

Herald 521

Chapter 521 Preparations Before Leaving

It took a while for the three to recover from their hard four hours of 'celebrations'.

And as Alexander got up first, he was the first to see and smell all the results of what they did.

Expensive chairs were unturned, the large bed was ruffled, soft pillows were strewn all about the floor, many intricately embroidered sheets were crumbled and the thick carpet had suspicious wet spots all over it.

All the while the two beautiful women heaved heavy breaths laying on the carpet, their eyes barely open, but a satisfied light smile lingering on their faces.

They were naturally in their naked full glory and had white stain marks all over, some wet, some turned crusty, with them being especially around their faces and lips, breasts, and tummies, and with some also sticking to their hair which laid sprawled out on the carpet.

It appeared Alexander had douched them with his cream all over, marking them.

While their lower half felt warm and stuffed full, but was still leaking the hot liquid.

And on some parts of the skin which were not covered by the white goo, Alexander found them to have turned red, such as around the breasts and the butts, a clear evidence of the tough handling they suffered.

They most definitely enjoyed themselves to the absolute fullest, and for all three of them, it was an experience they had not expected.

For Alexander, he had never thought he would get to bed the Queen Mother and even do such acts with her, while for the other two, Alexander's package proved to be an absolutely sensational delight.

Lady Inayah could not wait to get another chance with him, while the Queen Mother knew she would look at this experience with fondness in the upcoming days.

Alexander had definitely managed to score some brownie points with her.

After Alexander got up, the girls did not stay in their lethargy for long.

"Ahhh, that was so good," And soon this refreshing cry was given by Lady Inayah, who then raised her arms to stretch herself, and let Alexander again appreciate her curves, while he also gazed at her now reddened black butt.

While the Queen Mother got up to reveal her wheat-colored flank that was marked with Alexander's handprints, and one could even see it had swallow bite marks on them, as Alexander had lightly bitten on them when she had presented her butt to his face.

And seeing those marks of conquests, Alexander also remembered the beautiful cries he heard the Queen Mother make during that play and knew that memory would stay with him for a long, long time.

While, the Queen Mother, after she got up, immediately restored her cold, recognizable facade, and then in total silence, without even giving Alexander as much as a sideways glance quickly made her way to another attached room.

And as she walked off, she inevitably presented her naked butt to Alexander, who upon seeing those luscious globules ripples under each step had quite the urge to grab them by the handful and spank them again.

An opportunity he knew was rarely ever to present itself.

Alexander's little ogling was finally put to an end as Seelima was given a large overcoat by the maid who had decided to suddenly appear out of nowhere, draping it all over her mistress's body, and thus robbing Alexander of that magnificent sight.

'Where had she been?' Instead, Alexander's focus turned to the maid who seemed to have the power to apparate in and out at will, as he had not seen her at all in the past four or so hours, and so gave her a deep look while the girl shrugged off the gaze and only escorted the Queen Mother to the other room, likely to help her freshen up.

"Lord Alexander, why don't you get dressed? And we will get you for supper a bit later," Alexander heard this from Lady Inayah who seemed to quickly follow the Queen Mother to the other room, and from her tone understood she was really asking him to leave.

So with a quick nod he ran to the veranda to get dressed, and after exiting the room inconspicuously and taking a bath, an hour later the trio sat around the dining table as if nothing had happened.

With the only thing being out of place was that both the ladies seemed to have taken a bath this late as evidenced by the slight glossiness on their damp hair.

But there could be a myriad of reasons for it, and such a thing could hardly be extrapolated to what they actually did by any reasonable person.

And so the secret lay buried with the three of them, and over the following days, through their talks and interaction, Alexander came to understand nothing had really changed with either of them.

Which was expected given this was neither's first tango.

So Lady Inayah was still the shrewd merchant lady looking to make a profit, and the Queen Mother was just as cutthroat and ambitious.

And this did make Alexander a bit disappointed, especially because as he understood he could not really bring the Queen Mother over to his side just by sleeping with her.

No matter how much she appeared to have enjoyed his tool. I think you should take a look at pandasnovel.com

Though I one thought about it, this was given, for if he could sway this ambitious woman so easily, then she would not be called such an ambitious woman.

