knew it would take around two months to get the soap to the market.

This was because, after cutting the soap, workers would have to hammer in Alexander's shop logo using a special mallet with the logo on its head and then stack up these soap bricks into giant pyramids for four to six weeks to dry and cure.

Then they could be wrapped in paper or just sold over-the-counter bare.

During the inspection of the soaps made using different alkali, Alexander would find the lye(NaOH) soap to be the most solid soap.

Very hard and strong, with a unique smell. he would in later batches add dried and crushed additives like rosemary, lavender, and thyme to the soap to give it a flowery, sweet lingering smell.

The next hard soap would be the soda ash (Na_2CO_3) soap, being a bit less hard.

The caustic potash (KOH) soap would be relatively soft, one would be able to make a thumbprint on the soap just by pressing on it a bit hard.

The potash soap would come as almost as a liquid.

And at last, the quick lime (CaO) soap would be a fully liquid soap, like a shampoo.

Alexander planned to sell these soaps exclusively to the nobles and the well-to-do people.

Because by his calculations it would be too darn expensive for ordinary people to afford.

And he did some simple math to figure this out.

The cost of one liter which was about one kilogram of olive oil was fifty (50) ropals.

And in a large, about two-hundred gram (200g) bar of soap, it would make up half, or one hundred (100g) of the weight, which came to five (5) ropals.

Then came the cost of the alkali.

The cheapest one was soda ash, taken directly from the edge of rivers and streams.

While this might seem free, one had to remember that to get the mineral the water was dissolved in had to be boiled out.

And on average one hundred kilograms of water, after removing all the other impurities and miscellaneous minerals got him just ten kilogram of soda ash.

And with ten kilograms of firewood costing one ropal, this boiling process was not cheap.

Alexander thus put the cost of one kilogram of soda ash at one ropal and even that was on the low side.

While the most expensive ones like lye and caustic potash, due to the much more complexity involved, was put at four ropals a kilogram.

And then there was all the labor cost, the biggest being the slaves, who did ninety-nine percent of the work, with the other one percent were the shopkeepers who sold the thing, the clerks who kept the record, and other people who did the odd jobs like guarding the door and keeping the shops clean.

It would be very wrong to argue that slaves were free labor, as it had to be remembered that Alexander paid four thousand ropals on average for them and their three meals a day cost him two ropals, which had to be included in the cost.

There was also the cost of heating, clothing, and housing them.

Then came the setup cost, the various pot, and stirrers, the soap-cutting tools, the hammers used to brand the logo, the wrapping paper, etc, the list could go on.

The transportation cost was next, which had the cost of the purchasing the wagon, the salary of the man driving it, and the feeding and maintenance of the horse pulling the cart.

And at last, there was the land cost, as the land they were using to make soap could have been used to make something else,

Alexander estimated that even the cheapest plant soap, one made from soda ash would cost him close to ten ropal per bar of soap.

While the more expensive lye soap could be close to double.

And thus he found that this cost, even the cheapest soap would be an astronomically luxurious item for a hard-working peasant.

Because at the end of a month, after paying all their expenses, peasants are usually able to only save up to ten to fifteen ropals a month, in case they need it for any emergencies.

And none of them would be foolish enough to use their entire month's savings on a bar of soap, which, even if the family used them to wash their hands two times a day at meal times, without using them for bathing or cleaning, would last them may be a fortnight.

If they had such ability to splurge on luxuries, they would rather spend the money on meat and fish, which was eight ropals a kilogram.

And the peasants only ate such delicacies during special occasions, like the new year of religious festivals or during butchering seasons when the prices of meat would fall.

Even the cheaper soap, one made from animal fat, was not still affordable to them.

Because to get the fat, a whole animal had to be killed.

Granted its other bits could also be sold, but even after all that, even when using the fattiest animal known to mankind- the pig, per kilogram of fat came to five ropals.

This came to four ropals for a bar of soap which was the price of two kilograms of wheat.

Thus, due to the inherent expensive nature of the ingredients used to make soap. instead of a 'for the common masses' product. Alexander decided that his target demographic would be the nobles and well-to-do merchants.

