

Herald 461

Chapter 461 Guests From Sybarsis (Part-2)

Alexander would admit he was a bit surprised hearing Lord Janus address him as such.

Sure he had expected they would know about the battle.

But being able to not only know about the Jahal mercenary's participation but even more frighteningly their exact number while being 1,600km away was beyond impressive.

This truly astounded him.

"Haha,"

Alexander gave a light chuckle to hide this shock and then quickly got down to business,

"So, what can I offer you guys? Paper? Soap? Glass?" He asked.

"Iron." The word was short and sharp, and let out by the lady whose lips quivered and shook as she spoke.

The answer was so quick and impatient that even a child would have been able to able sense they were in really great need of it.

And this sentiment was further reinforced by the grimaced face he noticed Lord Janus pull, making him correctly presume they had likely discussed how to handle the negotiations but the lady had jumped the gun nevertheless.

It seemed they were under a lot of stress.

And hence Alexander decided to poke around a bit, probingly saying, "We certainly have iron. But I'm sure Mister Harold has also told you that those cannot be made into weapons. So may I ask why?"

"We want it nevertheless. And we are even willing to pay 200 ropals per kg for it," The lady again blurted out, avoiding the question, but still showing even more of her cards.

This eldest daughter might be a beauty, but she was no negotiator, as outright saying that one was willing to pay 200 ropals for iron ingots that went for 150 ropals was a very obvious way to tell they were desperate.

A fact well understood by the other two men, who clutched their fists in frustration and could barely stop themselves from slapping their heads.

While to Alexander this appeared to show that this lady was their leader, while the other two were very much down the pecking order, as they seemed too scared to stop her.

'This is getting interesting,' Alexander hence smirked, and then slouching back, very easily said,

"Okay. We can sell you the iron. How much do you need?"

The ease with which Alexander said this surprised the trio, as given how Harold had described to Lord Janus and Lady Miranda about Alexander's refusal to sell iron to him previously, they had assumed much more negotiations would be needed.

But what they did not know was that Alexander's stance had changed from back then.

Back then Alexander had wanted to use the iron to open a cast iron pottery shop.

But now faced with a severe labor shortage and other priorities, he had decided to push that project several years down the line.

So Alexander was currently in the market looking for buyers of his iron.

And here they were.

Additionally, there was also the fact that Alexander wanted to build closer ties with these people to tap into their intelligence network, a thought he came up all from that almost innocuous greeting Lord Janus had given him.

"We want to buy all of it. Every last scrap," Finally Lord Janus got to insert himself into the conversation, confidently demanding the entire stock.

When Harold had talked up Alexander, it only made the two nobles consider that Alexander may have around a few tons or at best about ten tons of iron.

So they could have never guessed what Alexander would say next.

"Haha, then by your price limit, that would come to 200 million," He chuckled as Alexander had built up a month's stockpile of iron by now, amounting to around 1,000 tons.

"What! Are you deaf? We said kg, not grams!" And even before Alexander could finish, Lady Miranda immediately erupted, almost jumping up from her sofa in rage, as she glared at Alexander hatefully.

The lady clearly thought Alexander was trying to swindle them.

While Alexander only raised an eyebrow at this discourteous behavior.

Sure the woman might be pregnant and have her hormones in overdrive.

But it was still not any excuse to burst like that.

"M..my lord, Lady Miranda did not mean anything by it. She is just stressed,"

"Yes, yes, my lady was simply surprised. She meant no disrespect"

Immediately afterward, the two men jumped forward to try and douse the fire, providing various excuses and reasons.

"...." While Alexander appeared unimpressed, only pursing his lips and leaning back.

"Why do you need the iron? And why have you brought such an imminently due lady to the negotiations?" He at last frostily asked.

To which the two men glanced at each other for a bit, trying to figure out what to do, with ultimately Lord Janus deciding that it would be better to placate Alexander by answering his question rather than risk losing the iron.

Alexander's tone did not sound too friendly right now.

"My lord, let me say it" He hence stepped forward, and explained,

"Recently the Margrave family has been charged with treason by the governor of Galisos. The reason is trading with Iyizarid, "

"To that effect, a large naval fleet was sent against us, but fortunately, a hurricane happened to hit them right when they approached our city."

"This was certainly a boon from the gods," The old man nodded forcefully, but then his voice turned melancholic, "But that also destroyed our fleet that went to fight it. My lady lost her father, many of her brothers, and even her husband."

"The waves then also destroyed our harbor and most of the walls there, flooding the city and causing great devastation. So much so that it forced Lady Miranda to evacuate with her remaining family members and citizens to my city."

It was after hearing this that Alexander understood why Harold had introduced Miranda as 'now the eldest daughter' as opposed to just the eldest daughter.

It seems some of her sisters had also died in the subsequent flooding.

As Alexander connected these dots, Lord Janus was still continuing, "But even after his naval failure, Governor Straus was undeterred. And soon afterward, we got the news that a land invasion was being raised to attack our city and finish us off."

"So we raced to raise our own."

"And that was where our lack of metal ores revealed itself. For our large stockpiles had been washed away by the flood, and we are unable to mine enough quickly." He let out a powerless sigh saying this, before going on.

"Thus the decision was taken to buy them from every merchant and vendor there was. And that was how we met Harold, who was peddling some of your iron."

"We bought the ingots, and seeing their quality, asked him when we could get more. And that was how we got to learn that you had a large amount of iron ore."

"But then we were told that you were unwilling to sell them."

"And so, as currently the eldest member of the family, my lady chose to come here despite her advanced stage of pregnancy to try and convince you."

The old man finally finished his long speech.

'She could have done it better if she had not come,' Alexander had to try very hard to not retort with this snarky remark after hearing the tragic incident, as not to appear insensitive, and ultimately managed to put on a solemn, understanding face,

"My condolences to you my lady."

"I also apologize for my rude behavior. I let my emotions get the best of me." Lady Miranda too seemed to calm down and even bowed politely.

Seeing the sense of civility return, Alexander decided to go back to the sales topic, saying

"I was not kidding when I said that it would cost 200 million if you wanted by entire stock. I currently have 1000 tons of iron ingots."

He had a light smile as he said this, which drew bigger at the satisfaction of seeing the trio draw bulging eyes and look all confused.

Alexander always enjoyed seeing that expression.

While for the three there, they tried to make sense of the offer.

1000 tons of iron was close to 1% of Sybarsis's annual consumption,

And this was for a country the size of the modern US.

While the same amount was claimed to come from a city that was basically another settlement in most's eyes.

Anyone would have been not only surprised but likely called Alexander a liar hearing this.

'Tha...that..how,' And this was the exact emotion the three sitting in front of him were experiencing, who could not believe their ears.

But they also could not call Alexander a liar or prankster.

"That...we cannot afford that much. Maybe 10 tons." So Lord Janus only chose this modest amount.

But Alexander offered a much better deal.

"As friends, I will offer you the iron ingot at 50 ropals per kg. So how much would you like to buy?"

He did not do this purely because of altruism, but more so because he wanted to sell more ingots.

To which Lord Janus accepted with a heartbeat, "Tha....then we will accept."

In fact, it was so quick that he actually stammered, as he was afraid Alexander might change his mind, or even that he had misspoken.

And as for how Alexander could offer such low prices, that could wait.

The most important thing now was not to look a gift horse in the mouth.

"So how will you buy now?" Alexander then asked, which made the two nobles look at each in askance.

They were now not sure themselves.

Chapter 462 Guests From Sybarsis (Part-3)

Lord Janus never thought the problem he would have to deal with coming here would not be having too little iron but too much.

And so cheap too.

Hence he had to fight against his innate mercantile impulse to buy as much iron as possible.

For the profit margins on them would be truly astronomical.

But given they were at war, he also had to consider that perhaps their limited resources would be better spent elsewhere.

And so Lord Janus and Lady Miranda were seen furtively glancing at one another.

Finally, after a while of consideration, Lord Janus spoke with gritted teeth,

"My lord, we are unable to buy your entire stock. But we would like to buy as much as we can."

"Harold told us that you preferred food, slaves, and draft animals for your transactions. So we will use them." Lord Janus at last determined.

The reason for his decision was that the iron could both be used to fight and sold in foreign markets to raise funds.

"Oh? How much do you have?" Alexander really hoped they had a lot of food.

"We have 10 ships of various grain, vegetables, fruits, and wine, totaling for 3,000 tons.

"We have 5 ships of slaves numbering 2,000."

"And lastly we have 6 ships amounting to 500 horses, donkeys, and mules."

Harold gave the exact numbers and even sounded a bit proud.

This was the first time he had traded in such volumes.

'Sure enough, the nobles do it differently,' He said to himself.

While Alexander was actually a bit disappointed hearing the numbers.

Because the amount of food was much lower than he had expected.

Given the 3,000 tons were not purely grains but a variety of food, Alexander estimated this would let him run another 2 weeks, and that was without mentioning the fresh addition of more people and animals.

But anything was better than nothing.

So Alexander was still happy to accept.

"So much do you want to sell for?" Alexander then asked.

And as an experienced businessman who had been bought here precisely to negotiate this, Harold quickly gave the prices.

