

## **Herald 371**

### Chapter 371 Wedding Lanterns

Alexander met with the various guests, exchanging pleasantries and receiving various gifts after the feast ended.

These were usually wrapped with fine linen or inside beautifully craved wooden boxes and ranged from various pieces of ornate pottery to many types of gemstone, and jewelry for both him and Cambyses, fine clothes of all types, various drinks such as wine of many flavors, and even a beautiful fowl from Grahtos.

Among the presents, the merchants that Heliptos and Camius had invented tried to suck up to Alexander the most, presenting him with many expensive gifts just for the chance to get some exclusive trading rights.

One gift from a merchant that particularly moved Alexander's wife was a pair of shoes, painted bright red and made of bronze, it was ornately decorated with gold and silver, and studded with glass beads.

Cambyses loved anything red and this beautiful, fashionable shoe really tickled the young girl's heart.

Alexander thanked all the merchants for their gifts and then promised to meet them the day after tomorrow to officially discuss business, thus letting others pay their compliments to the couple.

"My lord, my father sends you the best wool in all of Adhania," Mikaya presented Alexander with some rolls of wool that came from a breed of sheep native to Matrak.

Reportedly it had the softest feel out of all the wool in the world.

And Seelima presented Alexander with some fresh legummum on behalf of Ptolomy.

In this way, the relatively small number of guests said their congratulations and this part of the ceremony was concluded relatively soon, just before dusk.

Once all the gifts had been collected, and as the approaching dusk made the staff light large torches in the background, Alexander got up from his chair to say, "Esteemed guests, the wedding festivities are almost drawing their conclusion. But we still have two more surprises in store for you. Please..."

As Alexander said so, he gestured to a large trolley being pushed toward himself, hosting the wedding cake, and lit with small beautiful candles.

The cake was made the same way the pudding was made, with each of the layers being steamed in airtight vessels, the filling made of alternate layers of strawberry and lemon curd, then decorated with cream, frosting, and seasonal fruits such as grapes and cherries.

The crowd was both a bit awe-struck and confused seeing this huge tower of concentric circles decorated with candles, and some even wondered how anyone single person would be able to eat such a thing if it was at all a thing that would be eaten.

The way the huge tower was illuminated by its own candles, and shaded by the dim orange glow of the just set sun was a sight to behold, and one of the reasons Alexander had decided to hold off on cutting the cut until dusk.

"Honored guest, this is a new kind of dessert called the wedding cake." Alexander introduced,

"It is something that my chefs made, and it is said that blowing out the eleven candles and then eating it at a wedding will bring good luck."

With this said, he and Cambyses approached the cake that reached their forehead and one by one blew out the many candles, before taking a knife with both their hands and cutting the cake with the words, "May the gods bless us."

"May the gods bless you," The crowd cheered along, and clapped as Alexander fed a small bit of the cake to Cambyses and Cambyses did the same.

As this ceremony was finished, and the large trolley was wheeled away to give the waiters to cut and serve the cake, Alexander bought out his last round of festivities.

He said raising his index finger, "Now, ladies and gentlemen, we have one last round of surprise for you. A surprise that will enable you to send handwritten messages to the gods!"

This bold claim naturally drew many curious and some even questionable looks, the latter especially from the more religious ones like Menicus.

'How can a mere mortal send greetings to the gods?' They all asked themselves.

And Alexander soon answered, as he was handed a folded piece of sky lantern, and some quill and ink, with which he gently wrote, 'Everlasting peace and prosperity to all of Zanzan' onto the paper.

"This is called a 'Fanuush'. It is made from paper which I'm sure many of already see. And now, it will allow us to send our words directly to the gods." Alexander declared while unfolding the lantern with Cambyses's help, and then lit the little amount of wax underneath the hollow cylinder.

As the fire caught on and burned brightly around the wick, it gave the formally dim lantern a fantastic, red glow, and made it appear fantastic, almost hypnotic to the crowd.

To some in the distance, it even appeared like the Pasha was holding a magical, flaming ball, which was gently swinging in the breeze.

Alexander and Cambyses held the lantern for some time, letting the inside fill up with sufficient hot air, before finally releasing the lantern.

And as the lantern wobbled and wiggled, but still soared up into the sky, there was a huge, almost defeating cheer from the crowd.

Launching things into the sky had always been a great wish of men, and so seeing the small, glowing dot slowly rise up into the night sky, higher and higher, into the heavens until it became almost one with the stars was a profound, almost spiritual moment for many.

They felt that regardless of all the other new things, regardless of even the so-called 'sugar', just this spectacle alone would have been enough to make them remember this fantastic wedding for a long, long time.

And the best thing was that it was still not over.

"We have also arranged so that the guest may be able to fly like 'fanuush' if they so desire." Alexander gestured as stacks of the stuff were carried into the garden by trolleys, accompanied by many quills and ink pots.

Though he also quickly added, "But I would also like to urge everyone to be careful and listen to the guides around the garden. Since it involves fire, and all of us are wearing such fancy clothes, we should take the proper precautions and try and avoid any accidents."

Alexander was afraid given how many layers of clothes both men and women wore, and how voluminous and spread out many of the costumes were, a slight carelessness would lead to a part of the cloth catching fire without even them noticing.

And hence, he assigned a large of soldiers who would not only keep an eye out for this kind of thing but also help out with setting the lanterns.

They would even coordinate when to launch the lanterns so that too many were not launched at the same time, and collisions could be avoided.

"Yes, Your Grace. Please keep holding it like that until you feel the lantern wanting to fly away," One of these 'soldiers' were seen instructing Mikaya and Tafia, both of whom had large smiles on their face as they gazed at the sky lantern getting brighter and brighter, until finally at the word of the guide, they let go, and watched with glee and anticipation as the lantern slowly but surely high up.

panda---nove1,coM This event was repeated all throughout the garden, as dozens after dozens of this festive lantern were launched into the sky, with writings ranging from personal wishes to well-wishing Alexander and Zanzan, to even wishing for world peace, until the sky around the Temple seemed to have many extra, much brighter stars around them.

And each round of 'fanuush' release was always accompanied by cheers and whistles, as to the people, these successful releases meant a chance for the gods to read their personal letters.

And where there were successes, there would always be failures, and these included the lanterns most commonly just not rising up, some being blown off course by the breeze and colliding with other lanterns, some having their flames go out and in some instances, due to improper holding of the lantern, one side of the lantern would slant and the paper would simply catch fire.

But fortunately, Alexander had a lot of men looking out for these accidents and even had buckets of water on the side, so all potential sources of fire were stomped out before any major accident could happen.

These failures would of course cause some heartbreak for the people involved, but there were a lot of new lanterns nearby and sometimes these failures would be the sources of some of the most fun parts of the experience.

The crowd would hold their breath and even cheer on a flattering lantern, urging it to rise up as if it was sentient.

And many would also rejoice seeing their lanterns keep on going even after colliding.

While others would see elation turn to disappointment when their lanterns would catch fire midflight.

This was certainly the most fun part of the wedding, even better than the feast in many's eyes, as rounds and rounds of the sky lanterns were released into the night sky.

And soon, the nobles began to notice that there were many more sky lanterns being released all around them, coming from all over the city.

Alexander had distributed these lanterns to many of the populace and instructed them to start launching them after dusk, and finally, they were beginning to become visible all over the wintery sky, turning the pitch black cold sky into a warm hearth carrying messages for the gods.

## Chapter 372 Wedding Conclusion

Alexander had ordered a general holiday today, and the hundred and fifty thousand people of the city were given a free lunch of chicken, beef, and fish soup with two very thick slices of bread mixed with vegetables.

And as many lucky ones from the group got a lantern to gift to the gods, their collective effort made Zanzan's sky become dazzling for a while, a phenomenon that was noticed by all the neighboring areas of the city, with all drawing a variety of reasons for the sight, ranging from the gods descending to bless the city, to the gods descending to destroy the city.

The lantern release lasted until most of the lanterns were used up, and as the excited guests sat around the dining tables, they were soon served the wedding cake and pitchers full of fruit juices mixed with honey and sugar.

The large cheesecake slice was white with two red and yellow alternate layers of strawberry jam and lemon curd, topped off with flowers made of creamy with fruits and nuts on top.

And as the guests cut into the slice with their silverware and put a small piece into their mouth, they felt an explosion of flavors they never knew existed.

It was creamy, sweet, tangy, and fruity all at the same time, as all the men and women there learned for the first time that bread could actually be so soft and yummy.

"I need to get Alex to tell me how to make this," Mikaya had a forceful, almost crazed look on her face as she blurted this out, her cheery lips glazed with white cream.

This 'wedding cake' was the thing that finally stole her heart.

Alexander too found the cake to be not half bad, a bit dense than he would have liked, but still decent.

'Looks like the last week was not a waste,' Alexander was relieved that Mean and her team had managed to successfully pull this off.

By the time the cake slices had been finished and glasses full of fruit juice and wine had been drunk, it was already deep into the night, around 8 o'clock by Alexander's estimate, and finally deciding it was getting enough, he made one last toast, raising his ornate glass goblet,

"Honored guests, this pasha again thanks you for taking the time to attend and partake in this one's celebrations. This day would not have been the day it was without you. So I thank you." Alexander finished by gulping down the wine, which soon others followed while paying some last-minute compliments to the couple.