It would a luxury product with a profit margin of at least ten times instead of an everyday commodity.

And this was the case even in Alexander's previous world.

Soap belonged almost exclusively under the use of nobles and only became available to the regular public after industrialization,

And some cultures like the roman did not use soap, but rubbed their body with olive oil, used sand as an abrasive medium to rub the dirt out, and then used a special tool to scrap off the oil.

And in Adhania, because of the prohibitive cost of soap, the public did not use it.

If one came from the fields after working the whole day and wanted to clean his greasy hands, he would just take a pinch of ash, rub it on his hand and clean the hands using water.

And because of this, as ash was very caustic, many farmers would have burnt like hands or even die from various skin-related diseases.

The only place where soap was used outside of nobility was by tanners to clean hide, especially wool.

And as such, Alexander would sell his animal fat-based soap exclusively to them, as that soap would have a slightly, stinky, fatty smell to them that the nobles loathed.

And with these thoughts embedded in him, Alexander moved to his last shop.

Chapter 247 Instant Bow (Part-1)

Alexander's fourth shop was his most special one because the product it was making would revolutionize warfare.

It was also his most skill-based shop, employing only carpenters and smelters.

"Master, here," Takfiz invited Alexander into a workshop, the smallest in size of the four.

It looked ordinary and inconspicuous and if one were to walk by it, no one would think to glance at it twice.

As Alexander and his bodyguards were invited in, he found the shop to be dirty and dingy, with wood shaving and small bits of metal bit strewn all over the floor

The large windows let in copious amounts of light, letting Alexander see the thirty men that were tolling way, all too busy to properly pay attention to him.

Some were shaping the wood making it into a bow.

Some were shaping the wood to make a crossbow, drawing grooves on the wooden stock, and using a tool called the plain to make the wooden ends narrower than the head.

Some were seen working the forge, making iron to make the crossbow bow.

And some were seen assembling the whole product.

It was a special kind of crossbow-making factory, making both a crossbow and another what Alexander liked to call the instant bow!

"Faziz, how's the bow's coming?" Alexander asked with a light smile, being more interested in the latter's production.

Engrossed in his work, this head carpenter, who had not till noticed Alexander quickly turned from carving the wood, a large smile forming on his face as he greeted. "Oh, my lord, welcome."

And then, without showing much courtesy, very excitedly showed Alexander their completed bows, saying, "My lord, here! Your ideas are truly like nothing out there. I have made thousands of bows in my life, but nothing like this one."

The reason why he said this was because this instant bow that he was showing Alexander looked like a regular bow but with one difference, it had a horizontal wooden block-like mechanism stuck to it,

It was made of two planks of wood, one able to slide over the other and the part that was not able to slide was tied to the bow shaft using ropes, while the second movable part had a slot in it that housed the bowstring and a wooden trigger to engage and release the string.

This slot was on the bottom and had a little notch on it, while the top part was hollowed out and could hold five arrows,

How this almost over-designed bow worked was one would horizontally grab the wooden handle attached to the back of the slidable panel, pull back the horizontal wooden trigger at the side of the handle using his thumb to open it, and then use his arm to push the slidable panel forward.

This would cause the stationary string to slide over the notch in the lower slot, which was there to avoid the string from catching the arrows on top of it and once the string moved past the notch it would raise itself up, moving parallel and in contact with the body of the arrow and ultimately the string would move itself to the space behind the trigger at the back.

At which point the trigger would be pushed down and the heavy wooden piece of crescent-shaped wood, would close itself, locking the bow string behind it.

Then the slidable panel would be pulled back, and due to the courtesy of the trigger, the string would follow with it, thus effectively loading the bow.

To ensure that the string could not push the trigger open by itself, the crescent-shaped wooden trigger would sit in a groove inside the plank and it was even advisable to push against the trigger with the thumb when pulling back the slidable panel to keep the trigger locked.

And although this prototype used a wooden trigger, Alexander could later use the much more abundant iron to make the trigger out of iron to make it heavier.