"My lord, we were hoping to get 4,500 ropals per ton for the food. 4,500 ropals for each slave. And 1,000 ropal for one animal. That makes everything a total of 27.5 million ropals."

Alexander paused a bit to verify the maths in his head, after which he raised his eyebrow a bit and asked, "Hmmm? The prices seem 10% higher, doesn't it?"

To which Harold gave a loose smile and said,

"But my lord, didn't you list these prices the last time we met?"

Harold was referring to how Alexander had promised to buy the goods at a 10% markup.

But Alexander would not pay more if he could get away with paying less.

And so gave this retort. "And didn't you list iron at 200 ropals?"

Which made Harold's lips twitch and he could not help but inwardly cuss the young lady.

"I will pay the market price for the goods. So let's say a total of 25 million ropals. Which will buy you 500 tons of iron. Agreed?" Alexander then gave his own offer, and after the three looked at each other for a while, and with a nod from Lady Miranda, Janus was there to accept.

"Sure. That seems fair. We accept," He said

They were actually quite satisfied with the trade, because according to them, they had bought at least 75 million ropals worth of goods, netting them around 50 million ropals if they could sell it to the right customer.

So the 2.5 million did not seem too big a deal.

"Great! Then it's agreed! " Alexander gave a loud clap and a large smile signifying the completion of the deal, and finished by saying, "We will get you the things within three days."

The party could finally let out a breath of relief at having secured their weapon materials, and Lady Miranda, who had gone quite quiet after her foible with Alexander, even spoke up in a grateful tone, "Thank you. The Margrave family will not forget your support, my lord."

"No problem," Alexander gave a light smile, and then asked a simple question that had been bothering him, "Though, I have to ask, if you needed iron to make weapons, why didn't you just buy the weapons directly? I heard Sybarsis is a great trading power."

This seemed like a no brainer.

Lady Miranda first gave an awkward smile to this, before quickly hiding it as she did not want to embarrass Alexander.

The reason for the smile was because she could not believe Alexander had not heard of the Margrave family.

And here Harold decided to help the lady out.

"The Margrave family is one of the biggest arms suppliers around here. Everyone buys from them. So...."

He meant to say that they were the ones who sold the weapons.

There was no one to sell them back.

"Oh? Not even Thesos or Tibias? Or the warring states?" But Alexander sounded skeptical.

The world was a large place and given they also sold weapons to these regions, Alexander was sure they would be able to resource some of it.

"*Sigh*, unfortunately, Thesos is too far away to get them quickly. And Tibias does not have enough stocks. So the prices they asked for them was outrageous. We could not afford them."

"We would have gotten them nonetheless if we failed here," Here Lord Janus helped fill Alexander's confusion.

"I see," Alexander understandingly nodded, and then glanced at Lady Miranda to say, "To think I would be in the presence of such a powerful family. I'm honored."

He actually meant what he said, for being someone big enough to supply all the parties in this war-torn era was not anything easy.

This family must have serious muscles behind it.

"Haha," Lady Miranda gave a proud chuckle to this, but then quickly said, "No, no, it is we who should be honored. Our family cannot make 1,000 tons of iron like you can after all, haha"

Lady Miranda's eyes were naturally drawn to that huge amount of iron and its production process, as would anyone's.

And only the civility of meeting Alexander for the first kept her from asking for the details.

"Haha, yes, well I cannot seem to make weapons out of the iron I make. 'Cracks if heated, breaks if beaten' my blacksmiths tell. Alexander lightly chuckled the lie, and then praised, "But my lady seems to have solved that. It seems the Margrave family's smithing skills are truly the best in the world."

The latter was not as big a lie as the former, because if they were indeed able to refine Alexander's 'civilian steel', they had to be given credit for that.

"Oh really?" Lady Miranda sounded genuinely surprised at Alexander's inability to manipulate his steel, and after looking at Lord Janus, she spoke in a doubtful tone, "But I have been told that Lord Alexander's iron is certainly among the best ingots in the market. Who is your blacksmith? What's his experience? Perhaps my lord would like someone from Galiosos?"

She seemed to genuinely offer him that advice.

Which caught Alexander a bit off guard.

For he had never thought his junk steel would be really any good.

Now, Alexander had expected that weapons would be made from even his bad steel.

Because junk or not, it was still good steel made using modern techniques.

But he certainly never expected that it would be much good.

For goodness sake, Alexander would even intentionally add impurities to make it crap.

And if even after that it was said to be one of the best steels in the markets, then Alexander could only blame the abysmal standard of iron smelting of this time period.

And this was in fact the truth, as compared to the blast furnace and Bessemer process, even the best steel of this time was junk.

This was not to just say that the blacksmiths of this world were incompetent, as even the blacksmiths of the middle ages made quite poor steel when compared to modern times, be it the katana, or the even more famous Damascus steel, as chemical analysis of those weapons showed the presence of large amounts of impurities and slags.

But it just went on to show how much quicker and better modern steel-making techniques could make the product.

But it did not mean Alexander's precautions were useless.

Because Lady Miranda had lied a bit here.

Alexander's ingots were indeed not suitable to be made into good weapons, but the blacksmiths' of the Margrave family had been starting to use powered limestone during their hammering process to forge weapons, which would remove some of the impurities such as sulfur and phosphorous in the steel, and enable them to shape the weapons.

This was one of the most highly guarded secrets of the Margrave family which was why Lady Miranda had lied, and though this was nowhere near as efficient and efficacious as Alexander's process, and the weapons would be significantly worse than the latter's, it was good enough.

As a matter of fact, this refining technique was likely the biggest reason the Margrave was able to dominate the arms market of the eastern region of Galiosis and was even among the reasons for the attack against them.

But since Alexander had no idea about this, he simply presumed that the steel-making standards of this time were simply that bad.

And agreed to the deal.

Chapter 463 Guests From Sybarsis (Part-4)

Alexander would have likely sold his iron even if he knew about the technique.

Because he needed to sell his product.

And it would likely be the same product because he could only raise the amount of impurities in steel only so much before it became completely useless.

"Hahaha, thank you for your advice Lady Miranda. I will be sure to," Alexander hence lightly smiled, and quickly decided to steer the topic elsewhere.

Particularly towards the Margraves and Sybarsis in general.

"If you do not mind me asking my lady, seeing as the Margrave family is so powerful, why are you being attacked? Is there any truth to the claims?" Alexander curiously asked.

Though the latter portion could certainly be considered somewhat rude, as he was asking them to their face if they were traitors.

And surprisingly the nobles were frank in their admission.

"The reason for Governor Straus's attack is not due to us trading with Iyizarid, Everyone does that even though that is banned. Even he does it, the swine." Lord Janus cursed the man in a mocking, frustrated voice, before saying, "No, the real reason for his attack is because he wants our land. Simple as that."

Lord Janus could not reveal the truly real reason for the attack, the smelting technique, and the arms market, and gave this secondary reason.

This Alexander bought.

After all, expanding one's territory was an innate desire of every noble.

What was so strange about it?

"Oh? But why now? What changed? What do the other nobles say?" Alexander then followed up on his question.

And here Lady Miranda decided to give a detailed introduction to Sybaris.

She began. "The Straus and Margrave families have always been at odds over the rule of Galiosos. But the reason why they chose to attack us now has to do with some power shifts in our northern mainland. To be precise it is because we lost a few large battles against Iyizarid, resulting in huge territorial losses, but much more importantly for us, the loss of our biggest ally in the mainland."

Lady Miranda here paused to look at Alexander and posed, "As a Thesian, I presume you know Iyizarid? And how aggressive that nation is?"

And Alexander was quick to respond,

"*Nod*, yes, they are theocracy like Adhania, worshiping the dragon god Bahamut. And their core doctrine is an expansion of territory and bringing everyone under their belief." Alexander had learned this short of Lady Miranda of the nation situated between Thesos and Sybaris who aggressively attacked their neighbors from his travels as a mercenary.

Though fortunately, he had never had to fight them

"Yes, that is correct. The red nation we call them after their red uniform" Lady Miranda returned the nod, and then continued, "Recently they have managed to win a great victory against such, and took three provinces, resulting in much losses for us."

"And with these losses sustained, some scapegoat had to be found. And it was, unfortunately, us," The pregnant lady out a helpless sigh saying this.

But quickly got back to the conversation, explaining why it was them.

"You see lord Alexander, Sybarsis is quite different from Adhania from its kings, or even Thesos with its senate."

"Instead the huge country is run by powerful merchant families, with the fourteen most powerful merchant families together forming the confederation council. And as you might have guessed, the heads of each family have a seat in that council."

"They control everything in Syabris and like your pashas, all noble families in Sybarsis and all business undoubtedly belong to one of these families. Naturally, this also includes us, who belong to the Marsh family. They are our ally and backer."

"While Governor Straus belongs to the Kaiser Family."

"And as I said before, the head of the Marsh family, Lord March has died under Iyizarid, 's attack a few weeks ago, along with a large part of his family's army."

"Which not only created a temporary vacancy in the council's seat but also weakened them quite a bit."