And this was followed by the tradition of the groom gifting the guests.

Usually, it would be just simple food items such as nuts and berries.

But Alexander had decided to go the extra mile. gifting each of the guests a nicely bowed luxurious wooden box covered with velvet, inside of which was a small bar of soap wrapped in beautiful, patterned wrapping paper, a hundred grams of sugar in sealed paper bags, and a small beautiful hand mirror inside a steel frame, accompanied by the usual assortments of various nuts and berries.

The guests did not recognize the soap and sugar at first but for now, they were captivated by the mirror the pasha had gifted them, finding it hard to believe that their faces were being reflected with such clarity.

Even under the soft glow of the touch light, these people marveled at seeing their faces being displayed with such sharpness across the smooth surface, as they excited thought how it would look in the morning under the bright sunlight.

Alexander had gone through a lot of trouble to produce these beautiful mirrors, using a layer of silver to make them as reflective as possible, whereas regular mirrors would use copper or mercury.

He even thought of using gold but was talked out of it by Cambyses because the wedding costs were already soaring high.

And later, Alexander gently explained that the one in the colorful wrapping was used to wash the body and made it smell like perfume, while the white powder in the white bag was the sugar he had described, making everyone once again praise how generous and big-hearted the Pasha was.

The sugar especially moved everyone as they could hardly believe that Alexander was just gifting them such precious ingredients.

And with this gift-giving ceremony, finally came to an end of the wedding ceremonies.

Or at least of those to be performed in the temple.

For traditionally, all this celebration would have occurred in the bride's house.

And then, with the festivities concluded, it would be the turn for the groom to take his bride to her new home- to his house.

And so Alexander and Cambyes again made their way out of the temple, this time the walkway lit up by overhead lanterns that made the special stones in the walkway look like little balls of fire, as the parade was restarted once again.

And as the carriage marched through the streets, the crowd seemed to have not dispersed not bit, making the journey a brightly torchlit procession while the guests and citizenry threw nuts and sang traditional Adhanian songs which were quite suggestive in nature, making Cambyses lightly blush.

This parade lasted till Alexander reached his manor, and as the couple disembarked in front of the manor, Cambyes was handed a special torch, called the wedding torch which she tossed into the crowd.

According to Adhanian tradition, whoever managed to catch it was supposed to enjoy a long life, and Alexander spotted quite a few eager hands wrestling for the chance to grab it.



This was impressive considering the torch was still flaming and no doubt a dramatic moment while the modern parallel custom of the bride throwing her bouquet to the crowd seemed a bit tame in comparison.

After this, Alexander and Cambyses both rubbed oil and fat on the doorposts of the house and once inside, she symbolically touched around the fireplace inside the outer hall, declaring herself

the guardian of the hearth from now on, and lastly Alexander picked her up in her arms and princess carried Cambyses to her nuptial chambers.

Hence came an end to a very long day, but began a very long night for Alexander and Cambyses.

The staff of the manor were prudent enough to provide a large tub of hot water inside the room so that the couple would refresh themselves, and Alexander was helping Cambyses do just that as he took off her clothes one by one.

"So, how did you spend on the marriage?" Cambyses seemed more interested in the cost of the marriage than the fact she was becoming naked as she took off all her jewelry.

"Hahaha, the fastest way to become rich is to steal it," And Alexander gave a seemingly unrelated answer.

But it basically meant that without him robbing the Grand Ramuh Temple, this wedding might not have been possible, which indicated a large sum even for Alexander.

He had once tried to keep track of all the expenses but gave up mid-way because there were so many and so varied.

"This bra looks good on you," Alexander then commented seeing the red cloth bind her breasts which he helped to unclasp before giving them a squeeze.

They felt fantastic, a little small but firm and perky.

"Mmmm, let's get into the birth first, we can start after," Cambyses moaned, as she felt Alexander sniff around her armpits, and say, "But I like you just as you are now. The smell is so strong, I can't wait."

"Nooo...pervert," Cambyses faked a cry of reluctance as the man then expertly continued to strip off Cambyses's layered clothing one by one, until she was just wearing a red pair of underwear.

And as Cambyses stood with her butt facing Alexander, the red cloth made Alexander charge towards it like a bull, as he kneeled down and growled, "Stand still and don't move," before diving this nose into the heavenly garment.

"Nooo, Alex, what ...ahhh...are you doing... oohhh," Cambyses was shocked by Alexander sniffing her butt after using it the whole day, and even felt an electrifying shock run through her spine when Alexander wet tongue licked her flower through the panty.

And Alexander, for his part found the experience almost profound, as the juicy buttcheeks smashed his face in and his nose drank in the concentrated, musky flavors.

He even kissed Cambyses's puckered hole through the cloth and felt that Cambyses taking a bath would be such a waste.

But the shy girl had not degenerated to Alexander's level and so with a strong push, she freed herself and instead run to jump into the hot tub, douching herself in the relaxing hot water.

While seeing his prey escape for the time being, Alexander undressed himself, and promptly joined Cambyses, and then soon started the second round.

He made her sit on his lap in the large wooden tub, rubbing her flower and making her moan, as the girl soon came.

Then the action moved to the bed, as Alexander made Cambyses lie down and push her butt up, while he worshipped the magnificent piece of flesh.

"Ohhh, don't bite it," Cambyses cried as Alexander did not just kiss and suck the holes, he even bit around the tanned ass, leaving red teeth marks on the ass, while his fingers pumped in and out of the two holes, soon making Cambyses squirt.

In this way, the couple enjoyed almost till dawn, with Cambyses being filled in all three holes, as she screamed lewd songs such as "Ahhh, my asshole, my asshole feels so good. Pound it harder. Make it yours."

Chapter 373 Infant Trade Routes

Alexander woke up late the next day.

No scratch that, he did not strictly speaking wake up that day.

Because he woke near dusk the following day.

Alexander had peeped open his eyes once in the morning but found the room dark and heard a raging snowstorm going on outside.

Winter had truly come.

So, shivering a bit involuntarily, he pulled his thick blanket closer to himself and snuggled the nubile Camybses even more tightly, feeling her warmth brush off his skin as he again drifted off to sleep, reassured that today was his day off.

And once Alexander and Cambyses joined the others for dinner, knowing that the couple had missed both their breakfast and lunch, Mikaya even cheekily commented, "Looks like the Pasha enjoyed his nuptial night very much, hahaha."

The next day was greeted with another blistering blizzard, and though Alexander very much wanted to laze away just like yesterday, he did not have that luxury.

Because he had some important meetings to attend.

First, he met the businessmen.

"My lord, it is an honor," A stout, portly man leading the group greeted Alexander as he went to say, "I have been to Zanzan a few times, but it has never looked as vibrant as it does now. Truly Your Grace is a just and capable lord."

This type of puffery was standard procedure and Alexander simply gave a light smile and nod, as soon the others went on to give their unique spin on this greeting.

And after this initial round, came the actual meeting.

"My lord, we have been truly blessed to witness all the unique products that Zanzan has to offer, both yesterday and on your wedding day. It was extraordinary, exquisitely extraordinarily!" The fat merchant, whose name Alexander recalled as Harold, was from Sybarsis.

Adhania and Sybarsis did quite a bit of trade together and it seems that his ship docked in Zanzan at an opportune time for him to be introduced by Helliptos.

"Yes, we could hardly believe our eyes. Truly magnificent," This voice belonged to a merchant named Kialat, and he was from the warring states south of Zanzan.

And there were three more present, one from Tibias, and two from different city states in Thesos, recommended by Camius.

Trading with Tibias might seem strange but 'sanctions' and 'not trading with the enemy' were hard to enforce when during modern times, and so in these times, merchants could smuggle goods across borders.

It was even something that the authorities would turn a blind eye to because the goods exchanged might be vital to both sides.

Such as one side might need salt and the other iron.

And this trade would likely occur even when both sides knew that the salt they sold would enable the opposing side to live and fight and that the iron they traded would be used to kill them.

Because such was the necessity.

"My lord, the soap that you have is fantastic. I'm sure the nobles of my country will love it," Harold loudly announced as the meeting began, who was quickly followed up by Kialat who said, "Ohh, yes, but I particularly loved that paper. I'm sure it will become the new papyrus."

The ones from Thesos even tried to draw relation with Alexander saying, "To think we would be able to see a fellow Thesian as a lord of Adhania. The gods have truly smiled on Your Grace and the land of Thesos," while the smartly dressed merchant from Tibias added, "Yes, with Your Lordship as the lord, peace, and prosperity will again resume between Tibias and Zanzan,"

This was said because Tibias and Thesos were considered allies.

As the merchants praised and asked about the products, Alexander also asked them about the places they were from.

Harold was from Sybarsis, which was a great trading power west of Adhania.

"My lord, I trade around the Galosos island. We have everything for sale, ranging from all types of food to every metal to all kinds of slaves. Anything you need I can get," The merchant boastfully promised.

While Kialat was from the warring states, which was south of Zanzan.

It was a patchwork of many small states and warring lords who were vying for supremacy.

"My lord, although we cannot compete with Sybarlis over food, and metal, we can certainly give you the best slaves, hardy ones who can work the fields from dawn to dusk without breaking a sweat." Kialat advertised his land's main export.