Once the slidable panel had been pulled back to its limit, then it would be the easy job of releasing the trigger, and as the string raced to return to its original position, without the notch it would catch one of the arrows from the chamber, and shoot it out of the slotted opening.

And then the cycle could be repeated by again pushing the slidable part forward, and viola, you could send five arrows in five seconds, whereas a traditional archer would take a minute to do that.

This was a toy that Alexander got to play with when he worked for that medieval reenactment company, where one of his colleagues had made this for fun.

And surprisingly when the product got so popular after the man uploaded it to the internet, he sold it to many medieval enthusiasts even though it was not medievally accurate.

And when some of the medieval purists whined that it could not have been using ancient technology, that colleague made a video using only medieval techniques to shut them up.

And fortunately, Alexander got to be a part of that process because that man needed a helper, and Alexander happened to be the closest one available.

Alexander took the bow and tried pulling the hundred-pound bow several times and though his strong arms struggled a bit, after bending a bit and putting his back muscle to work, he could do load and unload the bow several times.

Of course, the bow was blank and he did not shoot any actual arrows.

Alexander was impressed with the build quality and found that the wooden panel smoothly slid over one another without much friction, giving the movement a slick feeling.

"You did a good job, it mustn't have been easy," Alexander smiled in delight, handing the bow back to the man.

"No, no, we only followed master's instruction." Faziz humbly replied, then added, "We could have never even dreamt up such a thing in a million. It must be what is used in the heavens."

Alexander only politely smiled at the man, while saying to himself, 'You guys have no idea what is used in heaven. Neither can you imagine even if I were to tell you,' Alexander could imagine how mind-

meltingly difficult it would be to make these people understand the concept of modern firearms from tanks to aircrafts to drones.

He had also always found it weird that many ancient religious scriptures claimed that gods fought with swords and arrows, and would always ask himself, 'If gods really did exist, then why do they use such primitive weapons?'

Alexander kept these thoughts to himself and instead said to Faziz, "I have heard that you converted to the faith of Gaia. Welcome to the path of light."

This was one of the small tidbits of extra info Takfiz had shared with him while they were coming here.

"Yes, yes," The carpenter let out a huge grin at the knowledge that his master was taking the time to remember him as he eagerly and zealously announced, "The things you taught us have convinced me that you are truly divine, master. And that's why I have decided to convert to the faith of Gaia."

Alexander lightly smiled and nodded, while thinking back on the things he taught them.

He did teach them quite a few number of things while showing them the design of the wooden mechanics of the bow during the plague week.

First of all, he taught them mechanical drawing which was about drawing and properly labeling all the dimensions of the drawing written next to them.

This sounded easy, but for these men who could barely read, it was no joke.

He also taught the to properly measure things.

For example, there was no standard on how to measure the distance between two circles in a straight line.

Some of the carpenters measured it from end to end, some from the center of each of the circles, and some even used different ends of the two circles, giving three different measurements for the same distance.

Same case for a circle with a smaller hole in it.

They did not know if they should measure both the circle or measure one circle and then add or subtract the thickness of the material.

Next Alexander gave them the design and manufacturing of a new drill.

The people of this time used the cord drill, which had a cord attached to a stick and by pulling the cord to both sides, the stick would spin, and with it, the metal drill attached to the end.

And in this way, a hole could be made.

But this was very laborious and inefficient, leading to very slow work.

To rectify this Alexander invented the crank drill which was exactly what it sounded like, basically, a hand-powered crank with a drill bit attached to it.

And this could not only make holes a few times faster than its primitive brother, but the holes would be of more accurate dimensions too, as unlike the cord drill, the crank drill would not wobble and move around so much.

Chapter 248 Instant Bow (Part-2)

"Master's hand-crank has made our work hundreds of times easier," Faziz exaggeratedly praised and then even prostrated on his hand and knees as he loudly proclaimed, "And so for this invention of the century, please accept this bow of respect on behalf of all craftsman in this world. We are eternally grateful."

Faziz's loud proclamation drew many interested looks from his fellow artisans and many of them emulated, and though Alexander kept a flat, placid look throughout it all, internally he was lampooning.