"In fact, it was so much so that the Kaiser family used this opportunity to proclaim that the loss Sybarsis suffered was due to us selling weapons to Iyizarid, saying only fine weapons like ours could have enabled Iyizarid to get victory in battle."

"And he then arbitrarily instructed Governor Straus to attack us, his real intent being as a way to drag the March family down. Because we are their biggest weapons supplier."

By the end of it, Lady Miranda sounded weak and helpless, while Alexander was not at all surprised by all the shenanigans.

Another name for politics was being thrown under the bus when it was convenient.

Instead he focused on something else that did not add.

"And the other council members just sat around and let it happen?" He raised his eyebrow in surprise.

"Hmph, they are all scrambling to find a scapegoat. The lands that were lost were fertile farmlands. So we fit it perfectly!" Lord Janus loudly huLady Mirandaed the answer, showing his anger and rage.

"Oh? Why?" But to Alexander that did not make sense.

If there was really only a need for scapegoats, families far smaller and less important could have worked.

If one was not enough, then they could have used a bunch, no problem.

"Because the many nobles who had lost their lands could be moved to Galiosis and the Margrave family's estate. It is a huge conspiracy." Lady Miranda's voice was sounding even weaker.

"I see. That is unfortunate." Alexander only lightly empathized with them, for they were not his problem.

And then posed a deep question, "So how does this end? If it is a conspiracy as you said, then will Sybarsis keep attacking you until they succeed? "

Alexander was basically asking them how long they could hold, and against how many attacks.

Because there was no way for a tiny earldom to defeat the colossus called Sybarsis.

"We have already sent messengers to the March family. They have yet to reply, but they should be getting ready to solve this. We just need to hold on against this attack," Lady Miranda was very quick to answer this, though she sounded more hopeful than certain.

But Alexander did not burst that bubble.

Because maybe everything would work out just as Lady Miranda said.

But as for himself, he much preferred to presume that the Marsh family might be unable to help, or even unwilling.

The former might be simply because of the losses they suffered.

If it was truly bad, even the Margrave family might not be told about it.

While latter might be because of what Lady Miranda had said, that the current head of the Marsh family had died.

And given that the usual custom of the successor taking his mantle had not happened, as evidenced by the confederation seat being vacant, it probably meant that there was no clear line of succession, likely caused by the grave defeat of their army.

This meant that the Kaiser family would certainly be able to interfere in the secession battle of the Marsh family and manipulate any of the candidates into giving up on the Margrave family in exchange for inheriting the family.

Now this was a completely baseless hunch on Alexander's part who had no inside information, but it was certainly possible.

Alexander felt he had heard everything there was to it, and decided it was about time to close up the conversation, so said, "I see. Then I wish you the best of luck in your battle." before offhandedly asking, "So how many troops do you have?"

"...." The duo held their tongue for a while at this sudden question.

This was militarily a very sensitive question after all.

What if Alexander sold this information to the other side?

And realizing this, Alexander quickly apologized, "Ahh, sorry, sorry, I misspoke...did not mean to pry."

But Lady Miranda at last sweetly smiled and said, "Thank you for understanding."

"But we see you as our friend. So we can tell you that we had originally planned to field 50,000 men. But now with your iron, we can recruit even more."

"So much? Are Sybarsis earl's so rich?" Alexander was truly surprised by the coated numbers as he saw such digits belonging to a Matbar (Marquiss).

So he asked, "Am I mistaken to assume that earls are equal to the Jamiders of Adhania? Or are they equal to Matbars?"

"Hahaha, no you are not mistaken, my lord. Jamiders and Earl are of similar peerage rank." Lady Miranda chuckled.

"But we are simply an Earl because if we wanted to go to the next stage- Marquiss, we would either have to defend a piece of territory either against Iyizarid in the north or the Numadian in the south."

"We simply do not want to do that."

"While becoming a duke requires acquiring enough wealth and the approval of a majority of council members. And as you have guessed, only the fourteen members have that title."

"So that title has too much behind the shadow politics and only the realistic way to get it is to kill one of the fourteen."

"As such, we are satisfied with being an earl. With this, we might not be politically too high but we are free-er."

"And in terms of land, men, and resources, the Margrave family can rival most Adhanian Pashas, hehe," Lady Lady Miranda sounded both proud and sad as she said so.

Proud of her family's wealth but also sad at what that wealth had suddenly brought them.

Chapter 464 Guests From Sybarsis (Part-5)

Alexander found the claimed land and wealth the Margrave family controlled to be certainly impressive.

"I see. Thank you for clarifying," Alexander gratefully nodded, and then thinking of a long-term strategy regarding building a relationship with his family, could not help but pose, 'Then might I interest you in a special bow that would be great against sieges?'"

Here he was not actually referring to the crossbow but the instant bow.

He actually wanted to use this opportunity to test out his brand-new toy.

And as for the technology landing into other's hands, Alexander had already accepted that fate as the hand-to-hand, close-quarters nature of warfare had made that a foregone conclusion.

And his only hope was to have better-trained men and better-quality bows.

"Oh? Is that the special bow you used to win against the Jahal mercenaries? We have indeed heard of it," Lord Janus did not disappoint Alexander with his intelligence network, and alluded to the fact that he already about the crossbow.

And Alexander was beginning was understand why.

Because the Margrave family was an arms family with clients everywhere.

He would not be surprised if even DJose did business with them before and had people there.

"Yes, there is that. But we also have another type," Alexander mysteriously answered with a smile, and then proposed, "Perhaps it would be better to show you. Does tomorrow work?"

"Of course. We would love to," It was Lady Margaret who replied in a heartbeat, for she was quite eager to get every advantage she could get.

And thus they again met up at the garden behind Alexander's manor the next day after lunch.

First Alexander showcased the crossbow.

There were several targets situated at various distances which were shot at by a few of his bodyguards using the crossbow as they mechanically aimed, shot, reloaded, and repeated the process multiple times.

While Alexander introduced the system,

"As you can see, the weapon's main advantage is that it can allow even a peasant to shoot with the range and accuracy of an experienced archer. Very good to turn useless peasants into good soldiers quickly and cheaply." Alexander sounded like a salesman.

"And as for its downside of the slow reloading time, well if you are defending a siege, it is not a problem. You can take your time behind the safety of the fort."

"Which leaves only the cost. The bow is made of iron or steel, which makes the things a bit on the pricier side."

Alexander shot a very knowing gaze at his two guests, indicating they would not be cheap.

But the duo did not care.

Particularly it was Lord Janus who was over the moon, and understanding the military potential of turning raw recruits into expert sharpshooters, excited shouted,

"How much? How much is it? No! We will buy it regardless!"

This type of weapon was exactly what they needed and he could not wait to buy it.

Even one would be enough because after that their blacksmiths would be easily able to replicate it.

"Haha, well let us wait till I show you the next weapon," Alexander only chuckled, as he then bought out the next demonstration, the instant bow.

And the following barrage of ten men shooting nonstop and creating a wall of arrows that shredded the straw duLady Margareties left the two gaping nobles in awe.

In fact, Lord Janus for some time could not find the words to speak.

"This bow is complete of the crossbow. Rapid firing and to be used by skilled men, it is ideal for holding small passages and narrow spaces around a fort. We call it the instant bow" Alexander gave the sales speech, and finished by saying,

"With this, you can guard critical points with only a few men, and let the remaining reinforce the more exposed places. It is quite the nice tool."

"Yes. We will buy it," And got this, almost absent-minded answer from Lord Janus.

Because the man still felt what he had seen was a dream.

The showcase was that effective.

"Haha, I'm sorry Lord Janus, but I never got to know your relationship with Lady Margaret. May I?" Alexander in return lightly asked this with a chuckle.

But what he was actually saying was that he wanted to talk to Lady Margaret regarding this.

And the beautiful lady with raven hair understood this, as she stepped forward and said, "Uncle Janus has been my father's right-hand man and the head of our army for decades. Regarding the military, his words are my words."

"I see. But what if the sale of these weapons is not military but political." Alexander suddenly posed with a light smile, one which drew caution and apprehension from the lady, while anger and aggression from Lord Janus.

"What do you mean by that Lord Alexander?" The older man sounded hoarse and enraged, like a tiger whose tail had been stepped on.

He was off the mind that Alexander was eyeing the now available Margaret.

While Alexander treated the loud outburst as if it was a light breeze, and sent a teasing glance to say,

"What I mean is that in exchange for these weapons, I want a free trade agreement with your family. So no tariffs and no taxes....for twenty years."

This was the play he had targeting towards since he offered to show the weapons yesterday, and thus, he expectantly asked the pregnant lady.

"As the eldest member of your family, you can at least get me that much can't you?"

"Twenty years? Are you mad?" But even before Lady Margaret could respond, from the side Lord Janus furrowed his eyebrows and exclaimed in anger.

This was clearly Alexander taking advantage of them.

But Alexander reasoned, "Without these weapons, perhaps you will not be alive after twenty weeks. So why worry about that now? Is your survival not the greatest concern?"

This reminder made the duo a bit poignant, as they really could use these convenient tools.

"...th...that...uLady Margaret, still, I cannot make that decision now." But Lady Margaret was still unable to give a definitive answer.