Tibias offered Alexander cheaper prices to the closer proximity and many miscellaneous things, while the Thesians offered similar things to Sybarsis.

The meeting with the merchants lasted about two hours, and while they advertised their goods, in the meantime, they also expressed interest in buying all the new things such as soap, paper, sugar, glass, etc.

But the exact sales were not too large, first because these were all new products and some time would be needed for the market to even know such products exist and thus let the demand grow.

Secondly, because the merchants had ended up here by either chance or a routine stopover, and did not have very much cash on them.

And so the five mostly bought various products in small quantities almost as samples, intending to first see how the market received them before buying them in bulk.

In total, sales for the merchants mounted to only around one hundred and fifty thousand (150,000) ropals, the bulk of which was made up by the rich merchant from Sybarsis.

Harold bought small quantities of paper, soap, glass and even some lingerie.

But the things he was truly interested in- sugar, salt, much more glassware, and iron ingots were mostly denied to him.

Sugar because Alexander had used up all of the remaining bit in his wedding and would have to wait for the beetroots to mature in about a month to process the white powder and refill his stockpiles.

Salt because Alexander had just started making them and had not built up a stockpile to sell yet.

Same reason for glass- the workshop had not expanded yet, and they had been pushed to their limits to fulfill the wedding deadline, the reward for which was Alexander giving them a week off.

So Alexander had only a few premium pieces to sell.

And iron because Alexander wanted to sell pots and pans made out of it rather than raw iron, for the markups on the latter were much higher.

There was also the reason that Harold wanted to use them to make weapons, and even when Alexander told him that, 'These iron ingots are made using a process that makes them unable to be made into weapons', the merchant seemed to want to take his chances.

Alexander did not like this and stalled the merchants by gifting a few hundred kilograms of the 'civilian steel', and asking him to try making weapons out of them before wanting to buy from him again.

And this was the same thing he did with the others, who were also head over heels to buy the iron.

In fact, they had been initially enticed to Zanzan in the first place with the promise of extremely cheap iron ingots and inexpensive glass.

And it was only later they found that this city had been ravaged by war, famine, and plague had so many gems being produced here.

Thus, though they were a bit disappointed at not being able to buy everything they wanted, they were ultimately very happy with the purchases they made.

And promised to bring a lot of slaves and animals the next time they would visit Zanzan, which ranged from three to nine months depending on the individual merchants and their trading schedule.

And yes, it was slaves and animals that Alexander wanted to barter with.

He said that though he would accept cash, he would offer to buy each good slave at 4,500 ropals, or at 11% more than the market price of 4,000 ropals, and each pack horse at 1,000 ropals which was 100 ropals more.

Meaning it would be more profitable for the merchants to do that exchange.

And the reason for Alexander wanting to do this was obvious.

He needed more men and so the demand for more slaves.

And more pack animals because he needed more animals to work in the industries and the farmlands around.

And he was willing to pay a premium even when bulk buying.

Alexander even wanted to buy large ships to transport his cargo but decided to hold off on that purchase for now as it was not vital for the time being, and he already had a fleet that Amenheraft used to attack Tibias at the harbor that was just sitting there.

Those ships could double as both cargo vessels and warships as soon as Alexander had a navy to speak of.

One point to note would be Alexander not selling any cement, bricks, or weapons.

This was because current production could hardly meet Alexander's own demands for cement and bricks, while Alexander was still arming his army with the new weapons.

It was unlikely he would be able to sell these products in the near term even if he wanted to.

But all in all, this was a fruitful encounter for both groups as the other merchants discovered a yet unknown treasure trove and Alexander finally found his first channel to sell all his beautiful products.



And best of all for the pasha, it was all out of Adhania, meaning no restriction from the nobles.

'Well, then here is to a long and profitable partnership,' Alexander toasted before concluding the meeting.

#### Chapter 374 Jabel Campaign (Part-1)

With the meeting with the merchants finished, Alexander was soon thrust into another one, a meeting with his council member, or more specifically the now and ex-military commanders. Because it was time to discuss the imminent winter campaign for last minute checks. The members soon entered the room once the merchants left, and after making themselves comfortable and some pleasantries about Alexander's wedding and such, soon started to dive into the meat of the business. First Menes and Melodias reported the status of the army, saying how the soldiers had been prepared, that enough weapons such as arrows and pilums had been procured and food had been stockpiled. With the highlight of the report being Menes's claim that, "Since our first target is Jabel city that's just thirty kilometers north of here, we will not need to carry any large food trains with us. Just the three-day ration each soldier carries will suffice." This reasoning was sound and hence approved by all. With the readiness of the military done, it was time for Grahtos, who had a scout cavalry squad under him, to give his reconnaissance report. "We have confirmed that a lot of the nobles who fled Zanzan are currently in Jabel and in its vicinity. Though the truly wealthy ones have taken refuge much further away, within the three Matbar's (Marquis) land." He had a regretful expression on his face that they could not catch all fishes at once. Alexander nodded hearing this, matching it with the intelligence report he got from Camius. His spymaster had in addition informed him that a lot of the nobles who had lands around the vicinity of Zanzan were hunkered down at the moment in Jabel, and this made Alexander feel like it was the perfect opportunity to strike. On previous occasions, some of his retainers had asked in a roundabout way what he intended to do with the old nobles, and Alexander usually said, "Haha, I have not been able to give you guys any land. So I must arrange it as soon as possible to not shame myself." This usually brought a smile to the one asking him this question, but it also meant Alexander had nothing for the old nobles but offering them a butcher's knife. Of course, he would eventually accept swears of fealty from nobles who chose to submit to him. But the key point being eventually- i.e.- not right now. Because right now, Alexander's goal was as stated to his retainers, to expand his own controlled lands. And so these former nobles had to go. And besides, the fact that these nobles lived so close to Pasha Muazz was a subtle confirmation of how much the obese noble trusted them. And Alexander was sure of this strong fealty to their former master still remained because for those nobles that the Pasha did not trust, well, that worker girl's parents were the perfect example of what happened to them. Men like Muazz usually chose trusted men. And to confirm this Alexander had even talked to that working girl one day to know her backstory and learned a bit about a few nobles of Zanzan. And that conversation had stimulated him to trust the nobles residing around Jabel. "As for the lands east of Zanzan, that huge stretch of territory all belongs to Pasha Muazz and are overseen by various caretakers who are either shordars (Barons) or Takuldars (Viscounts). I have already given a report to the Pasha detailing who controls what there," Grahtos continued his report. Alexander nodded to this claim as he

reminisced about the thick stack of paper, almost like a book that Grahtos had submitted to him. This report had been created jointly by Grahtos and Camius, with the latter being invited by Alexander after he understood that the NIA (National Intelligence Agency) and the military intelligence that was partly controlled by Grahtos had quite a bit of thing in common with this mission. Grahtos was initially certainly surprised when Alexander revealed this spy organization to him, though it was not completely unexpected because all the council members did know Camius spied for Alexander. Though that was the extent of their knowledge. So, the surprise came from seeing the organizational level of Alexander's spy network. Professional spies and spy schools where people would be taught various techniques of espionage was a no-brainer for modern times, but a completely revolutionary concept for such a primitive civilization. This spy organization and Grahtos's scouts together had managed to put quite the comprehensive report of the surrounding areas, which even served as a bedtime reading for Alexander sometimes. For example, Alexander remembered reading Jabel being described as 'a land of great greens with great value but grossly misused.' There were also a great many names, Alexander could not fully recall the exact number but it had to be at least twenty, next to which were written a lot of obscure names of land and properties that they controlled. The way the peerage system here worked was that Muazz would give a shordar (Baron) around a few villages, maybe four or five, each with a pre-war and famine population of around hundred to two hundred and maybe a small town or just a slightly larger villager, whose main feature would be the temple and a small number of artisans living there, though not all shordars (Barons) had such a town. This was the scenery that covered almost 90% of Adhania, just farming villages, fishing hamlets occasionally sprinkled with small temples. And that would be the thing most poor peasants would see in their lifetime. Which also meant the people directly looking after these peasants made up the majority of the nobility, i.e- shordars. Above the shordars (barons), Pasha Muazz like the other nobles had appointed the Talukders (Viscounts), who basically did the same thing as the shordars (barons) but on a bit grander scale. So they controlled the usual farmlands just like the barons but naturally much more of it, but also more importantly they all controlled a decent city of around 10,000 to in some abnormal cases sometimes upto 30,000 people. This city would always have a temple of Ramuh, and a proper temple at that, being able to house something equivalent to a proper priest or even a bishop, whereas a shordar (baron) would maybe have a trainee priest to take care of the day-to-day looking after of the small temple and would only be occasionally visited by a real priest from a nearby Talukerdar's (Viscount) territory, perhaps once or twice a fortnight depending on the distance and road situation. There were a few Talukders (Viscounts) mentioned around Zanzan and Alexander took notice of them, remembering their names, while largely forgetting about the large number of barons dotted around. This was mainly because Talukders (Viscounts) was the peerage from which one could realistically gather an army, as below that the low population and the poor finances made such an endeavor unrealistic. Of course, this did not mean Shordars did not fight. In fact, they fought constantly. But it was mostly against bandits, others of a similar peerage, or by joining a coalition. Because individually they would not bring soldiers to a fight, but a mob of peasants. And hence Alexander only remembered to learn the names of the Talukders (Viscounts), because these Shordars (Barons) would likely fight under them. And they would fight with their Talukders against Alexander because he also planned to attack them after taking Jabel. In fact, Jable was just a stopover. His real target was taking over the fertile lands to the east and what was the use of learning the names of nobles who would participate in the battle and soon die? Alexander presumed in his eastern campaign, only the Talukders who would direct the battle but would not participate in it would survive. And as Alexander swam in these thoughts, Grahtos finished reporting his scouting report, after which Alexander asked with a light