'*Sigh*', being a pasha is not easy,' Alexander did not feel overjoyed at this show of reverence, instead asking himself how much of the respect was genuine and how much bootlicking, or maybe both.

The shop visits of the last two days had made Alexander find it increasingly hard to distinguish genuine praise from the fake.

Everywhere he went he would be showered with praise and adoration, and although he found it natural for everyone to want to curry favor with their lord, he still found the whole situation tiring.

In fact, he thought it might not be good even if the adoration was too much among the craftsman as he feared it could mean that all his designs would be seen as divine artifacts and any changes to it hence heresy.

This would certainly stymie invention and innovation.

But as the pasha, as a noble, he also could not tell them to skip such formalities either as it would make these people feel close to him.

Too close to him.

And that would be too close for comfort to him.

Why?

Because if the people start getting too close to him, what would be stopping them from thinking, 'Hey, he is the same as me. He has the same two eyes and nose, mouth and ears, and eats and breathes just like me. He even bleeds the same color blood. So what's stopping me from replacing him'.

This was why nobles would claim themselves to be blue-blooded and would come up with all those ridiculous punctilio and etiquettes.

All in an effort to make themselves appear as different from the common masses, to appear more civilized and thus better.

And if they are successful in this endeavor, if they can make the people think that those at the top are better, well then these peasants will never rebel.

Because they will believe that whatever the situation they are currently in is the best-case scenario for them under the present circumstances, and even if they were to rebel and somehow succeed, things would only get worse for them, as if the better people could not make things better, what chance did they have?

And to promote this thought, consciously or unconsciously, the nobles would act in a very refined way, talk in a sophisticated way and carry themselves in luxury and opulence, all to give the impression that since they have all these good things, the way they lead their lives is the correct way and everybody must follow them.

And circumstance forced Alexander too to do the same, leading to his current situation, where the carpenter remained prostrated towards him.

"It was nothing, please get up," Alexander lightly asked, not feeling too overwhelmed the inventions were not really his.

And after everyone got up and dusted the dirt off their knees, Alexander then lightly asked, "Did the crank work properly? Were you able to make the holes properly?"

"Oh, yes, it was no problem. As easy as cutting butter," Faziz reported enthusiastically with a nod.

But why did Alexander need to make holes?

Because the manufacturing of the wooden mechanism demanded it.

To make the slidable part of the mechanism, the plank had to be cut and the individual insides had to be chipped off to make the slots.

Then the two parts would have to be put together to make the three-dimensional structure able to house the arrows,

And this joining was done by using two methods.

First by gluing the two parts together using deer tallow.

And then by drilling holes through the two parts and pushing a wooden peg through it, thus locking them in place.

Multiple holes were made along the wooden structure to hold the two pieces together and Alexander found the structure to be very sturdy.

And then he asked the question he had been dreading all along, "How long did it take you to make this?"

"Ahem, three of us worked all day for the last three days to make the bow and the mechanism," Faziz meekly said, feeling ashamed of his work speed.

But in fairness, Faziz really did it at quite a good speed.

Maybe not in record speed, but as a skilled carpenter with decades of experience at bow making, this was about the speed Alexander would expect from the men.

Not to mention they were all novices at making this particular type of bow.

But all this did not stop Alexander from feeling like his heart had dropped.

Because although it was something he had expected, it did not mean he felt happy at such a slow speed.

For context, a regular bow would take around three days or around thirty hours for one bow maker to make from scratch.

This would include everything from cutting a suitable piece of wood from a log, making it into a plank, using a small handaxe to chip off the large bits of that plank, using a chisel to then slowly give the bow its iconic crescent shape and at last using a plane to smooth out the edges.

Then the string would be attached to the bow and using a piece of special equipment it would be pulled back incrementally, increasing the tension on the wood and slowly bending it, until the iconic curved shape would be achieved.

This would be done to see if both ends of the bow were evenly thick and whether the bow could take the stresses put on it.

And sometimes, if the ends were by chance made too thin, or if the wood was not of good enough quality, then it would simply snap, wasting a full day or even two days' work.

And worse, there was really no hard way to tell if a plank of wood was good bow material or not.