And this made Alexander ask, "Oh? Not even when your family's survival is at stake?"

"Is your family authority that divided? What? Is there a power-hungry uncle?"

"....." Lady Margaret only stayed quiet, not preferring to discuss her family situation with an outsider.

But the silence was enough to make Alexander understand there were major complications.

It was likely the family would disintegrate even without the attack.

And so he decided to give up on the family, "Okay, I understand. I wish you all the best in your war."

He said in a final way, indicating the talks were over.

"Wait!" But Lady Margaret seemed to be of a different mind.

"I cannot guarantee that I can get you the trade agreement. But I will do it if I become the family head. So please!" She pleaded and even bowed her head a bit.

The poor woman had no other card in her hands.

"..." Alexander paused and turned to give the lady a solemn look.

He did not say anything cliché like, 'And if you can't?'

The lady was clearly asking for an investment, one where one had the chance to win or lose.

And from what he seemed to gather, the chance for her to lose was much greater.

But then Alexander saw his own situation, about how he was surrounded by enemies on all sides, and ultimately decided he really could not afford to play it safe.

"Okay. I will."

Alexander's short answer sounded like music to her ears, and the lady lifted her head with shock and surprise, for she did not think it would be this easy, which rapidly transformed into glee and relief.

"Thank you, thank you. We will not disappoint you," And quickly words of gratitude began to flow out.

"But there is one condition." Alexander abruptly interrupted her, and then listed it a wary woman,

"And that is that you will not replicate them or sell them to another party without my express permission."

"I want you to swear it by the gods."

This was Alexander's production and transfer embargo.

The reason for which was obvious.

"Done."

And to which Lady Margaret agreed in a heartbeat.

When Alexander had said he had a condition, the lady dreaded he would want to lay with her.

And so this reasonable request was nothing.

And thus, with that, the fruitful meeting came to an end.

The nobles then spent the next day determining how many crossbows and instant bows would Alexander allow them to make, after which he took them on a tour around Zanzan, and showed them many of its wonders, like paper, soap, glass, etc, all selling by the shop counters owned by Alexander.

And all of which were bought by Lady Margaret in small quantities.

It was here that Lady Miranda was at last beginning to truly see Alexander's true potential, and by the end of the day, her attitude towards Alexander had very much changed.

Which was perhaps best illustrated on the day of their departure.

"My lord, once we win, I will be sure to come and visit you, Please pray for me, *chuu*," The lady then suddenly gave a very daringly peck to the cheeks, before pulling a flushed face and turning her head rapidly away to board her ships, much to Alexander's surprise and the dismay of one Janus.

It appeared for whatever pragmatic or emotional reason, the lady expressed her desire to pursue a romantic relationship with him.

Chapter 465 Harbor Renovation

As the ships sailed off, Lord Janus turned his head from looking at the harbor to glance at the back of his mistress with a complicated face.

"My lady, are you sure?" His question was filled with concern and doubt.

Trying to ally with such an unknown individual with no background and an unknown history seemed very dangerous to him.

"....." Lady Miranda only stayed quiet, simply clutching her swollen belly and looking down at it.

It seemed she felt allying herself with Alexander gave her and her unborn child the best chance to survive.

The house politics going on in her family were about to turn very nasty.

And she needed every ounce of help she could get.

And Alexander was the only one she had.

Though whether Alexander would actually extend that hand was yet unsaid.

As was how Alexander's territory would be affected by his aiding the Margrave against Sybarsis.

Only time would tell.

For now though, Alexander turned his attention to the harbor, or more importantly the expansion of it.

He had felt the inadequacy of it in the prior days, and he also wanted to create his own navy, which would need special docks.

To this effect, he raised the concern to his council members.

But before he brought up the most important thing.

"My lords, we are running low on money. What are we going to do about that?" Alexander addressed in one of his morning council meetings.

Which made everyone look at each other.

Because they certainly had not the capital to contribute.

Or at least contribute meaningfully as compared to Alexander they were beggars.

But Alexander could no longer let this situation go on, as he pointed out,

"Up until now, I have paid 700 million ropals from my pocket for Zanzan. And every day I pay even more to cover everything, from the food to everyone's salaries."

"This cannot go. And I wanted to talk about that." Alexander spread out his palms and gestured, symbolizing his destitution.

Zanzan currently was entirely a government-funded entity, or even more specifically entirely funded by Alexander.

And Alexander could not be expected to fund everything by himself, as he had done in the last six months.

"Does my lord want to raise taxes?" Heliptos really had that one trick up his sleeve.

To which Alexander inwardly scoffed.

Increase taxes for whom?

There were only two real types of tax in this world, a sales tax, akin to VAT, and a land tax.

If Alexander were to increase the sales tax, he would be taxing himself as it was him who made much of the products like iron, cement, bricks, etc.

As for increasing land tax, that was a landmine he was not willing to touch with a ten-mile pole.

They had just recovered from a brought and increasing taxes immediately would be far too unpopular.

Maybe a few years into the line.

And besides, again, it was Alexander who owned almost all the planted farmland.

So by raising taxes, he would just be increasing the price of his own goods.

And as for increasing the taxes of the nobles, if Alexander proposed it, Heliptos might be the first one to revolt.

Other types of taxes like income tax and capital gains tax did not exist as they were modern inventions.

For example, in the US, income tax was implemented in 1913, which was enabled by the invention of modern tools and institutions.

But since those did not exist yet, so in this time period personal earning was simply too hard to keep accurate track of.

Thus Alexander was left with two rudimentary tax options, neither of which he could raise.

"There is no point in increasing taxes. Who are we going to tax? Ourselves?" Alexander loudly shut down Heliptos, as he then proposed, "No! What we need is people from outside buying our goods. We need to attract more merchants,"

This got a unanimous nod from the others, for more trade meant more sales tax, following which Alexander then posed,

"And so to expand the volume of trade, I wish to expand the harbor. I had noticed it was getting a bit crowded here and I believe a better port will attract more merchants." He raised the issue of the dock's capacity to the group, looking around for their thoughts.

And Heliptos, who was put in charge of the port as part of his economic minister duty, responded first, "Hmmm, yes. Though I think it is adequate for the time being my lord. Perhaps we can expand it once a few merchants starts coming." he seemed to cleverly object to the plans, reasoning, "The only frequent ships who come to us are from the nearby villages. They are quite small in total numbers."

"And the recent large number of vessels from Adhania and Sybarsis was really an oddity."

He did not seem to share Alexander's concern and had correctly guessed that Alexander came up with this idea after seeing the recent congestion in the ports.

Heliptos was the type to solve problems when they arose.

"This is only for now. But soon our specialties will be known to all those around us. Then the small port will be not able to accommodate that, now will it? Alexander posed.

"So why wait till later? Now that the harbor is relatively quiet and traffic is light, is it not the best time to expand it?" To Alexander it seemed like a no-brainer.

While for the group of council members, they had no problem imagining that the specialties Alexander created would have no shortage of buyers in the near time future.

Heck, even if there were, they would be glad to purchase all of them for themselves.

But they did have a problem imagining the current port being small and inadequate, at least for the near time future.

"Small? The harbor is 300 meters wide sire. Sure it's no Kaisos, but it's still quite large!" Heliptos sounded incredulous and compared, "It would easily be one of the bigger ports in Thesos if placed there."

Kaisos was the port area of Cantagena, one of the largest regional trading hubs, and if Alexander was comparing that to Zanzan, now and here, then there was a problem with his head.

A view that seemed to be shared by many.

A port that could service 15 to 20 ships at a time seemed to be very large for them.

"*Ahem*". And so with his signature cough, Menicus felt he should express the joint decision of the council, where he said, "My lord, I think we can wait on the docks. Let us wait a few more years until the shipping volume increases a bit."

But for Alexander, who saw these 15 to 20-m-long ships with less than 10-meter beams as quite small, he felt the 300m harbor as tiny.

He wanted to build much bigger ships and had much grander plans.

And so he made his case, "We just suffered a naval blockade. And if we had not won that battle, we would have all been killed or starved. So it is imperative that we build up a navy. For which we need new docks."

"Am I right?" He pointedly asked.

Here Alexander not actually asking, but saying.

Pasha Muazz had built few ship-building facilities here in Zanzan as he much preferred to buy naval ships from Adhan.

But that was not an option for Alexander who was very much eager to develop his own shipping industry.

"Yes. That is true. We do need a navy," Menicus heavily nodded as the group's representative, but then said, "But we do not need it right now,"

"After your recent win, we have at least 5 years in our hands. We can use that. And slowly build the navy up. There is no need for it right here and now."

He seemed to be of the opinion that the resources to be used for extending the port and building the navy were better off being used elsewhere.

While Helipots chimed, "I agree with Lord Melodias. We have time. Besides maintaining a navy is very expensive. One needs experienced sailors who demand 250 to 300 ropals a month. That is not to mention the ships themselves. We neither have the men nor coin right now. You yourself it said, my lord."

Alexander was now only reminded that the original talks were about money.

But just as he was about to track back to that, Diaogosis suddenly spoke up,

"My lords, may we see the proposed designs first? If it's some small renovations, perhaps we can accommodate it."