smile on his face, "So how do you think we should deal with the nobles inside the city?" "If we are going to attack them, it would be better to leave no traces," Menicus in his gravelly voice gave a very frank answer very first. And was quickly joined by the usually cautious Melodias, "I agree. Since this attack would be breaking the contract, we should not leave any witnesses." The two men seemed ready to be ruthless to protect their and Zanzan's hide. "There are almost no civilians in Jabel. The nobles kicked everyone out to conserve food when they took over the city. So there are only the nobles and their slaves and servants in there" Grahtos too expressed his support of such action by assuring Alexander that there would be no innocent casualty. Alexander was happy seeing his retainer think like he was. So he began confidently, claiming, "Firstly, attacking the nobles will not be a violation of the treaty." which made his retainers ask what kind of convoluted way their lord was gonna justify that. And they were not disappointed as Alexander in a twisted way reasoned, "Because we are not attacking them for siding with Amenheraft. We are attacking them for rebelling against their higher lord- me, The Pasha of Zanzan." "....." The others only gave a wry smile at this shameless reason but certainly did not interject. So Alexander, hearing no objection finalized the decision, "Okay, then. We will raze Jabel to the ground and build a newer, better one." Alexander thus made the cruel order, before turning to his retainers to ask "All agreed?" The others naturally nodded in consent and thus in that shorter-than-an-hour meeting, Alexander's first campaign of annihilation was decided.

#### Chapter 375 Jabel Campaign (Part-2)

Alexander's excuse for the attack was a weak one.

A very weak one that.

Because although a higher noble could attack a lesser noble for refusing him, the main caveat to that rule was that it had to be sanctioned by the king.

Or else any bigger noble could take over a smaller noble using all sorts of excuses.

Now, this would be too big a problem as Ptolomy would not mind Alexander attacking rebel nobles.

He had even given Alexander prior permission to punish any nobles under him without needing to seek Ptolomy's council first.

But the little snag with this was, firstly, it was still undecided who was the king of Adhania, Ptolomy, or Amenheraft, with the matter being left in limbo for the time being.

And secondly, which was the more important point, it had already been verbally agreed in the treaty between Amenheraft and Ptolomy that Alexander would not attack the nobles of Zanzan and vice versa, with each of the nobles free to choose a side they wished to join without persecution.

So, what Alexander was attempting to do did indeed break the treaty,...but so what?

It was all verbal.

The US once allegedly verbally promised to not expand NATO.

But what did that verbal promise mean?

Nothing.

"We will set out after dark. And attack the city at dawn." Alexander announced, intending to catch the noble completely off guard.

Usually when an army was approaching a place, it would make such noise and kick up so much dust that there would be really no way to hide it.

So, marching at night was one of the ways to somewhat mitigate loudly announcing one's presence as a large number of the enemy would usually be asleep.

Now, night marches were always dangerous.

This was because when an army of thousands and thousands of men moved without light or vision, through mostly rough or even nonexistent roads, even the simple case of tripping and falling were major causes of accidents as soldiers would simply walk over their fallen comrade and crush him to death over hundreds or even thousands of heavy steps.

And these soldiers would not even know they stepped over someone because each individual will think they just stepped over some patch of wet or soft ground, while the scream of the fallen soldier would be muffled by the marching footsteps of the thousands or tens of thousands of men and animals.

And this was just one, relatively banal risk of marching at night.

Animals were more easily spooked by noise at night, soldiers might graze their spears with others in the dark, deadly animals such as snakes might come out in the night and then there was the ever-present risk of soldiers losing their sense of direction.

All such dangers and many more accompanied a night's march, which was why generals tended to avoid them.

But just because military commanders did not like them did not mean they did not happen.

There were many examples of such marches both in Alexander's previous life and in this life as well, the most recent one being Agapois's march to outflank the enemy.

There were even records of full-scale night battles which had lasted for hours.

So marching and fighting in the dark did happen, though in fairness, all those were exceptions, not examples.

And Alexander had chosen such an exceptional strategy because of the vital need to catch the nobles off guard and prevent them from asking for reinforcements from nearby areas or worse in Alexander's eyes, sending a message saying that he was attacking them and blatantly breaking the treaty.

And Alexander was confident that his troops would be able to pull this off because they had prior experience in night marching, and because the road between Zanzan and Jabel was well-known and well-traveled, even having a decent, earth-beaten route.

With these thoughts, one bright late afternoon, Alexander went to greet his legions outside the city, arranged in proper formations, in full armor, and ready to march.

Because the chainmails were still being made, Alexander could not equip his entire army with the latest and greatest, and so for now, only the officers had them, while the general soldiers wore their bronze cuirasses.

And those bronze cuirasses shone brightly in the setting sun, as Alexander swept his eyes over his army from atop his horse.

The smallest unit of this army was the squad, made of 8 soldiers, 2 slaves, and 1 mule, with the men sharing one tent.

Above them was the company made of ten (10) squads and led by a sergeant, amounting to one hundred (100) men with twelve (12) mules, and eleven (11) tents.

The extra 2 mules and 1 tent were assigned to the officers, who numbered five (5).

These were:

The leader of the company-The Sergeant.

This man usually led from the front and was the rallying point and morale support for the soldiers.

He was usually chosen for his intimidating physic and loud voice meant to cower the soldiers and make them follow him unconditionally and was

eaglesnovel`c,om The second in command- The Lieutenant Sergeant.

He would be usually at the back policing the back of the formation and was tasked with urging the soldiers to fight on and prevent routing.

While in peace times he would help his sergeant drill and train the troops

The third in command- The Staff Sergeant.

This man would be around the middle of the formation, also policing the formation, while out of battle he was the watchman, distributing the watchword and managing those on sentry duty.

The Standard Bearer carried the flag and called men for roll-call, reviewed them, and solved disputes between soldiers.

And lastly, there was The Trumpeter, who signaled the various formation changes, while being in charge of the military clerks who tracked the soldiers' pay and calculated all the deductions that were incurred.

A company was the real first fighting unit of the army, and as Alexander moved his horse across the frontline he called out some of the officers by name to boost morale.

And bigger units such as battalions made of 600 men and even legions made of around 6,000 men were created simply adding these companies together.

But commanding this legion belonged to a very high-ranking member- such as General Menes, with Melodias as his deputy and a small army of clerks and officers to help him run the gigantic machine.

And it was a gigantic machine, as the total area they covered in their regular everyday life with all their gear and animals was an astounding 20 square kilometers.

They numbered about 7,000 when counting both men and animals, with the proportion of men to animal being around 9 to 2 when taking into account the cavalry, and so a lot of men were needed to keep this fighting machine lean and mean.

Alexander's heart filled with pride as he watched the rows and rows of soldiers standing in attention for him.

He had certainly seen bigger armies, much bigger ones, but this was the first time he felt so overwhelmed- because this was his army.

His to command and lead.

And so, just before setting off, Alexander decided to give a rousing speech, as he bought his horse in front of his soldiers and loudly said,

"My men, all of you have witnessed firsthand what kind of people the nobles of Zanzan are! These brutes hunt women and children for sport. These men kick out the poor and starving. And these men kill priests and loot temples."

Alexander then dramatically raised his arm to the sky, as if clutching the dim, setting sun, before proclaiming, "But that ends today! Today we will kill them. Today we will raze the nest of the devils to the ground! Today we march to victory!"

Alexander's loud voice was joined by an ear-splitting nebulous scream of "Haaaaaa", as soon, under the cover of dusk, the men formed up and began marching north in a disciplined manner.

They were deployed in the following order during their march.

First, ahead of the legion rode a small contingent of Grahtos's scout cavalry, looking for any signs of ambushes.

Though this was very unlikely in this particular circumstance as the nobles most likely did not even know that an army was walking towards them, Alexander still deployed them as such for he deemed it as standard procedure.

Then there were the vanguards, consisting of mainly cavalry and heavy infantry, who were meant to be the first point of contact with any enemy during the march.

Then were the officers, where even Alexander was, followed by the main legionary body.



After that was the baggage train, which was relatively short for this campaign, and lastly the rear guards which protected the back of the marching column.

The men walked with 4 men abreast given due to the relatively narrow road, making the

7,000 men and almost 1,500 animals stretch out over 2 km.

This meant that at a walking speed of around 5 km/hr, it would take almost half an hour for a single legion and its baggage train to pass.

Or at a gallop, it would take a rider going 40 km/hr about 3 minutes to ride across the entire length of the column.

And this was assuming quite idealized conditions, which there rarely ever were.

If roads were narrow and progress delayed for any reason, a single legion could easily double in length and stretch well over 4 km, taking almost an hour to pass, and requiring 6 minutes to ride from back to front.