Even when using the same species of wood, from the same area, from similar-looking trees, the quality of wood would differ between individual trees.

And thus, even when a bow is just wood with a string attached to it, it could cost a peasant his week's pay to afford one, at forty (40) ropals.

And given that according to Faziz, three men worked for three days or ninety hours (90) in total to make the instant bow, it meant that Alexander's bow would cost at least one hundred and twenty (120) ropals.

And that did not account for the extra wood materials needed, from the rope to bind the mechanism to the bow, the glue to hold the two pieces together, the nail used to attach the trigger to the plank, the metal drill used to carve out the hole, and the wooden peg used to lock in the holes.

And then was the cost of skilled labor, as this specialized equipment could not be made by just anybody.

Taking all these into account, Alexnader estimated the darn thing to cost around one hundred and forty to fifty(140-150) ropals, around four times a regular bow.

And this number scared Alexander so much that he asked his bodyguard captain Hemicus about it, hoping that the man of few words would be able to point out some kind of flaw with Alexander's calculations.

"Hemicus, what do you think of the instant bow?" Alexander asked for a second opinion.

"Master, this is an amazing invention. With this super weapons I think with this we'll be able to defeat enemies multiple times our size no problem," Hemicus was quite voluminous in his answer, the joy and amazement in his voice unmistakable.

It had to be noted that Hemicus was a man of few words.

Throughout the day he would not on his own accord utter more than ten words and even a lot of those would be grunts and groans like 'Hmmm', 'Mmm', etc,

The joy that Hemicus was showing was also very uncharacteristic of him as he would have an almost eternally poker face on him, showing almost no emotion.

In fact, Alexander had chosen him for his bodyguard position because the man was like that, as Alexander determined that such a man would not have a loose tongue.

And up until now, he had lived up to Alexander's expectations, standing guard loyally by his side through everything, seeing and hearing many secrets that most were not privy to but never commenting much less tattling.

So for such a hard man to lose his emotions like that proved the impact that this instant bow had on the military man as he could barely imagine would this invention would change the battlefield.

Chapter 249 Crossbow (Part-1)

As a former mercenary, Hemicus certainly could appreciate the significance of what this bow would be able to do and he had a hard time imagining what the battlefield would look like when this was used en masse.

"I know what you are thinking you know," Alexander gently broke his guard captain from his fantasy, and then spelled out what this stoic man was likely thinking, "You are probably thinking that a thousand soldiers using this bow would create almost a literal wall of arrows for the enemy, where even if they were to form a testudo, a few of them would be able to find the gaps and reap lives by the minute."

And by the look on Hemicus's face, Alexander was sure he had hit the bullseye.

So, Alexander asked him the next question, "What do you think would be the cost of the bow?"

Hemicus gave himself a bit of time to think at the question, and then in a low voice said the estimate, "Ummm, well...about one hundred ropals."

"Hmmm, yes around that," Alexander nodded and then asked, "So tell me, at one arrow costing around one and a half (1.5) ropals, and assuming one archer takes one second to shoot one arrow, how much would it cost to have a thousand archers shot arrows for one minute? Take the time to reload the bow to be five seconds."

"That...." Hemicus was known for his ferociousness on the battlefield, not in the field of mathematics and so naturally he stumbled at the long-winded question.

"Forty-five thousand (45,000)." Alexander gave the answer, and then repeated it, "Forty-five thousand ropals per minute."

"What? We can't afford that!" Alexander for the first time in his life saw the stoic man become frightened.

"Yes, we can't," Alexander nodded with agreement, and then asked in a teasing tone, "So, where will we use then?"

"That...." Hemicus drew blank at that question.

"Okay, tell me about it once you thought of it," Alexander lightly smiled and then turned to Faziz.

But before he could say something, Faziz quickly said before him, "Master, I'm willing to give up my salary to see the bow work. I know it's minuscule that still..."

Faziz found the thought of this super bow not being able to be used due to money troubles a great shame.

One keynote of the sentence was Faziz's use of the word salary, as he was not like the other slaves that Alexander had bought.