He wanted to at least get a sense of Alexander's scale.

And he was not disappointed by Alexander's ambition, who passed along a large scrolled paper, that he quickly unfolded.

The picture on it was of the current crescent-shaped harbor placed in the middle, with two long horizontal strips of land touching its edges and running far into the sea.

From above the sky, the whole thing kind of looked like a ball which had two flat sticks attached to its either end.

But what really gave the project its grand ambitions were the numbers written next to them, denoting their dimensions.

The plans labeled the crescent crest-shaped harbor as 500m wide, meaning the harbor would have to be extended, while each of the two horizontal strips read 500m long and 50m wide.

Truly Alexander did not dream small.

Chapter 466 Slave Reforms

Alexander had designed the harbor using the exact same blueprint as the famous harbor of Carthage.

And as Diaogosis was interpreting the drawings, Alexander leaned forward and offered, "Here, let me explain,"

"The center crescent will be used to house military ships. It will be 300 m in diameter and be surrounded on all sides by 10ft walls. Its entrance will be guarded using chained gates that can be raised or lowered and this is where we will build our new ships."

He then moved his fingers to the horizontal strips and said, "And these two strips of the harbor will be where the regular, civilian ships will dock. They will be an artificial construct extending half a kilometer into the sea and will be able to hold more than a 100 ships at a time."

Alexander sounded very proud of his design as he then asked Diaogosis, "So if I give you the 2,000 slaves I bought, how long do you think it will take you to build?"

"..." Diaogosis somewhat regretted asking to see the design.

Building anything over the water was hard, building anything over the sea with its waves and natural disasters was even harder.

Never mind it would have to be about a kilometer of land the width of a football field.

And if they did not have cement, Diaogosis would have simply told him it was impossible.

But given that they did have that, that was not exactly an option.

"...I will have to look at the site first. Figure out the depth of the water and as such," So finally after a long pause, Diaogosis could only reply this.

While the others seeing their words fall on deaf ears could only sigh.

They had tried, but it seemed Alexander had decided to go ahead with this new port nevertheless.

The building of which they all felt was pretty pointless.

All were of the mind that rather than wasting their meager resources on building a half-assed navy or making a giant port that would most likely only to 10% of its capacity in most days, it would be far better for them to concentrate their efforts on building a strong army first.

That way they would have one very strong force rather than two weak forces.

But Alexander held too much prestige and power among the council members.

And he controlled all the factors of production, land, labor, and capital.

And so when Alexander really wanted something done, the others really had no way to stop it other than with their mouths.

And Alexander really wanted this port because he had plans the others could not even imagine.

And so to that effect, he moved Diaogosis from overseeing the construction of the residential buildings to tasking him with building the port.

And after a week later, Diaogosis would come to Alexander with the finding of his survey, stating that with 2,000 men it would take him around 18,000 tons of cement and about two and a half to finish the whole project."

This put the cost of the at around 12 million ropals, which was quite a lot, but Alexander thought was definitely worth it.

And thus, after allocating the construction effort 25 tons of cement a day, Alexander greenlighted the project, which was scheduled to be finished by the winter of next year.

But these decisions were for future Alexander.

Though for now, after revealing his grand port idea much to the dismay of this council members, the man decided to get to the issue of money

"So! Let us go back to the issue at hand. How to raise money? Or rather how to increase the businesses in the city?" He posed this question to everyone.

And most wanted to retort, 'Stopping that port might be a good idea.'

But since that was not an option, Heliptos, being the expert here pointed out the main obstacles, "My lord, I believe we just need some time. Zanzan is just starting to recover and patience is the most important thing. Everything requires time."

He was right about this.

The new Zanzan was still an infant just six months.

So it would be unreasonable to expect it to be a hustling trading hub right now.

Hence the simplest solution would be to wait.

But getting to know his master a bit more the time, Heliptos was sure this answer might not satisfy this young man.

Alexander had a lot of good qualities, but one bad one was his impatience and tendency to do everything at once.

And this was evidenced by all the huge projects that were simultaneously going on currently.

So Heliptos decided to give him some secondary reasons.

He said, "Besides, after the drought, most people have lost all their life savings. They simply have no capital to start a business."

"And lastly we have a lot of slaves who earn no wages. So they cannot spend any money. As such that group of hard-working people is not part of the economy."

Heliptos's competency to identify the limiting factors in the market frankly impressed Alexander.

"Hmmm, I see," Alexander tapped his fingers on the table as he nodded, while trying to figure out the remedy for this conundrum.

The lack of easy availability of capital made him remember how there were no banks at this time, which made it very hard for anyone to start a business.

So if one truly wanted to, he would have to either raise the capital himself, such as by working, or selling property, or the worst option of it all, by borrowing it from loan sharks.

These people were usually nobles or affiliated with ones, and would charge them an astronomical 20 to 30% interest rates, the failure on the repayments of which would either result in death or enslavement.

And if you died before you could pay them back, no worries, your sons and daughters will have to bear the cost.

These made setting up businesses really unpopular, which stifled the economy.

So Alexander felt he should set up a bank.

After all, his 300 million ropals were still sitting in his treasury gathering dust.

The others could certainly use some of it.

But then the question arose who would get to run it?

He certainly was not going to let Heliptos get his hands on it.

Or any of his retainers for that matter.

What if they embezzle the money?

Or worse waste it in foolish loans.

No, Alexander would have to be hit on the head by a donkey to give access to his cash to such novel rich whose self-control towards money could be said to be non-existent.

But then again, who else?

All of his girls were too busy to take on another job.

And so for the time being, Alexander decided to put that thought onto the shelf.

So secondly came the issue of the slaves.

"How many slaves do we have again?" He asked as he lost track of the numbers, and after adding each of the answers, got the answer as 22,000 bought, 1,000 captured as criminals, and 8,000 as POWs.

"Hmmm, for the 22,000 how about this?" With a bit of thought, Alexander firstly proposed dealing with the most innocent group, "They can either choose to work as slaves for 5 years. Or they can choose to become free men right now, but they would have to pay 40 ropals a month for fifteen years?"

If one did the maths, he would find the five years as a much better option.

You got food and a house and no expenses.

But Alexander was sure most would choose the 15 years.

Because 'freedom'.

"That.....um...40 ropals might be too much my lord," Heliptos felt that demanding more than a quarter of a man's wage might be too steep.

Living in a city was inherently more expensive and so he felt that even if the slaves wanted to, they might not be able to afford the plan.

And besides, if the plan was to boost the economy by increasing consumption, slapping a 40 ropal 'mortgage' was no way to do it.

"Then make it 30," Alexander lowed the value,

He knew Heliptos was hoping that he would free the slaves, but Alexander felt giving anything for free to anyone was stupid.

He would bet his head that if he simply set them free, these people would not cherish their freedom and be grateful to him as much as they would if he let them buy it.

After all, many saw free things not as priceless, but useless.

But Alexander did plan to increase the minimum wages to 200 ropals, which he felt would be able to compensate somewhat.

But those were for later years, so when Heliptos grumbled even that might not be enough, Alexander simply said,

"Then tell the men to marry a good, earning working woman. We have lots of jobs here for them, like paper makers and tailors."

"And if someone really wants to, they can always work in construction, brick making, or coal briquettes."

Alexander felt that instead of holding women up, they should work.

And the current policies should incentive that a lot.

Alexander did not talk about the other 10,000 who were either hardened criminals and POWs, both of whom were not suitable to be released.

Maybe in the future.

And so, after answering the question 'What would happen if the slaves cannot pay back their dues' with 'They will have to serve their remaining term,' the council meeting came to an end.

Chapter 467 Lady Margaret's Obstacles

After leaving Alexander's port, Lady Margaret made several stops along her return journey, mainly stopping around the various ports of Tibias, where she mostly traded iron for some food, weapons, and men, mainly hiring a few thousand mercenaries.

And finally finished, she at last reached Lord Janus's city of Hamson.

"Margaret, you are back!" A small crowd greeted her as she entered their temporary residence, led by an old gentleman in fine clothes, but weak health.

This was the current head of the house- Earl Margrave IV, who had temporarily taken over after his eldest son and eldest grandson's death.

A blow that the old man had taken pretty hard as evidenced by how much weaker he had become since before and how he had to clutch his cane with all his strength to stand.

"Grandpa! Why are you here? You should be resting!" Lady Margaret ran up to hug the old man with a large smile, while the old man kind of rebuked himself,

"Nonsense! Whereas my 7-month pregnant daughter is running around trying to save these old bones, here I'm rotting away in my bed, This is the least I can do."

The Earl was a strong man before the disaster but had suddenly suffered a few consecutive strokes following the disaster, thus making him unable to move around much.

After greeting her grandfather, Lady Margaret moved on to complete her pleasantries with her other family members, which included her surviving siblings, cousins, and close retainers.

All of whom had been very worried that she might not even return.

While Lady Margaret was happy to see her family members and these greetings should have been a pleasant affair, but unfortunately they were not, for they once again reminded her of the people she lost.

There were a lot of people missing from this lineup after all.

Her elder brothers, sisters, cousins, and parents, to name just a few.