Chapter 376 Jabel Campaign (Part-3)

Alexander had deployed all his soldiers to this campaign because he wanted to have the greatest amount of mass to smash against Jabel.

And though this had also left Zanzan weakened, with it being currently only defended by Cambyses's city guards and the garrison, due to Alexander's proximity to the city, he was not too worried.

And so Alexander's huge train of trained soldiers moved slowly and methodically without worry across the flat ground, creeping up on the unsuspecting nobles, while remembering to be vigilant about making too much noise.

And after thankfully an uneventful march, the army could finally see the walls of Jabel at around midnight.

"Looks like they don't know we are here. That's good," Menes reported to Alexander while squinting his eyes at the torches lit up around the walls.

"I'm sure they did not think I would be insane enough to attack them at full scale just two months into the treaty," Alexander slightly chuckled at the good news.

While his frank admittance made the council members around him roll their eyes and say in their hearts, 'So you do know that this is a risky plan.'

But they had all agreed to it and the dye had been cast.

The only thing they could do was go with it.

And Alexander soon gave that go-ahead command, saying, "Let the soldiers drink some water and rest for an hour. And in the meantime, covertly send over scouts on foot to look for weak spots around the wall."

"If we can find any, we will scale them using the hooks. And if we can't, we will have to resort to using the battering ram"

Walls were taken using a lot of techniques, with the simplest one being the ladder rush, where a bunch of men would place ladders against the walls and simply charge up the wall.

But the simplest technique was also the hardest to get results with as the casualty numbers in these endeavors would usually be enormous.

Because a properly defended wall with motivated defenders would be able to easily push the ladders off and with them the soldiers on them, dump stones and other hot materials onto the incoming soldiers, or simply kill the soldiers once they got up on the wall by ganging up on them as these enemy soldiers would have to get on the wall one by one.

Ladder rushes rarely worked as seen in the movies if the wall was properly defended.

At least they rarely worked on their own.

So to supplement this, other techniques would be used in conjunction.

eaglesnove1,coM One of them was the battering ram, which was just a heavy beam hanging off a portable wooden structure used to attack gates.

And lastly was the best siege engine of the day- The siege towers.

These huge, moved with oxen, three to four-story wooden buildings could carry soldiers inside them and once they were placed near the walls by the oxen, a trapdoor could be opened to let the soldiers flood the walls.

And these were the three main options available to the people of this time, with sapping being a hated fourth.

This technique involved digging a tunnel underneath the walls and then starting a fire around the wall foundations, ultimately crumbling the structure.

But this technique took so long and was so tedious that it was rarely preferred and very rarely used.

And those were it, as siege weapons such as the catapult or trebuchet had yet to be invented.

And though Alexander had plans to build such weapons, they were not yet ready.

Though fortunately for him, it was deemed that they would not be needed.

With the reason being provided by Grahtos who had personally done the scouting a few days prior.

"My lord, Jabel never had any proper wall. This is because it was...is a relatively minor town, mainly housing and entertaining the peasants and other poor folks who could not afford to go to Zanzan. So these low walls will be easy to scale." He reasoned.

Prior to Alexander's annexation of Zanzan, Jabel held little strategic value, because the main threat to Zanzan was to the south, through the sea and Cisrian hills by Tibias.

While any land invasion through the north of the city would mean going through a lot of Pasha Muazz's retainers, many of whom had much bigger and better cities, and in more favorable geographic terrain, thus making them better places to defend.

Thus Jabel was left to the wayside under Pasha Muazz who saw it as nothing more than a den of thieves and crooks, while the nobles currently residing there had been here only for two months and did not bother building up too much defense around the city.

One because they never expected to be attacked.

And two because they never planned to stay here for too long, only until January.

And so the walls, which were relatively hard and expensive to build were neglected.

Hence Grahtos's argument was followed up by Melodias, who expressed, "I agree. We can even have a bunch of crossbows below the walls shooting any soldiers trying to attack the scaling men. This way will be quicker."

Speed and surprise was currently the name of the game.

And thus Alexander nodded and said, "Okay, find a remote corner of the walls, fill up the ditch, and start climbing."

The nobles were at least competent enough to dig a ditch around the city, but the problem was that a ditch by itself was useless.

To make it effective, one had actively defend it using missiles and projectiles.

An act the nobles neglected to enforce.

And thus, under the dark moonless night, groups of scouts circled the city, like a vulture circles its prey.

They kept their eye out for potential weak spots, and places where the wall was relatively lightly guarded, such as a tired sentry nodding off or simply fast asleep.

These scouts looked for signs using their great eyesight, and by also counting the silhouettes of shadows that fell on the stone wall, cast by the burning torches.

And soon Menes came as the bearer of good news, grinning a large smile and saying, "My lord, the scouts have reported several points along the walls they think might be suitable to attack. It seems most of the sentries have gone to their quarters because of this cold."

Menes's smile was so wide and so much of this pearly whites were showing, that Alexander was afraid the light reflected off of this might alert the enemy.

It seemed the black general was truly pleased.

"Hmmm..." Alexander hummed as he let out a cold, white breath of freezing air while ruminating on which side to attack from or if he wanted to attack from all three sides simultaneously to overwhelm the enemy.

But a while later rejected the latter thought as it could alert the enemy, and gave his command, "Good, then start with the left side."

Alexander had decided on that direction after hearing the details of the wall's structure, and learning that there were relatively fewer torches in that direction, meaning less opposing men and more cover of the darkness.

This initial directive was followed by another order which said, "And also have another group ready on the right side prepared to scale the walls from that direction if the other group gets detached."

"And lastly, arrange the men in the center with their battering ram if all fails."

Alexander wanted to cover all possibilities.

"Yes, my lord," Menes received the order with a military salute and then got to arranging the men in their proper formations.

The first, and primary group was deployed to the left, led by Menes himself, both because he wanted to personally oversee the unit's success and for the selfish reason that he wanted to claim that it was he who led the capture of Jabel, thus fish for more credit and glory from Alexander.

And in that endeavor, he placed his deputy Melodias to the right, as leading the backup, while Alexander placed himself at the center in case all went wrong.

The right and center forces for now mostly hid themselves in the wooded area about a few hundred meters from Jabel, while a battalion (500 men) of infantry and crossbowmen moved stealthily up to the left side of the city walls.

"Quickly fill up the ditch," Came the hushed order as the men in the front rows dumped the sacks of earth they had carried with them hastily and almost soundlessly, soon creating a solid earthen bridge.

Up until now, there had been no sirens going off which was good.

And so, the plan moved on to the last phase, as out came the hooks, with experienced men expertly spinning them by their thick ropes, before launching them upward, easily crossing the 5m wall.

\*Clink,\* \*clink\*, \*clink\*.

And instantly after, tiny bells of confirmation came of the steel hooks attaching to the walls, as soon a group of ten men grabbed the dry ropes with gloved hands and started climbing.

These men were very heavily armored, receiving the latest chainmail, and carrying the crossbow, but this weight did not seem to slow them down for it would be seen they scaling up the walls very similar to a red and blue customized superhero.

While below was an armed group of crossbowmen pointing their bows around the wall, ready to snipe off any unlucky sentry, thus guarding the climbing men.

It seemed the fall of Jabel was imminent.

Chapter 377 Jabel Campaign (Part-4)

Time was of the essence and the men climbed the walls as fast as they could while being as silent as they could.

This was because these men were currently in their most vulnerable position and were thus eager to get up on that wall as soon as possible before the clinking and clanking of the metal hooks against the stone walls could somehow wake the guards up.

And, so they scampered up the walls in what to them felt like hours but in actuality was less than half a minute until all ten men were up on the ramparts.

As soon as their feet hit the stone floor, these men equipped their crossbows and quickly swiveled their heads looking for any guards.

Alexander had wanted these men to carry the 'Instant bow' so that each of the men would have five rapid shots but found that the large bow was too hard to climb up with.

The wooden mechanism between the string and bow would glance against the neighboring soldiers, and so if he wanted to use that, he would have to spread out the men out more, making them more vulnerable to enemy attack as they could be picked off one by one.

As the soldiers scanned the rampart for any sentries, they soon caught sight of a few, near the torches, all dozing off and some even drunk.

\*Shoo\*, \*shoo\*, \*shoo\*,

All were delivered a quick, eternal sleep by multiple arrows fired accurately from near point-blank range, killing them as they could utter only a muffled cry of horror, while Alexander's men mechanically reloaded the crossbow using a ratchet-like those on a cavalry unit would do.

As the squad of men got to work cleaning the scant few men atop, the men on the ground had already pressed ladders against the walls the moment they saw the ten men successfully make their way across, and soon reinforcements started pouring into the left walls of Jabel.

But strangely there were no cries of hurrahs and shouts of jubilation from the men, as one might expect them to make for completing his task.

All these men were veterans from various mercenary groups, and thus they worked silently, and efficiently, without the need to shout orders and directions.

"Enemies!"

"Enemies"

"Run run"

Eventually some of the sleeping sentries were woken up by the scaling soldiers and their thudding footsteps, and the twines of their crossbows.



But it was too little, too late.

Because by that point, more than a company (100 men) had already made a 'beachhead' on the left side of the wall, and their numbers were increasing by the second.