He was an expert bowmaker of Adhan that came to Zanzan with Alexander as a freeman.

And once here, recognizing the man's talent, Alexander offered one hundred acres of land to the man to sell himself for ten years.

What this basically meant was that Faziz was contractually obligated to never leave Alexnader's estates without the latter's permission within this time frame, while he was required to fulfill a quota for the product throughout the time period, after which he would be given the land.

Of course, another small same caveat was that he never disclosed the secrets of the bow to anyone, which would risk him forfeiting all claims.

And so what Faziz was asking Alexander was that he was ready to sell some of his land to fund the bow.

"Haha, mister Faziz's devotion to Zanzan makes me very happy," Alexander chuckled at the suggestion, but then politely turned it down, "Mister Faziz, the best way for you to serve Zanzan is by making the bow. We will somehow manage to find the funding."

This deflated the bowmaker a bit, but his mind was quickly distracted by Alexander's next question, "So, how goes the crossbow making?"

'Another bow?' Hemicus wondered.

"It's going well." Faziz gave a large nod and then added in a worried voice. "But that bow will likely also be very expensive, almost three times the instant one!"

'How can a bow cost five hundred ropals (500)? Is it made out of gold?' Hemicus thought incredulously at the stated price tag and was interested to know what kind of bow could cost so much.

"Mmmm, I expected it as much. Both the bow and the stirrup is made of iron after all." Alexander nodded understandingly, knowing that the price of iron was astronomical.

But the only alternative to iron would be animal horns and the time that would be needed to grind and polish a horn into a bow would make the weapon as much, if not even more expensive.

Unlike the bow, the crossbow that Alexander had designed was just a normal crossbow.

It had a wooden stock, a cut groove to place the bolt in, a trigger mechanism at the bottom to unhook the string, an iron bow, and a stirrup at the head of the crossbow.

The stirrup was a D-shaped iron product and how it would be used was that the crossbow would be placed vertically on the ground with the stirrup hitting the earth, then a foot would go through the stirrup, stabilizing the vertical crossbow, which would allow one to employ not just his arms muscles but also all his back and leg muscles to reload the crossbow, thus making the reload much more manageable.

Because reloading even a light crossbow, which had a draw weight of around three hundred (300) pounds was no joke, even when using all the muscles available to one, and not just the arm muscles.

"Where is the crossbow?" Alexander was interested to see the real thing and thus, Faziz quickly led Alexander to near a furnace, to the side of which, on a wall hung the crossbow.

And as Faziz trotted ahead to retrieve the bow for his master, Alexander's eye's wondered to the man working the furnace and silently watched as the man turned iron ore to iron and steel.

In this time period, the process of getting iron, or more specifically mild steel was an arduous one.

It started with acquiring the iron ore.

This might have come in a variety of forms, from ore-rich iron sands (typically found at river bends) to "bog iron" formed by biological processes in swamps to veins of ore mined from underground.

This had to be purified with a variety of processes, like being repeatedly washed to remove loose non-ore particles (often in a ribbed trough, where the heavy iron ore would collect at the bottom, allowing lighter fractions to come to the top to be removed), heated to burn off other impurities, and crushed to help with the other processes.

Once the ore was suitably purified, it would then be put into a charcoal-fired furnace heated to a high temperature.

Once heated to about metallic iron would separate from the compounds it's chemically bound to; some of those would escape as exhaust from the furnace, though others plus remaining impurities from the purification process would remain as slag.

This would create a soft but not liquid "bloom" of wrought iron.

Ironworkers would then pound the bloom with hammers to force out the slag inclusions, thus making steel, i.e- iron mixed with carbon.

The reason why the slag could not be removed by melting the iron and allowing the impurities to rise to the top was because furnaces could only reach the temperatures necessary to smelt iron (that is, produce metal from ore at around 1250oC,) but not the significantly higher temperatures (about 1538C) necessary to melt iron.

In fact due to the practice of beating out the iron, at this time blacksmiths had a misconception that the more one hammered the bloom, the better the quality of the steel.

But this is actually not true, as too much hammering would not only drive out the bad elements, but also the good impurities like carbon which gave the iron its strength.