Lady Margaret was in fact the third youngest daughter by birth, but the hurricane had not only flooded her city and killed tens of thousands, but it had also crashed an entire tree into a wing of her family house, caving it in, and killing a lot of people there.

And unfortunately for her, many of her siblings lived in that quarter, most of whom died as a result.

And the main reason Lady Margaret escaped relatively unscathed was because she and her husband lived in a separate manor a few blocks away.

But this survival was bittersweet.

For with her father and most of her brothers dead, and the ones still alive being children, she was left to take up the helm, and to her it felt as though even if she was not killed, she was thrust into a pitch-black nightmare.

A fate she sometimes felt was worse than death.

And this nightmare had started right after the devastating hurricane came and the ensuing tidal waves destroyed her whole world, which now to her seemed like a blissful lie.

When the waters started entering her house, she first ran to the second floor, and when even that started getting flooded, her servants had fashioned a makeshift raft out of some wooden planks for her to get out.

And as she had sailed out, she still vividly remembers with uncomfortable clarity how the streets were filled up to her hips in water, and dead, rotting bodies of humans and animals were seen floating all around her like they were the vengeful ghosts of the deceased, blaming her for all their misfortunes.

People had lost their everything in the swirling tide and now were destitute, with no food or access to clean drinking water, as they simply looked up into the sky with utter helplessness.

They knew they were on their own as it was unlikely any aid was going to come to them anytime soon.

While for Lady Margaret, when she had arrived at her family homes, she found the place to be in total chaos, with houses destroyed, trees uprooted, and the servants running around without knowing what to do.

It took her three days to get everything under control, after which they quickly evacuated the city, because arguably the worst event was about to start- the plague.

This was typical as the bloating, rotting corpse and the lack of fresh water was the perfect starting condition for starting an epidemic, one that would last for months if not years.

But for the Margrave family, this escape would provide little relief, as soon after reaching Hamson, they would get the news that the governor had initiated a general levy.

It was evident he intended to finish the job once the water had receded, and his family was ready to march.

Which left the Margrave's little time to prepare.

And with her grandfather suffering several strokes in the meantime, it was left to the green lady who was totally out of her depths to try and navigate the murky water of Sybarsis politics and save her family.

A task that she was handed over almost overnight.

And given how poorly she had handled the negotiations with Alexander, though she managed to get the goods, if not for someone like Alexander, who had his own consideration, she would have ended ending up losing her family even before Straus could march on them.

But it seemed luck was on her side, so she lived to fight another day.

And after the pleasantries and dinner, she met her grandfather in his study to slowly tell him about her journey.

".....and so he says he wants a free trade agreement with us," Lady Margaret finished

"HLady MargaretLady Margaret, you did well getting so much iron, Margaret. It will greatly help up restart our industry," The Earl first heaved a sigh of relief at obtaining the stockpile of iron.

Their most productive mines had been flooded, and who knew how long it would take for the water to recede.

So, Alexander's iron would greatly help them in that regard.

And then the old man turned his interest to Alexander's request.

"Getting a free trade agreement is not possible." And he iLady Margaret immediately shut it down, pointing "Say nothing of having never signed one in our history, just the political ramifications of signing something like that with Adhania of all places is a political fiasco we cannot even imagine."

It seems Alexander was wrong about the presence of a jealous uncle.

In fact, it had more to do with Sybarsis's general trade policies, which were simply biased against Adhania due to history, and so any kind of trade agreement with it had national security concerns that required it to be approved by a majority of confederation members.

And these were just trade agreements.

Say nothing of the free agreements, which were almost impossible to get, as there was another great factor at play, which was that every single import in Sybarsis had a kind of VAT attached to it.

This amount would directly go to one of the fourteen families, and so signing any free trade agreement would be a great loss for them.

In fact, these families were so protective of their income that they even had men in every major of their empire, whose job was to tax all the goods coming in, meaning Alexander's chances of getting a free trade agreement were nil.

Which was the real reason Lady Margaret had rejected Alexander's offer and then stayed quiet when asked about family troubles.

Not out of shame, but because she feared that if Alexander knew that it was a national thing rather than a family trouble, which would have been much, much easier to solve, it was likely he would choose to back out.

"But Grandpa! You saw all the things I bought! They..." Still, Lady Margaret felt that Alexander was different and wanted to say he was an exception, but was cut off with a sigh from the Earl.

"*Sigh*, yes, I have seen all the new things. And will admit they are very nice. Just one or two would have been already very impressive, never mind all at one once." The man nodded, before continuing,

"And any merchant will want to form a good relationship with them. Even if it means twisting a few laws."

Up until now, he seemed to be in the same camp as Lady Margaret.

But then his tone shifted to a kind of prescient one, "But so many valuable things coming out of such a small place will undoubtedly bring the attention of jealous eyes."

"So, trying to ally oneself with someone who might not exist in a few years is not prudent Margaret."

"You cannot just look at the money pile now. Instead, you should be able to look at deals from a few years in the future." He advised.

The old man was of the opinion that Alexander would be destroyed like how a beggar is killed for possessing a pearl necklace.

"But he has won that great battle! And so many more before that! How else can a slave become a pasha? Lady Margaret cried this in her defense.

But the old earl was not convinced.

Even if Alexander won so many times, it would take just one loss for him to lose it all.

He thought

But seeing his granddaughter so agitated, he did not outright deny her, but said, "Okay, though we cannot make a formal trade agreement, if you can get us the permission to produce that new bow, we can discuss it further."

And then quickly finished the conversation by feigning weakness and saying, "Let us wait and win before discussing this further."

Chapter 468 Battle Of Hamson

Lady Margaret and her grandfather talked a few more times in the following days.

But though the old earl was full of praises of all the stuff Alxx had invented, saying things such as:

"This new 'paper' will certainly replace the papyrus."

"The soaps will be a hit with all kinds of nobility."

"These glasswares must be made by the gods," and

"This 'sugar' will likely start wars,"

He still refused to entertain the idea.

To him, this Alexander seemed to have too many good things with too little to protect himself.

But finally, after hearing a lot of whining from Margaret, the old man at last promised that he would consider it his Margaret could become Mother Earl.

This basically meant if Margaret gave birth to a boy, then the earl could consider naming the child his heir.

And then, being the Earl regent, it would give Margaret a lot of privileges, as she would be able to rule on her son's behalf until he came of age and was ready to take the family seat.

And this selection was likely to be held soon, for the old earl was very possibly on this earth not for long.

But if she could not, well then tough luck, the Margrave family had a lot of candidates for that position, ranging from the old earl's other sons to even some of his great-grandsons.

But before anything like that could happen, they would have to first win the upcoming battle.

So each busied themselves with their own business in preparation for that.

Margaret focused on learning the family business, after a while of which she fell ill, experiencing stomach cramps as the end of her pregnancy drew near, and decided to rest.

While the Earl gave himself no such luxury as he busied himself in bolstering the city's defenses with the help of Janus.

And as they called up the levies and prepared the weapons and armor, they also remembered to particularly focus on the crossbows, which they marveled at and praised to the high heavens.

It was truly a revolutionary weapon for those with the eyes to discern it.

And with that intention, the Margrave family certainly lived up to their pedigree as a weapons family, as even Hamson, a city that was not at the core of their territory still had a pretty robust blacksmithing industry which, along with its nearby settlements gave them the ability to churn these bad boys out very quickly.

And once the weapons were ready, they were moved to train the peasantry on their use, a task the average Joe took little time to master.

In this way, the bows were built, arrows fletched, levies called up, and defense plans made, as the Margrave family trained and bolstered itself, until after around two months, the big day finally came.

The Margrave scouts had detected Governor Straus's troops some days ago, who numbered close to 100,000 and after crossing the countryside, soon this huge force was staring down the walls of Hamson.

"Let's move out,"

In response, Lord Janus, who was given overall command of the army given the aged Earl's deteriorating health, gave the order for his troops to sally out of the city and take defensive positions behind a wide trench dug out outside the city, as he intended to make their stand there, not in the confines of the walls, but immediately in front of it.

His main reason for not using the city walls as bulwarks was due to them being too short and thin.

The reason for this was because Hamson was not a big city prior to the disaster, as it was relatively in the center of the Margrave territory, and so it never had any great reason to develop a robust set of fortifications.

And it was simply not possible to build a great wall in two short months unless you had cement like Alexander's.

Thus, Lord Janus felt that it would be simply better for them to have a long deep, ditch on all three sides outside the city rather than defend a flimsy wall.

With this thought, once the Margraves were out of the city, Lord Janus arranged his phalanx in a kind of hollow square formation, minus the back line because the city was to the back of them, and had five rows of spears spreading out in three directions.

The idea seemed to be to make the enemy face an impenetrable wall of spears and an impassable terrain, which would force them to give up.

Or that was what it seemed to be the Margrave's plan from the enemy's perspective.

First Governor Straus rode out of the front of the army and gave his standard ultimatum to stand down and urged the soldiers to hand over the traitors, following the failure of which he ordered his own phalanx to charge, intending to make the opponent rout using brute force and overcome the obstacles that way.