And so the unprepared outnumbered, and scattered sentries, understanding their position simply ran.

Some got lucky and escaped into the city, while many were killed by shots to the back, as other more tragic ones died in accidents, tripping in the dark and breaking bones, in stampedes, and even by being mistaken as the enemy.

"Kajim, you and your men stay clear out the other sections of the walls and then stand by guarding it. Justian, you take the servant quarters. Others follow me to the gates." This order was given to the various sergeants, each responsible for a company by Menes who had at last climbed the walls himself.

And so events unfolded as such, with Kajim's men fanning out in squads to kill any stragglers atop the wall, while Justian's men went around the guard quarters in and around the wall, kicking down the flimsy wooden doors, and hacking all the inhabitants down.

Sometimes they would find some of the men with women, possibly prostitutes, and on some rare occasions even children, which might as well be their daughter or worse.

But regardless of cast, color, race, and gender, they all received the same fate, for Alexander had given all of them strict orders, "Kill everyone."

"My lord, General Menes reports that the left part of the walls has been secured. And that his men are moving to secure the city gates as we speak," A herald rode to report to Alexander with a military salute.

"Mmm, good." Alexander regally nodded while his heart breathed a sigh of relief, as he then asked, "Does he need reinforcements?"

"No, my lord, it appears the five hundred men will be enough." The herald answered with a slight shake of his, before continuing his report.

"Instead, General Menes suggests that Your Grace starts moving the army forward, and to be ready to charge inside once the gates open." The scout relayed.

"Okay," Alexander replied with a singular utterance, after which, finished with his task, the herald performed a salute and rode back.

Alexander meanwhile ordered a forward march before sending word to Melodias to tell him that he would not be needed to act and ordering him to rejoin the main force.

The main army quickly crossed the small distance and laid down large, thick planks of wood over the dug ditches, forming a makeshift bridge, once again showing that a ditch that is not defended could not perform as a ditch.

Now they only needed to wait.

And Menes, to his credit did not keep them waiting for long, for his three-hundred men bulldozed their way through the defenseless city with ease, making a beeline for the gates.

And on their way, the men made sure to light the various houses and other structures with fire using the torches they carried, until even Alexander could see the plumes of smoke rising from the city.

'Good, it seems the city's been captured,' Alexander said to himself, seeing the smoke as confirmation that the soldiers were inside the city and had started razing it.

There was nothing the defenders could do now to save the city.

And soon, he granted a visual confirmation, as he heard the complex mechanism of the gate being moved and taken part, shortly followed by Menes's joyous greeting, "My lord, welcome."

The fully armored general was flanked by a contingent of soldiers, all having large grins, and was greeted by a much louder chorus of roars.

Since the city was already burning, what point was there being stealthy?

The soldiers soon flooded the city and got down to feast on it like a bloodthirsty hound feasts on a defenseless rabbit, lighting the city on fire, smashing into houses, and generally pillaging and plundering the premises.

eaglesnovel.com And soon agonized screams and muffled whimpers dressed the air while the thick, stinging odor of wood smoke assaulted all those inside.

A night of tragedy had begun for the residents or rather temporary residents of Jabel, and there was little they could do to resist.

Seeing the horrors unfold in front and around him, Alexander did feel a tinge of regret and remorse for the few innocents that would be eventually caught up in the blazing inferno.

But the vast majority of those residing here currently were people who were tyrants and plagues of misfortune, who spread misery and death among the common populace, bringing them hardship and oppression.

And though some might argue that only the nobles were guilty and those around them innocent, though technically correct, nevertheless they were no doubt either

1. Accomplices- like the various soldiers and bodyguards who did their master's bidding and many times partook in it,

2. Enablers- such as various maids and servants who helped the nobles maintain his lifestyle, while also at times serving as his spies, and lastly

3. Beneficiaries- who were mainly the wives and children and other relatives, who enjoyed the lifestyle they were provided and profited from it.

And just as a father's good deeds elevates his progeny, a father's misdeeds also dooms and curses his progeny.

Of course, rarely did a person fit neatly into only one typical mold but was rather a mixture of two or more, and so Alexander had no problem cleaning the houses, even if the method was crude and barbaric.

"General Menes, you did well. Managing to take the wall with no casualties. Very impressive," Thus as the soldiers razed the city, Alexander and the various high-level leisurely talked outside the city, around the thick, mahogany gate.

Since the city was going to be razed, Alexander did not bother entering it.

"Where, where? We had more troops than the city had residents. And they never expected an attack until our soldiers were opening the gate. It was too easy, too easy," Menes humbly played down his success.

The duo then talked for a while about the operation and if there were any problems during the attack and such, and by the natural flow of the conversation, when they were talking about the soldiers razing the city, the issue about the nobles came up.

"My lord, do you not intend to meet any of the nobles? Perhaps even to hear what they have to say? We can kill them any time." Menes gently prodded.

Though this had already been discussed, Menes still had this nagging feeling that meeting the nobles might be a good idea.

And Melodias, who had by now joined the main group, surprisingly supported Menes, saying,

"The information about the surrounding lands and the various treaties and alliances might be a good thing to know." before suggesting,

"Perhaps we could kill them after the interrogations. In this way, we might be even able to get some written confessions."

It appeared the potential value of capturing a noble moved even the cautious man when he was directly faced with it.

#### Chapter 378 Jabel's Nobles (Part-1)

Alexander thought about the two generals' suggestions and reconsidered his actions.

Melodias uttering the word 'land' made Alexander remember that he had no detailed maps of the surrounding area, as Pasha Muazz had cleaned his study before Alexander could take over the city.

And so if he wanted to make his own maps, the only way would be for him to send surveyors into the other lands and ask the locals about the land features.

And even then that map would likely be grossly inaccurate because without having a bird's eye view, one needed to stay in one place more a long time to get the scale and positions of the various features correct.

Not to mention, if this was on another noble's land, this type of action would be slightly short of declaring war according to them, as surveying another's land was usually followed up by an invasion mostly using the secret routes discovered during this process.

Thus maps were highly prized and guarded, and something that Alexander could definitely use.

This fact made Alexander reconsider his order and was further tempted by the thoughts of what he could make the nobles write and confess.

"Okay, tell the soldiers to not kill anyone claiming to be a noble, his children, or his wife." Alexander thus made the decision, and even added, "Anyone who finds a noble or his next of kin and brings them to the military camp unharmed will be rewarded 150 ropals for each of them."

Alexander knew the soldiers were more likely to heed his command if a monetary reward was involved, and even repeated, "Remember they must be unharmed."

This was because he feared the women might be humiliated if a smart soldier decided to think, 'Well enjoying these beautiful fleshes before bringing them to the camp would be alright. After all, I'm not killing them.'

Alexander's decision to meet with the nobles pleased both Menes and Melodias who quickly had their officers relay the message down the chain of command, while cleverly adding the following addendum to the soldiers,

'Remember those people must be able to show proof of their identity.'

In this way, not every Tom, Dick, and Harry will be able to claim being related to the nobles, and also the soldiers will not be able to farm the system.

While the soldier lit the dry, winter houses of Jabel and went around killing almost anything that moved, chaos and carnage, inside the large, central house that dwarfed any of its contemporary buildings and looked over the city from the center, there was a very heated debate was taking place.

"Who is attacking us? Is it that Jakqum? Has our plans been leaked?" A very fat man slammed his fleshy fist against the wooden ash table, his face flushed with anger, while his fists were visibly pale with fear.

Jakqum was the equivalent of 'nobody' in Azhak and it was the name Alexander was addressed by among some in Amenheraft's ranks.

And if Alexander could see the obese man, he would have certainly noticed the remarkable resemblance he had with Pasha Muazz, appearing like a younger version of the degenerate, disgraced noble.

"No...no Your Grace Maizdy, that's impossible. We...we never told anyone!" A lean noble with gaunt cheeks quickly stammered the reply.

It was unknown if he was afraid of the soldiers razing the city, or of the man standing in front of him, huffing and puffing in rage.

Perhaps it was both.

Though for him the more immediate concern was placating the Pasha's eldest son, as he then reassured, "Please...please let us be calm. I'm sure whatever is happening outside is just a little accident. Everything is under control."

But the low tone, stammer, and the gulping sounds he made while saying this not only managed to inspire confidence among the group of nobles present but instead conversely managed to reaffirm their suspicions.

'A lot of enemy soldiers are in the city,' All their hearts shivered.

"Accident! You call the city burning a small accident? Tell the truth you mongrel!" Lambasted Muazz's firstborn, making that noble shiver and go mute, as he heard the threat, "Or I will go see it for myself. And if I see that it is not a little accident, I will personally break every bone in your body."

Kyamin's heart beat fast and erratically.

Some time ago, his steward had come to him saying, 'There was some disturbance in the city but the soldiers had been deployed,' but after that, he had not heard anything from the man

Kyamin could not even call the guards too conspicuously for fear of spreading panic.

And while he was raking his mind on how to respond to this hot-tempered spoiled manchild, fortunately for him, another noble quickly stepped up to defend him.

Strong, tall, and with a large beard, he had a stellar reputation among Muazz and Amenheraft's retainers and his intimidating physical features made Maizdy rein down his anger.