Without the addition of carbon, pure iron is a soft, ductile material that is pretty useless in every case imaginable.

Thus about 0.04% to 0.3% carbon was desirable in most iron products.

As Alexander saw the blacksmith, to put in coarse words, 'beat the shit out of the bloom' to make extract the iron and shape it into a bow, he could not wait for work on the blast furnace to start.

And then he added, 'If only these poor sods knew of the double-acting position bellows,'

Double-acting piston bellows were a type of bellows that had the property that air was blown out on both strokes of the handle (in contrast to simpler and more common bellows that blow air when the stroke is in one direction and refill the bellows in the other direction), allowing for getting a much higher temperature, high enough that possibly molten iron could have been produced.

And this was also the bellow that Alexander had given Krishok and Jazum to produce, which due to its complexity and novelty was taking the man a few days to produce.

"Here, master," Faziz's loud call broke Alexander's inner thoughts, and he quickly turned to see the crossbow being offered to him.

Chapter 250 Crossbow (Part-2)

Alexander carefully inspected the crossbow that Faziz made, then asked, "Have you tried shooting with it?"

"No, sire, I couldn't manage the time," The man honestly replied.

"Um, then let's go outside for the test," Alexander invited as he was interested in testing out its accuracy and build quality and soon the group was outside the workshop, with Alexander carrying the weapon and Faziz carrying five freshly-made bolts just for the crossbow.

The group moved themselves to a small clearing and quickly chose their target- a cut tree stump, about a meter width and reaching up to Alexander's thigh.

Alexander quickly loaded the crossbow, took aim at a distance of around ten meters, and with trepidation in his heart let loose, the feel of the trigger making him feel like he was a combat sniper, the slight recoil of the crossbow giving Alexander a realistic feel.

Loosen by Alexander, the arrow sped in the slant direction towards the target and in a spectacular way...Thuk!, it missed, burying itself into the soil next to the tree stump.

For all of Alexander's 'feeling' he had missed the quite close target.

This drew a few shocked looks from the others while Alexander was a bit embarrassed at having missed such a large, easy target.

He had never shot a bow in his life and for the first time found shooting an arrow was really not that easy.

He had shot guns before in gun ranges for recreation and he had assumed that both should have some similarities to them.

But even if they had any similarities, Alexander could not find them.

After all, the ballistic of a bullet and an arrow was vastly different as the former spun as it traveled through the air while the latter bent and flexed as it moved.

"The lighting is not good at all. It's really hard to see in the distance," Takfiz quickly tried to save Alexander from the embarrassment, making up a lame excuse.

But this only made Alexander curse himself, 'What light problem! It's only late afternoon and everything is clear as day,'

And then to divert the blame Alexander started to diss a whole different entity, 'Fuck...in the movies they made archery look so easy,'

Then, to quickly make everyone forget this embarrassment, Alexander hurriedly reloaded, aimed by making sure he was looking at the center of the tree stump while making sure to keep his eyes parallel to the crossbow, and pressed the trigger.

Thuk!

Another miss!

Frustrated Alexander tried again,...miss.

By this point, Faziz had gone a bit pale as he feared Alexander might lash out at him for making a defective product.

But Alexander did no such thing.

Instead, he took the time to notice interesting phenomena.

He noticed that all the arrows had landed a bit right off his target.

And thus, accounting for that, he adjusted his aim a bit to the left, and *Thud*!

A hit.

And then he quickly followed up the success with another one.

"Perfect! Perfect shot master," Takfiz was more relieved than overjoyed as he did not have to think of ways to make excuses for Alexander, something that his master did not seem to particularly enjoy.

"Hemicus, you try." Alexander did not pay attention to the cheering fangirl and instead handed the weapon to his guard captain.

And then gave a short piece of advice, "The arrow seems to go a bit right to where you are aiming. So adjust according."

"Mmm," Hemicus gave a curt answer, and after the bolts were retried, by following Alexander's advice, he managed to hit all five on target.

"Lord was right. The arrows do veer to the right a bit," Hemicus confirmed Alexander's findings.