Seelima would always enjoy power more than anything else and little would change that.

So Alexander came to view the intimate act as simply the three deciding to have a good time, like drinking and playing games between friends, and nothing more.

The two women had done it with him not out of any particular fondness but because they wanted to do it then and there and he was available.

Furthermore, Alexander had little time to consider these two anyway, as after his decision to leave Zanzan was made, he was inundated his all sorts of work which he needed to finish so that the fief could run smoothly even in his absence.

And so Alexander spent his remaining days slaving away at clerical works, and delegating various parts of the administration to individual council members, followed by teaching Cambyes the various how-knows about how to run Zanzna.

Alexander had decided to leave her in charge.

As for his new inventions and institutions, well the printing press could wait till he got the books from Lady Inayah and Pasha Farzah to be able to actually use the darn thing.

While the public schools needed educated people to act as teachers, which again Pasha Farzah promised to send, and the bank would have to wait till Alexander got back to show Nanazin the ropes.

He certainly did not feel safe leaving hundreds of millions of ropals at her disposal without his personal oversight.

And as he was finishing his preparations, suddenly the farmers began to report that their crops had started to ripen and bear fruits.

Which was strange given it was only mid-August, and the fall harvest was usually around mid to late September.

But it seemed this year, the harvest had come early.

And so all available hands were summoned as quickly as possible, with Alexander even ordering the army to take part in the harvest to get the crops out of the fields and into the granaries as quickly as possible.

Hence for some time, both farmers and soldiers could be seen working the fields, which was not particularly a rare sight in even other parts of the lands as well, given fall harvest was always among the most hectic time for a farmer, requiring him and his entire family to work nearly 70 to 80 hours a week to get everything done on time before any rain could come and lower the grain quality.

Because rains around this time would 'wet' the grains, and that would make the higher moisture-carrying grain of lower quality.

Which further meant that the flour ground from such grains would neither taste good nor be able to be stored for very long.

Hence many times this kind of wheat would be sold as horse or chattel feed, which would be significantly cheaper than regular wheat, meaning less profit for the farmer.

And so to avoid that unfortunate happenstance, everyone in a farmer's family would be required to chip in, as both men and women would be seen taking part in the harvest, using their sickles to reap the wheat, oat, or barley as quickly as possible.

While most times the lord of the land would also make his servants join the fray to help with the collection.

As did Alexander.

And this particular harvest was an especially joyous occasion in Zanzan, for this season's harvest was truly bountiful.

A fact that Menicus let him know as they duo stood in front of a field of golden wheat.

"Haha, my lord, you are truly blessed by goddess Gaia. We have actually managed to get 900 kg of wheat per hectare. 900!" The man's face was flushed with pure joy as he recited the number, as he then exclaimed,

"And in this land! In this heavy clay land!"

pandasnovel.com "The farmers feel they are living in a dream."

The reason for this jubilation was obvious as Zanzan previously only made 250 - 300 kg per hectare.

And so a triple harvest was of course a cause for celebration.

Alexander made a polite nod towards the excited old man, and after the harvest was nearly completed over the next few days, finally decided to leave Zanzan.

Chapter 522 Travel To Adhan

As September closed in, the farmers quickly finished reaping their harvests and started the process of storing them.

Which for grains like wheat and barley meant heating them in giant pots to kill them so that they do not start to germinate once they are stored in the granaries.

And the whole of Zanzan seemed to be busy doing that.

And every household there seemed to have a huge grin on their faces, for they never had this much of a bumper harvest.

'Praise the lord! Long live his rule!' Many cheered.

Though for Alexander, 900 kg per hectare was not anything special.

It was only to be expected given the use of the heavy plow which actually managed to dig up the nutritious soil that lay dormant underneath the heavy clay ground.

Whereas before, with the light plow, the farmers really could only plant their seeds on the top thin layer that was very low quality.

It was hard for anything to grow on it and so most seeds would die before their roots could reach the good part of the soil.

But still, Alexander was quite happy with the amount of grain collected, as from the 27,000 hectares of land that had been planted with wheat, oats, and barley, he got around 22,000 tons of grains, which was enough for six months for his city of around 200,000 people, and close to 10,000 draft animals.