But it was upon this order that the Marquiss was greeted with the surprise Margraves had set up for him, as when Straus's soldiers approached the defending men, they were quickly greeted with a shower of arrows that came from the walls.

Yes, Lord Janus had placed his crossbowmen above the city walls, giving them extra range and reach, not to mention the safety of the walls, from which they would launch volley after volley of deadly, accurate projectiles, with little fear of being hit back.

"Fuck! When did they have such good archers? Mercenaries?" And once the casualties in Straus's army began to rise, he began to gaze at the walls hatefully.

But that was all he could do.

For the higher elevation of the archers gave them a range advantage he was simply unable to match.

So the Marquiss could only ask his phalanx units to repeatedly charged at the entrenches troops, hoping to break the formation that way.

But the Margraves held, partly bolstered by the defensive structures, but more importantly, by the sight of their enemies dying in front of them from what seemed to them like judgment from the heavens.

This scene seemed to really energize the men.

So much so that even cavalry charges seemed to have little effect, as the men held tightly and firmly.

Instead, it was Straus who appeared to lose considerable men in those attacks, as the bunched-up light cavalry units, who provided a bigger target area due to the steeds they rode, revealed themselves as perfect targets for concentrated arrow fire.

An attack that was made much deadlier as Lord Janus had placed some of his most experienced men at the walls, who were there to act as leaders and commanders, tasked with guiding the inexperienced peasants on where to aim and where to concentrate fire.

Thus those charges proved to be very bloody for Straus, so much so that he had to call back all his riders till the end of the battle.

And that was how the first day ended.

After which he tried again the next day, now with just his infantry.

Or it would seem, as his real plan was to use only a thin line to hold the frontlines while diverting most of his forces to attack the other unguarded portions of the walls.

In this way, he intended to get a breakthrough there, or at least lure the Margraves out of their trenches for a decisive battle in the open.

But that plan also failed.

He had grossly underestimated the power of the crossbow, and the fire Straus's men faced was withering.

The simple ladder rushes were easily repelled, and Straus had no other siege options as he had not brought heavy siege equipment like siege engines in the fight, thinking it would be a cakewalk.

And even if he had, it was unlikely he would have been able to deploy it in battle because the Margrave army was still present, and they would have certainly attacked the structure when it was being built.

So, the second day's attempt failed as well.

But Governor Straus was anything if not a determined man.

And so he thinned out his frontlines even more the next day, and committed much more men to the headlong rush, intending to simply overcome the incoming arrow fire by just absorbing it using the bodies of his men.

And for some time it seemed to be working.

The walls seemed to be under serious pressure, and sections of the rampart appeared to be on the verge of being lost.

And it appeared Governor Straus would have his long-awaited victory.

But alas, then the counterattack came.

For Governor Straus, either in his hubris or negligence, had pulled too many troops away from the frontlines, giving Lord Janus a rare opportunity to counterattack.

And the experienced general instantly grasped it by the neck, breaking out of his defensive position to attack the thinly defended first lines, easily routing it through a simple frontline charge, and then swinging his entire army around to hit the flanks of the preoccupied wall attacks.

And all this while, Straus, who had momentarily lost contact and communication with his units as he preoccupied himself with his imminent victory, simply had no idea what hit him until Janus was already attacking.

This general was able to create a kind of hammer and anvil pincher attack using the flanking attack, the hammer being him and the anvil the city walls, and the resulting managed to deal large casualties to the army and inflicting great morale loss, which culminated in a full fledged rout.

Thus the battle of Hamson was over.

Chapter 469 Zanzan's Spring

The Margraves had not only won the battle.

And it was just not a decisive win.

No.

For as if the gods were compensating them for their recent misfortune, in the ensuing flanking attack, the biggest fish out there, Straus, was injured and even captured.

What a catch!

The man was then interrogated about the real political maneuvering going on in the mainland against them, but he simply refused to open his mouth.

And with him being a high-ranking noble, the Margrave's did not dare to raise their hand on him, restricting their interrogation techniques to only denying the man food and particularly water.

This soft approach was applied because the public opinion was still neutral, and if the Margrave were to assault a noble like Straus, a gaint Sybarsis navy coming to greet them was entirely possible.

The Margraves were not that powerful.

So the topic then was moved to the issue of his freedom, where in exchange for his release, he was asked to cease all hostility against the Margraves.

But that was rejected as Straus claimed it to be out of his control, for the real masterminds were the confederation members.

And so finally the deal was then changed to make him swear that he would remain neutral for the next ten years in the event of a conflict between Margrave and other Sybarsis powers, as well as being required to pay 200 million ropals, a true king's ransom as this was equal to 4 tons of gold, or about 40 times his weight in gold.

The amount was equal to his annual revenue, and was so huge that he had to borrow the amount from the Kaiser family, which practically meant that even if Sraus wanted to, his ability to wage another war for the next ten years would be severely crippled.

In this way, it appeared that the Margraves had managed to tide over their predicament for the time being.

At least the one that intended to militarily obliterate one.

Now, they only had to convince the political apparatus in Sybarsis to give up these charges.

The military win and capture of Straus was not the only piece of good for them.

Another piece of good news, which might be more specifically favorable to Alexander would be that Lady Margaret had luckily managed to give birth to a boy in the meantime.

This, coupled with the fact that she had managed to get so much iron in their time of need, plus acquiring the crossbow which most certainly had played a decisive role in their battle, meant her contributions were so great that it was practically guaranteed she would be named Mother Earl.

Which by extension meant that Alexander would be likely able to establish a foothold on Galiosis.

For now it appeared that his gamble paid off and were about to reap great dividends.

But all these events transpired during the months of May to September.

While in the meantime, many, many things had taken place in Zanzan as Alexander and his retainers were busy solving their own individual challenges.

The various civilian council members were primarily occupied with carrying out all of Alexander's grand construction plans.

Diaogosis was busy preparing his men to start building the new harbor.

A subordinate of his, named Farnaz was tasked with completing the residential buildings Alexander wished to make.

Harun, alongside managing the mines, was additionally tasked with overseeing the building of the aqueducts and the senate hall.

The latter was so because Alexander certainly could not be expected to host the council meeting in his manor, in the hall room on his first floor forever.

He wanted a much more formal setting.

Uzak was furiously working to complete the extensive road network Alexander had set out for him to complete.

Jazum was finally completing the 10 cement kilns Alexander had ordered.

And Krishok was at last catching up on the brick-making dome kiln projects, which had been delayed up until now due to the war and then the spring harvest.

As a side note, the boy in charge of the brick-making facilities, Jazum's son, Jafor, had been sacked by Alexander due to incompetence as Krishok had complained to Alexander about his many mismanagements in the manufacturing process, which ranged from being lazy, being late to work, not showing up, and cutting the workers pay just to say a few.

Worse of all, there were even multiple reports of the boy assaulting some of the female workers there,

This was the final straw for Alexander, and even knowing that it would affect his relationship with Jazum, he still removed the boy.

And then chastised the father for not raising his son properly, which predictably turned the two's relationship very frosty.

But Alexander did not care, as there were a million Jazums for Alexander, but only one Alexander for Jazum.

Alexander even thought of depriving Jazum of the noble title he had promised because he did not want someone like the boy to have the powers of a noble.

But he had not made up his mind on that yet.

Then there was Menicus who oversaw the fields, or more accurately his sons did as the old man's body really could not handle the heavy toll this job placed on the body.

Overseeing the fields might sound easy, but it was really not, as the job required one to regularly go on patrols around the vast amount of land to ensure the farmers did not slack in their work, make sure they had everything they needed, such as plows, animals, and water from irrigation, and lastly solve any disputes between neighboring farms.

These disputes might be over water supply, things like nearby farm animals trampling other fields, or even complaints about the neighbors not properly planting their seeds and so causing them to blow them into others' territory.

It was a tiring, full-time job and Alexander knew Menicus with his aged body could not hope to fulfill this role in the long term.

And lastly, Heliptos was running around the city all day, placing himself around the markets and keeping his eyes out for any foreign merchants.

For he hoped to attract them to the city, as per Alexander's directive, which had read, "All of you are to get more merchants to trade with Zanzan. We must increase the volume of trade,"

The 'all' here of course referred to all the council members, not just Heliptos, and Alexander even hinted their next promotion might depend on that.

So in fact all the council members had some men looking tasked with getting more merchants to Zanzan

These were the immediate tasks of the civilian ministers, who were currently much busier than their militaristic counterparts.

But it was not to say they had no tasks.

For instance, until now, they were responsible for reclaiming much of the land around Zanzan.

And there were always regular drills to keep them fit.

While they also worked to iron out the few creases in the new legionary formation, like the optimal placement of officers during a battle.

Alexander also soon intended to give the military engineers the task of developing various siege weapons such as catapults, ballistae, and the Roman scorpion in preparation for his Tibias campaign scheduled for the winter next year.

But he was still busy drawing up the basic blueprints of the weapons.

Alexander was of the mind to skip this year's attack due to having already fought a major battle and because he wanted to consolidate his rule this year, while also taking into consideration that it would them take some time to develop these weapons.

But that was only the current plan, as it was not as if he had totally ruled out an attack this season.

Time would tell.