Maizdy listened the man say, "My lord, I believe Talukerdar (Viscount) Kyamin is right. The treaty has been only signed for two months and that Jakqum will not risk breaking it soon. It must be some sort of accident or a few rebels causing problems. Let us be calm. We have enough men to take care of any situation."

This large man had a surprisingly soft, soothing voice and the gentle but firm tone calmed many down.

The group of nobles was gathered in the first-floor study of the manor, and as such could not see the full extent of the destruction going on outside.

This, coupled with the fact that they really wanted to believe Jamidar (Earl) Niibar resulted in such a passive action.

But did not any of the soldiers come to tell them the bad news?

Well no.

Firstly because none of them had the guts to burst into the room unannounced and uninvited and then report the real situation.

Because think about it.

Would you want to be the one giving your boss the bad news that there were soldiers inside the city and they were razing it to the ground and that there was nothing that you could do to stop them?

Naturally no.

Because in such a case, the best case scenario was the bosses believing you and asking you to escort them out of the city.

While the worst case scenario was they accuse you of lying and executes you because they find the information too uncomfortable while using the excuse that you are spreading misinformation.



So, why take the chance, when you can take the best scenario all by yourself?

And this was the second reason why the nobles were still in the dark about the true scale of the disaster.

Because many of the soldiers were abandoning their posts to save their own hides.

While a few staunch ones were engaging Alexander's invading forces before being swiftly cut down by the outnumbering enemy.

This problem was expounded by the fact it was dead of night, and many of the veterans who would have usually taken command and led an organized defense were either still asleep or separated from their men.

In fact, the nobles being still up so late was an anomaly, the reason for which was discussing the 'plan' eluded to my Maizdy.

And speaking of Maizdy, he was still among the few still rational, as even after many others bought the absurd claim, he said in a suppressed low growl, "Are you telling me the screams and howls I'm hearing are small accidents?"

As then swung his thick arms before a reply could come and declared, "Fine, let them be accidents. But I want to leave Jabel right now. Call me after you have dealt with this...whatever!"

"..." A dead silence ensued, and as the obese man glared intensified with each passing second, finally, Kyamin, the timid noble, broke out a mumble, "I'm afraid my lord, we do not know of any secret way out of the city. We only got here two months ago, and never expected to be attacked."

"Attacked!" Maizdy roared at the word, his eyes bulging out.

Kyamin deduced his steward might not be coming back, ever, as the loyal man should have reported whatever he found out by now, and so, in this fear let out this kernel of truth.

And then realizing his mistake, the thin noble visibly shivered even more.

"Get out! Escape! We need to escape!" No doubt remained in Maizdy's mind about the situation around Jabel.

And though he wanted to tear apart Kyamin and eat him raw, now was not the time for that.

Now was the time for getting out of the city.

Nothing mattered more.

And Maizdy's hysterical shout managed to spread fear and panic among the entire group, as many of the men attempted to dart towards the door, some even elbowing others to reach the wooden exit faster and unobstructed.

"Calm!!! Down!!!!" But just as the situation was about to devolve into a brawl or stampede, Jamider (Earl) Niibar's loud roar, like a lion opening his throat blasted the eardrums of the nobles, snapping them out of their confusion.

The bear-like man then loudly and forcibly roared, "As Talukder (Viscount) Kyamin said, the only real escape out of the city is through the main gates. And if you feel you can fight your way through the city, then go ahead."

Chapter 379 Jabel's Nobles (Part-2)

Jamider (Earl) Niibar's imposing speech gave the nobles pause.

"..." And thus they stood around the door in flux, not knowing what to do next.

Some consider taking their chances.

While some believed it might be better to stick together.

And as they looked at each in askance, finally, being unable to bear the stifling air, one of the nobles turned around and picked up the courage to ask, "Then what does Your Lord propose? Fight?"

His question was laced with fear and apprehension, meaning if Jamider (Earl) Nibbar made the mistake of saying yes, he would be the first one to bolt.

He very well knew the number of his own men and they were not enough.

"Fight? Without horses? That's what peasants are for!" Jamider (Earl) Nibbar had an incredulous tone to his voice as he pronounced this, as if finding the very concept beyond absurd.

After all, it was common knowledge among nobles that a noble who does not fight on a horse was not a noble, but just common rabble.

Having avoided this trap, the huge man then produced a wide, reassuring grin, and said, "First of all, let us all remember that we are nobles. Blue-bloods. Pure and saintly. So what are we afraid of?"

This implicit statement was made to remind the men that as nobles they were basically untouchable, decreed as saints or semi-divine by the temple of Ramuh.

And though this status was like wet paper in front of the royal family, against others, even against other nobles, it was a mighty shield.

For outside of combat, it was a great taboo to kill a noble under most circumstances, except for exceptional cases such as treason, rebellion, or gross military defeats against invading forces, meaning a noble usually got to die in bed.

Jamidar (Earl) Nibbar's confident demeanor and convincing speech made many of the panicking sheep calm down, and seeing this as he finished by saying, "Whoever is attacking...whoever that may be, be it

rebels, or bandits, or even that Jakqum, nobody will harm us. Because we are nobles. So let us stay calm and wait. Because no doubt the main perpetrator will soon come to greet us."

Nibbar seemed to place a lot of faith in his status as a blue-blooded noble and in its efficacy of being able to stop any soldier from killing him, as evidenced by how he puffed up his chest with pride after finishing.

And just like Kyamin's panic was infectious, Nibbar's confidence was too contagious.

And this reasonable speech and his poised demeanor quickly made fear transmute into courage inside the hearts of many of the nobles.

"Tha..that's right. Lord Nibbar said it well. If any of those mongrels dare touch a hair on us, the whole of Adhania will not let them off," A mustached noble squeaked out the reply like an obedient lackey.

And was soon joined by others making similar statements and threats.

It was unknown to who they were saying such words, though most likely it was to themselves in order to boost their morale.

And at some point, a burst of loud, uproarious laughter broke out, initiated by Maizdy, who said, "Hahaha, good, good. Just as I said, if we stick together nothing will happen."

The fat man's skill to so effortlessly and shamelessly make this statement surprised many, though those that interacted with him before knew such was his character.

If anyone thought Pasha Muazz was bad, they should meet his spoiled sons and daughters.

"Hahaha, yes, yes, my lord is most wise, most perceptive. We are honored to have you lead us," Jamider (Earl) Nibbar had been around these wastrels to know how to maneuver around them, and expertly provided the right amount of oil, drawing a big grin from the man.

And as the obese man was pleased with himself for managing to effortlessly steal the credit and as well as being happy with Nibbar for being 'clever', the real clever Jamider (Earl) also cleverly took advantage of the opportunity to say, "Then my lord, I ask you to allow me to step outside the room for a moment. I want to ask one of my soldiers to deliver our desire to meet the opposing party."

This noble was afraid that him arbitrarily stepping outside would spook the nobles and make them think he was trying to save his own hide.

And hence he asked for permission from his 'superior.'

"Mmm, okay. You do that. I too want to see who had the gall to attack us. I will judge him myself," It seemed Jamider (Earl) Nibbar's speech was a bit too successful, as fear had turned into haughtiness for Maizdy.

"I will endeavor to arrange it as soon as possible," Came a gentle smile and an elegant bow, as Nibbar quickly but elegantly shuffled out of the door.

And though many nobles held a tinge of suspicions of the large man being so eager to leave, they knew they could not contradict the man who had appointed himself in charge.

Because those who did did not have happy endings.

Jamider (Earl) Nibbar rapidly walked across the hallways, almost as if he was riding on a hurricane and whipping by a storm, as he soon met up with his head bodyguard stationed at the front gates.

"What is going on? Tell me the truth!" And this was the first thing the Jamider (Earl) asked after he grabbed the strong man from his post and effortlessly dragged him to a corner, his tone hushed and fearful.

The nobles back in the hallway would have been surprised if they could see the look on the big man's face, for the upbeat, confident facade had been torn to reveal a man just as scared as them, perhaps more.

"T..It's them. No doubt it's them, my lord. Many of my soldiers and even other soldiers have said they heard these enemies shout in a foreign language. It can only be them!" This bodyguard blurted out, his spit almost hitting the noble.

"Thesian? Were they speaking thesian?" Nibbar instantly understood the implication, as he spat out even more of his spittle, before closing the distance between the two, trying hard to keep his emotions in check and his voice low.

eaglesnove1,coM He did not want to openly cause a scene, especially not when morale was already so low.

"Ye...yes. Most likely. Most likely," This was accompanied by forceful nods to display the confirmation.

Although Alexander had pushed for all the soldiers to speak Azhak, it had been only two months since they came to Adhania and there was not enough time.

In addition, many soldiers simply refused, feeling that the language was a part of their identity.

They did not outright rebel against the order, but they quietly ignored it.

And for the time being, Alexander ignored them because this transition was inevitable.

While another part of the reason was that when in a battle, everyone subconsciously tended to speak in the tongue one was most fluent in, i.e- his mother tongue.

Hence Alexander's men were soon identified, though even if they hid their tongues, their uniform and gear would have been a dead giveaway if the enemy soldiers took the time to observe them.

'Darmmm...!' Nibbar cursed that his worst assumptions had come true.

Even though he knew prior that this was the most likely cause, it still made his teeth grind.

"What about the city? Can we escape?" Came the next logical answer.