And this was in addition to the remaining 15,000 tons of grains Pasha Farzah had bought.

So, with a bit more buying of grain from the outside Alexander knew there would be no food shortages.

Which was why Alexander ordered a lot more of the farmlands be opened up for cultivation and had many of the harvested seeds be re-planted to increase his next year's production.

All to be done under Menicus's supervision.

Because Alexander did not have time to oversee these policies.

As Lady Inayah kept nagging him to finish his work as soon as possible and get ready, saying or else they would be late for the Jtaama due around the second week of October.

And this date was with Ptolomy having pushed back the event back at the last minute by a month due to having trouble arranging the accommodations for all the pilgrims, both noble and civilian, given the state of the city and country.

So this made Alexander regret it a bit that he would not be able to celebrate with his farmers over the new bumper harvest and take credit for his work, as a propaganda drive to boost his image in them.

Or invite the other nobles to his land to show off and socialize as a way to show the benefits of staying with him.

But he ultimately decided that the meeting with Ptolomy was too important to pass up.

Hence, on one sunny morning in very late August, a crowd was seen gathering around the harbor.

It involved some of the all-time big shots of not only this city but the whole country, and many of them were seen boarding their ships.

Even the lord of the city, Alexander seemed to be leaving and was seen giving some last-minute instructions to his wife, and three women, all of whom had come to bid him goodbye.

Alexander had wanted to bring at last one of them with him, even as a bed warmer.

But all four had work here in Zanzan, and could not really leave the city right now for four to six months with him.

And so Alexander here was seen exalting them, urging all of them to be good and prudent in his absence.

"I'll be back by spring. Preferably before." He reassured them, before turning to urge his wife Cambyses one last time,

"And remember, Pasha Farzah has bought a lot of messenger birds from Adhan. Be sure to send them if anything happens."

παΠδαςNovel.com And then added, "And send multiple pigeons in case of an emergency. That way even if some get lost or eaten by other predators, at least one or two will surely reach me."

"Yes, yes, Alex, you have repeatedly told me this.... a hundred times over," Cambyses let out a little sigh of exasperation at Alexander's slight hankering.

She felt like he was treating her like a child.

But for Alexander, leaving his city and everyone he cared about all alone for the first time was proving to be a difficult and anxious one.

Though his spies and head reassured him everything would be alright and Zanzan being attacked was minuscule, his heart was still worried.

And so, even when Cambyses seemed to think he was a worrywart, Alexander still pointed to a very large number of cages being uploaded to a ship using his fingers to say,

"And I will also let you know if anything happens. I'm taking a lot of messenger birds with me." I think you should take a look at παΠδαςnovel.com

This was how messages through birds worked.

You trained a chick from birth to identify the place it was raised in using special trainers.

And then, when you took it to another place, and let it go, it would fly back to its place of origin.

So it was only a one-way type of messaging system, and so if two sides wanted to keep constant communication, they needed to exchange birds from time to time.

So, when Alexander had first come to Zanzan, he had bought a lot of birds with him that could fly to Adhan, the same was with Pasha Farzah when he had come, and now Alexander was going to refill Adhan's stock of 'Zanzan going' birds.

Of course, to be able to do this Alexander had raised a lot of birds.

All nobles did, as evidenced by the fact that his mansion had not just one but two aviaries, all to breed and raise messenger birds, which he could then give out to other people.

But anyway, with these said and getting a swift nod from his wife, Alexander bid farewell to his four women, and at last boarded Pasha Farzah's flagship- The Layla.

In there, he spent mostly the entire time on the ship engaging in talks and games with the people there, which included all the nobles- Pasha Farzah, Lady Inayah, the Queen Mother and Hellma, and even Mikaya and her two maids.

Now, how much of a safety concern was it to put every single important person in the fleet in one ship?

Very!

It was very concerning.

But such doctrines as dispersing important personals to other ships had yet to be developed, and Alexander did not feel like educating Pasha Farzah.

Besides, he could easily guess what the old man would say.

"We are in the Layla! The biggest ship in Adhania. If we go down, our entire fleet will be going down." The old man would have probably boasted.