And these were the tasks of all the retainers, minus Camius, who was currently posing as a wine merchant seller.

And it seemed his wine sales were going great, particularly among Tibian, which was his primary focus due to obvious reasons.

Alexander too was as busy as his retainers.

He had first spent some of his time during the later part of April thinking about the hurricane that hit the Margrave and shuddered to think what would happen if the same had happened to him.

If Zanzan was to be destroyed or flooded, Alexander would end up washed with it.

But even after raking his head for a while, Alexander failed to find a solution to this natural phenomenon.

So taking solace in the saying, 'Success is 90% hard work and 10% luck, he could only hope that probability was on his side.

After he managed to put that unpleasant thought he had no counter to to the back of his head, he decided to focus on things he could affect.

To that effect, he first focused on ironing out the details regarding the establishment of a bank, like its lending policies and interest rates, and then tried to implement the slave reforms he had discussed with the council members.

But here he ran into a great obstacle, something he had totally not seen coming.

That was the general lack of qualified personnel.

This situation had come to Alexander's attention before, as all the previous administrators, who were the nobles and their servants, along with the temple priests were all gone or slaughtered.

Meaning Alexander simply did not have the number of educated people needed to keep track of the paper trail of 22,000 people.

But all these problems had to wait for now.

Because on the 5th of May, Pasha Farzah arrived.

Chapter 470 Farzah's Zanzan Visit (Part-1)

Alexander was informed of Pasha Farzah's imminent arrival by a small, fast skiff that had been sent ahead of the main fleet to alert him.

And it let Alexander know that the main fleet was 2 days away and numbered around 150 ships, with 135 cargo ships and 15 warships.

It appeared Pasha Farzah was coming here with many gifts.

The very first thing Alexander did after getting this information was breathe a sigh of relief, as finally the worry about his food shortage was alleviated.

And then he got to preparing to receive the guests.

Thus under Alexander's command, many of the extra guestrooms in his mansion were cleaned and refurnished, the security around the city tightened, and the places to hold the about-to-arrive slaves allocated.

He even reserved some high-level courtesans to entertain the guests.

And with almost no time to spare after these preparations were complete, the designated time had arrived.

On one glorious summer morning, from the harbor that expanded to the vast expanse of the ocean, a magnificent sight emerged on the horizon, as first appeared a sea of black, blue, and white sails around the horizon, with soon the sight expanding to a fleet of wooden ships, all gracefully gliding through the waters, their sails billowing in the gentle breeze.

The rhythmic creaking of the wooden hulls and the distant calls of seagulls mingled with the anticipation that filled the air as a huge crowd gathered around the harbor to greet them and the huge fleet quickly approached them to not keep them waiting.

And as the huge number of ships got closer and closer, standing on the wharf itself, Alexander could identify a variety of types of ships in the group.

There were fast, small scout ships designed similarly to the Viking longship, there were huge, wide merchant ships laden heavy with cargo, and there were sleek, maneuverable triremes which served as warships to protect them.

All of which were making their way toward the harbor, their magnificent sails fluttering in the wind, and polished wooden hulls gleaming in the sunlight, reflecting the shimmering waves beneath them.

But perhaps the most eye-catching of the group was the leading ship, which it was Pasha Farzah's personal warship, and looking at it across the harbor, Alexander certainly could not help but marvel at the grand warship.

Layla, named after Farzah's eldest daughter was a colossal feat of engineering marvel, among the biggest of the trireme class, it measured approximately 40 meters in length and 8 meters in width, making its dimensions be closer to a cargo ship, than a warship.

But the huge size did not seem to hinder its speed at all, as its sleek and streamlined hull, constructed from the best cedar wood which Matrak was famous for, reinforced with iron fittings and covered in protective bronze plating to ward off shipworms from eating the wood, seemed to cut through the water like butter.

The entire hull was painted in a regal shade of deep red, symbolizing the might and authority of the Pasha, and at the prow (front) of the ship stood a magnificent beast head, sculpted in the likeness of a huge black bear that inhabited the cold outback of Matrak.

This revered animal of the province was crafted from shining bronze and painted a dazzling gold, with its eyes gleaming with fiery gemstones, which seemed to make the animal exude a sense of power and dominance that could strike awe and reverence in all those who dared to gaze upon it.

The bear was most certainly the most striking feature of the ship, but not the only one, for there were many other ornate decorations and embellishments throughout.

The hull had many frescos, gilded reliefs, and intricate carvings depicting scenes of victorious battles as well as pictures of Ramuh that seemed to seek the protection of the almighty god from the wrath of the sea.

Within the ship's interior laid a grand war room, lavishly decorated with marble floors, intricate mosaics, and richly upholstered furniture, with maps and charts adorning the walls which proudly displayed the vast coastal resources controlled by the Matrak province and marked many of the places of the ship's conquests.

While outside, the stern of the vessel was graced with a lavish pavilion, where the ship's commander, adorned in resplendent armor, oversaw the operations with authority and presence.

Alexander suspected whether he had not glimpsed at a huge, bear-like figure of a man sitting on a magnificent throne on the ship's deck.

But it was possible that his eyes mistook that something else, as the ship's sails, made of fine linen, and dyed the same vibrant shade of red as the hull and emblazoned with the iconic black bear, when unfurled, these majestic sails would catch the wind and propel the ship forward with great speed, making it a formidable force on the open seas.

This trireme which stood 4 meters above the sea level might be huge, but it was no slouch, capable of covering 8 knots per hour under high tides.

Its speed was further augmented by three levels of oars, holding 170 skilled rowers positioned on each side, with the oars themselves being meticulously crafted from sturdy oak, with intricately carved handles painted in gold leaf.

And as the ship slowly paved its way into the harbor, the synchronized movement of the rowers created a mesmerizing rhythm, as the sound of trumpets and drums resonated through the air, signaling their arrival, while the crew members on the decks scurried about, adjusting the rigging and preparing to dock.

The men then expertly skillfully guided the vessels into their designated berths with great finesse, securing them with ropes and anchors, and as the 'Layla' settled into their resting places, a sense of majesty and prestige seemed to envelop the scene.

'Well he certainly knows how to come in style,' Alexander smirked at the grand display, as he then quickly took Cambyses to greet the man exiting the ship.

"Esteemed prime minister, welcome to Zanzan. I hope your journey has been smooth and without worries," Alexander and Cambyses lightly bowed as the elder gentleman, lavishly dressed in golden robes and sporting a mass of white hair and beard disembarked.

Being currently the prime minister, the man was technically a bit above Alexander's peerage, hence the show of respect.

"Hahaha, so you are alive brat. Good, good," The bear-like man let out a huge, happy roar as he stepped on the concrete harbor, and then heavily slapped Alexander's shoulders to show his happiness.

From the looks of it, it appeared he was genuinely happy to see Alexander alive.

"All by the grace of His Majesty and the gods," Alexander only replied with the same hackneyed words, to which the elder pasha only smirked.

He knew certainly very well how 'high' an esteem the boy held Ptolomy at.

But such matters were never suitable to be revealed to the public, and so he then quickly turned his attention to Cambyses, who handed him a bouquet of flowers decorated.

These flowers were not organic but made from the finest linen, and colored bright red, blue, yellow, and even the most expensive color in the world-purple.

They were then adorned with gold and silver chains around the buds, and glued with various colorful gems on the petals, making the entire structure look like a present from the gods themselves.

Alexander had ordered this made a few months ago in anticipation of the Pasha's arrival.

"It is our honor to have you visit our small city, my lord," Cambyses dressed in her finest handed the present over, while Farzah laughed and greeted back,

"Hahaha, Shordar (Baron) Cambyses, congratulations on your marriage. I see that you have become even more radiant than the last time we saw you."

Following this, the elder pasha then moved on to greet the others who were also there, starting from the Queen mother, to Mikaya, to at last the twins.

"Azira, Azura, how are you?" And Pasha Farzah perhaps let out his loudest greeting when meeting his granddaughters, as he then even took both of them up in his arms, making the act of lifting around 60 kg with one arm look effortless.

The man might be in his mid-fifties, but he was no weakling.

While Pasha Farzah continued his continued, his entourage slowly made their way down too.

The first surprise for Alexander was Nanazin and her daughters, who, it appeared that the pasha had managed to smuggle out of Adhan.

"It is a great pleasure to see you again, lord Alexander," The curly-haired, voluptuous beauty and her three daughters gracefully bowed at Alexander, though Alexander would not help but notice the haggard face and the stiff movement of the mother.

Alexander did not know much of what happened to Nanazin in the last six months, but he had some inkling given how hopeful the tone in her voice was.

It was unmistakable.

"Pasha Alexander greets the Queen. Your Grace's presence honors this little noble," Outwardly Alexander gave a full noble's bow, and then turned to greet the triplets give a similar greeting.

While the mother did not bother to hide her scorn for the respectful reception and particularly word queen.

She was not here blaming Alexander, but just her own powerlessness as she knew that Alexander was very likely aware of just how little that word applied to her.

While Alexander finished receiving the queen, and then moved on to his last surprise, which was Lady Inayah!

It appeared the lady had also decided to see how Alexander was doing.