Given the chance, Nibbar would gladly leave all those imbeciles to the pits.

His and his family's life was more precious than any of those fools.

"I..I don't know my lord. I was asleep... and ...and I only woke up some time.. some time ago," This bodyguard's face had gone from blushed to pale in the span of just one sentence.

Because he had just admitted that he was sleeping on his job.

"Yo...yooo...youuu," Nibbar hearing this had the opposite change, his pale face turning flushed red with anger.

This was a man he had trusted to protect his life and he was now openly admitting to sleeping on his job?

This made Nibbar want to knock every tooth out of this guy.

Though in his defense, nobody was expecting such an attack, and it was biting cold, so sleeping seemed a mighty tempting option, a seduction further aggravated by the cushy life he got used to living with the Jamider (Earl).

"So who knows how to get out of the city?" Jamider (Earl) Nibbar was not an impulsive man and decided that chewing his bodyguard out could wait,

For now, the priority was running and he asked for information regarding this by grabbing the armed man by the collar.

"I..I don't know sire," The bodyguard's squealed in terror.

But just as it looked like the Jamider was going to snap the poor man's neck in anger, he squeaked out, "But I heard the soldiers mention that anyone who says he is a noble is being spared. I swear, I swear I heard it, my lord, I swear."

The bodyguard kept repeating this as he felt the grip around his throat tighter, making his tongue almost stick out, and his breath constricted as Nibbar tried to figure out if the soldier was telling the truth or trying to save his hide.

But he was snapped out of his deduction suddenly as a loud announcement was heard coming from the outside.

"Which noble is residing in the house? Come out. Our master wants to meet you. We promise you will be treated with respect and dignity."

The option to run had just closed.

Chapter 380 Jabel's Nobles (Part-3)

The bodyguard felt the throat-constricting sensation disappear as the Jamider (Earl) turned his gaze toward the door.

The heavy Thesian accent of the statement hammered nail the identity of the intruders.

"What now?" He thus fiercely growled, feeling Alexander's maw close shut around him.

His gut was telling him to run.

"If my lord orders, I'm willing to cut open a path for you. Just give me the word, Your Grace, and I will do it even if it is me alone." Free of the vice grip, the guard quickly swore in a martyr voice.

But though he sounded staunchly loyal, he was basically saying, 'I'm just one man. Spare me.'



'Craven bastard,' Jamider (Earl) Nibbar cursed under his breath, fearing for his family's life, before finally accepting the circumstances with pursed lips.

"Come with me! Let's go see what's going on!" And then, deciding the best course of action would be to face the situation head-on, he grabbed the guard and tugged him towards the front door.

While the sergeant leading the company stood in front of the huge door with a smug feeling in his heart.

Even a fool could tell that this huge, unmatched amongst its surrounding mansion housed some bigshot, if not the 'biggest'-shot.

And to catch these delicious prey, this man named Hercinidus had raced against other companies to surround this place and won.

'Ahh, imagine the amount of money I will get from this,' And with his reward imminent, the man's mouth almost salivated while glancing at the tall, imposing, magnificent structure, which had turned into a gilded cage right now.

And as his eyes scanned the frightened and scant few guards, each of them targeted with multiple instant bows, he caught sight of two shadows approaching him.

"My name is Jamider (Earl) Nibbar. We surrender. I repeat I'm Jamider..." The man dressed in fine clothing leading the duo said the two sentences repeatedly, while his guard was signaling to the few men around the front gate to throw all their weapons in surrender, which they did seeing it was an order from a Jamider (Earl).

"I'm Sergeant Hercinidus. How many of you are there inside?" It seemed that Hercinidus, instead of accepting the surrender, first wanted to confirm his booty.

Nibbar swallowed the fact that this commoner did not bow to him, as was the tradition when meeting any noble, friendly or hostile as well as the question of what was a 'Sergeant'.

That was not currently important.

"Most of us nobles are here. Once we heard the commotion we gathered in the mansion to discuss what to do next. And we have decided to surrender." Jamider (Earl) Nibbar twisted the truth.

"And the women and children? Where are they? Are they also in the house?" The sergeant asked where these human booties were.

Because he wanted to maximize his earnings.

"Yes, yes. Many of them are here. Please do not harm them. They are all innocent," Nibbar's voice slightly shook as he said this, the real meaning of the word 'harm' clear to all.

He was not as afraid for their lives as he was for their honor.

Because even though nobles were usually protected by the rules of battles, crazed and red-eyed soldiers accidentally 'harming' the women and even children in the heat of battle was not unheard of.

'If only the Lord had not commanded as such,' And Hercinidus's heart itched hearing this.

Noblewomen simply tasted different from the regular peasants that he and his men visited in the brothels, except that new one that just recently opened, and the strong man's loins burnt with desire remembering how he had enjoyed himself for three days and three days when they were allowed to sack the inner district of Adhan.

The number of women and even children he and his brothers had enjoyed those three days made it a memory to relish for years if not decades.

And he very much wanted to replicate that scene here today.

But ultimately he held himself back.

One was because of the monetary reward.

150 ropals was not a paltry sum.

But that solely was not enough for many, who figured that though 150 ropals was a lot of money, it was not a noblewoman.

After all, money could be earned any day, and gold can be gotten in any way, but when could a commoner ever taste a noblewoman?

Never.

The physical beauty of noblewomen, created by the good food they ate, and the sheltered and privileged lives they lived with no physical labor or the attack of the harsh sun, inherently gave all of them soft skins and plump bodies, making them all a delectable feast for these common sods.

And this was coupled with the fact that they had the charm of nobility, of high status, and being high-born.

This mere fact produced a charm that even a much more beautiful, but commoner woman would never have.

Which conversely also made enemy soldiers all the more attracted to them.

These were also one of the main reasons why any captured or fallen nobleman would automatically fetch five to ten times as a regular slave woman, many times regardless of her actual beauty.

Because people bought not the face or the body, but the status.

And thus, when this was accounted for, when the soldiers of Zanzan were presented with the chance to taste a noblewoman potentially worth 20,000 to 40,000 ropal, 150 ropal started to look like a rounding error.

The maths heavily favored the former.

But still Hercinidus decided to follow Alexander's command, and even strictly enforced it among his troops.

And it was not because he was foolish or blindly loyal.

But because of the second reason, which was that it was an open secret that the Pasha did not like such types of acts.

And this dislike towards men who committed these acts was evidenced by the fact that many of those who had not participated in the sacking of Adhan were given first priority when promoting to sergeants and captains (Leader of a battalion consisting of 500 soldiers) in the newly formed legion.

So understanding this, the ambitious Hercinidus decided to sacrifice this short moment of joy for advancing his career.

"None of you will be harmed... if all your guards throw down their weapons and surrender. And if all of you follow me to our camp." Hercinidus thus reassured the Jamider (Earl).

'Whew!' Nabbir very inconspicuously released a sigh of relief, saying, "Thank you, brother, we are relieved." before prodding with the words, "By the way, brother has an interesting accent. Might I ask for your master's name?"

He dared to do this because Hercinidus's answer emboldened him to the fact that these soldiers wanted to capture them, and more specifically wanted to avoid killing them.

So he tried to fish for more information before the negotiations.

But unfortunately for him, he failed in this endeavor, and it even somewhat backfired, as Hercinidus only sneered, "Either you are stupid, Or you think I'm stupid."

And then in a mercurial change of mood, his gentle tone turned harsh as he barked, "Now get everyone inside out. Or if my men have to do it, I cannot guarantee accidental 'harm' will not happen!"

This naked threat made many of the defending men go pale, but the noble himself, Niibar kept his cool, only his eyebrows scrunching up.

'Did I misread the situation?' He wondered, while he quickly thought of a reply to deny this instruction.

He did not want to meet the enemy in his own den.

eaglesnove1,coM "Esteemed sir, please calm down. I did not mind mean anything by it," Firstly Jamider (Earl) Nibbar gave a large, professional smile to try and diffuse the situation, with the words 'esteemed sir' said with as much saccharine in it as possible.

This ability to change one's face according to one's needs was a testament to the skills of the veteran noble.

And it worked, as Hercinidus's nose stopped flaring, and he heard the noble continue, "We very much want to follow you to meet your Honored master. But we are a large bunch. Full of defenseless women and children. And so are afraid that so many people may not safely cross the chaotic streets. After all, sir should understand the situation better than me." He paused after making the suggestive sentence, before finishing by saying,

"So, why don't we wait here? Our guards will disarm and surrender to you. And your men can guard us in the meantime. Will not that be the best for both of us?"

The Jamider sure knew how to wag his tongue.

He even posed the last sentence as a question to trick Hercinidus into thinking he was the one making the decision.

Whereas in reality, the decision had been already made.

And the reason for Nibbar proposing as such did have to do with the fact he was afraid that the marauding soldiers might attack the large group during their 'voyage'.

But he was equally afraid some of those imbeciles in the mansion would try to run and make a break for themselves if they sensed an opportunity during the march under the chaos of the dark night inside a burning city.

And that might as well create a blood bath as the enraged soldiers would slice and dice anyone in front of them to pursue the runners.

Nabbir did not trust these soldiers to be reasonable in case of an accident, and he certainly did not trust those idiots that called themselves nobles to react rationally and act considering the large picture when faced with difficulties.