"I...I will fix it immediately," Faziz quickly jumped up to offer the promise, a bit flustered at having handed Alexander a slightly defective product.

But Alexander only gently said, "No need to need to get worked up. This is your first time making this and such minor flaws are to be expected."

This made Faziz draw a sigh of relief as he had been in the past still unsure about Alexander's true temperament.

Sure he had met Alexander before and the man seemed very polite and cordial, but Faziz had also met similar nobles even before, and some of them would show a completely different face when work got involved or when things were not to their liking.

"Bring me a hammer," Alexander out of the blue asked, and without asking questions Faziz swiftly presented him one, though a small part of him was afraid that Alexander might hit him with it.

But fortunately, he avoided that fate.

"A crossbow does not shoot straight when the two halves of the bow are not symmetrical, that is one end is a bit longer than the other." Alexander gave some know-how as he accepted the hammer from Faziz and then said, "And there is a simple way to rectify that problem."

At this point, Alexander showed them the hammer and said, "What you do is take a hammer and softly hit the bow on the side that the arrow is deviating to. So if it's going to the right you hit on the right side of the crossbow and if it's going to the left you hit on the left side of the bow."

And saying this he tapped on the right side of the bow several times and then handed it over to Hemicus, "Here, try now."

Hit! Hit! Hit! Hit! Hit!

Five perfect bullseyes.

"Pasha's knowledge is infinite and immeasurable," Faziz claimed in awe and reverence, a thought that was soon shared by many.

Alexander did not feel like responding to such claims and instead turned to ask, "So, how much does it cost to make?"

"Mmm, I don't know the exact value, but iron is five hundred ropals a kilogram and there's a bit about one and a half kilogram there. And compared to the iron, everything else is cheap. So.." Faziz did not need to spell out the rest.

"*Sigh*, around eight hundred ropals (800)" Alexander said the figure aloud himself.

The iron bow was around sixty centimeters in length, five centimeters in width, and five millimeters in thickness, so that weighed around one kilogram and then there was the stirrup that wright close to half a kilogram.

So it seemed that when Faziz said that the crossbow would cost three times the instant bow, he was grossly underestimating the price.

It was double that estimate at six times the price of the instant bow.

But there was light at the end of the tunnel for Alexander as he knew that once the blast furnace got itself up and running, the price would fall by several factors of ten, and he estimated for one kilogram of pig iron or wrought iron to go for ten to twenty (20) ropals, while proper steel iron, made using the Bessemer process might go for around fifty (50) ropals.

"You do not need to worry about the cost Faziz," Alexander reassured the man as he knew that prices were scheduled to nosedive shortly.

But to the carpenter, it only sounded like Alexander was consoling his worried worker.

'I must work harder,' The loyal man pumped himself up.

And if Alexander could hear the thoughts he would not know whether to laugh or cry, finding the man's misunderstanding and consequent zeal to work both hilarious and unnecessary.

It was at that point Alexander instructed his worker, "Faziz, since the iron is too expensive, just concentrate on making the crossbow body, that is the wooden stock. I will try to make cheaper steel somehow."

Alexander naturally did not share his blast furnace plans with someone not related to it.

"As you instruct master," Faziz had no objection.

"Mmm, and also make ten of the instant bow by November. I wish to show them to the military then." Alexander added another task that Faziz obediently received.

Making one bow every three days was in fact quite a generous time limit as Faziz knew that through practice he would be able to bring down the manufacturing time by at least a day.

But this slight happiness did not last long as Alexander dumped another task at Faziz, "Also, you are to hire and employ specialized people to make the arrows."

He reasoned, "Both the crossbow and the instant bow have specialized bolts that are not the same as regular arrows and as you also know how to make arrows, it will be your job to find, hire, and train men to produce these arrowheads."

Alexander then expressed his desired numbers, "I know that a fletcher can make ten arrows an hour and so by the new year, two months from now I want to be able to make ten thousand arrows a day, that is - one hundred men each making one hundred arrows a day. Any questions?"

'I should have stayed at Adhan,' Faziz only silently cried in his heart at the spartan demand.