And which indeed was somewhat true.

And besides, this ship also had the best facilities out of any other ship out there.

Which was a great plus for these noble ladies who even under normal circumstances had trouble living in ships.

Eating and relieving oneself was a pain even for men, forget about the women with their many, many layers of clothes.

And besides, Pasha Farzah had placed the giant trireme in the middle of the fleet, so Alexander felt pretty safe, knowing that if this went down due to external forces, he would have died regardless of which ship he was on.

And so, Alexander made sure to relax himself in the following days and even spent some quality time with Lady Inayah who seemed to have grown a particular liking for him as she would visit his cabin regularly every few days.

And besides pleasure, they would also engage in business, with the woman being particularly pushy about the recipe for cement.

Now, Alexander had changed, or more accurately modified his previous thoughts about the Portland cement.

Because after thinking a while he felt he had been too uptight about the whole thing.

And with his new idea, he felt he had found a way to increase production without revealing the recipe.

And that idea was to sell the clinkers mixed with the gypsum directly to his allies in bags, and then have them grind it up themselves.

That way Alexander could increase his number of kilns without having to increase the number of waterwheels, which was the thing that was holding his production back.

In fact, if done correctly, Alexander felt he could import cement to increase his capacity.

But these ideas were still in their infancy, and so asking the lady for some more time, he then assured her that he would try to fulfill her requests as soon as possible.

So in this way, after around 40 days, the large fleet completed its 3,000 km journey from Zanzan to the port city of Agnirat, with the extra time needed due to the ships having to many times travel against the wind, thus slowing them drastically down.

After landing in Agrinat, Alexander only stayed in the port city for three days for rest and found it a lot of the same, just a bit livelier given that the drought was over and fall harvests had come in.

Here Lady Inayah acted as the perfect host and entertained them all with fine food, and great wine, and for Alexander even with the best woman the city had.

After which the carriages were prepared, and five days later, Alexander was staring down the magnificent walls of Adhan.

Chapter 523 Entering Adhan

Alexander stayed the three days at Agnirat mainly to rest and honor Lady Inayah's invitation.

But it was also because it took some time to unload all the gifts he had bought for Ptolomy and the court from the ships to the port and then again load them into carts to transport them to Adhan.

While in the meantime, Lady Inayah asked him to share some of his tips about how to develop her city, to which Alexander replied with some generic bits of advice, as he knew next to nothing about the city to give specialized suggestions.

And once the three days were over, and everyone was ready, the large group consisting of Alexander and his 500 bodyguards, Lady Inayah, and the royals, and Pasha Farzah with his daughter and a few thousand troops, again set off for the capital of the country Adhan.

And entered it around mid-October, only a few days before the start of the Jtaama.

When the group had approached the outskirts of the ancient city, Ptomoly had quickly sent a large delegation of soldiers and a high-ranking noble, or more specifically Pasha Farzah's fifth son Kayvan to escort Alexander and co. into the city, with the instruction to bring them to meet the king in his palace directly.

And along the way, Alexander kept his eyes peeled to see how the city he had left just a year ago was doing and found it to be almost the same as he remembered it.

Dirty, dingy, drab, and lethargic, the city, or at least the outer city seemed to have barely gotten better, with the only notable difference being that some of the inns and shops seemed to have hung colorful festoons and flags in celebrations of the pilgrimage and to attract customers.

And seeing this state of the city made Alexander have a schadenfreude kind of feeling, as a weaker Ptolomy was both a good and bad thing for him.

Good because then he could easily defy him.

And bad because it was possible such a weak king would get taken out by Amenheraft.

But that was why Alexander was here.

While the Queen Mother, who had seen how Alexander transform Zanzan, felt something needed to be done to address the sorry state of affairs.

She never minded it before as she had rarely bothered to descend her holiness into the dwellings of these urchins.

But after living in Zanzan and seeing it, her impression of that seemed to have changed.

She felt that compared to the pristine, well-planned, and structured Zanzan city, this place was clearly inferior in terms of layout and beauty, and for this proud woman, to have the 'capital of capitals' be lesser than any other city in the world, much less in her own country was unacceptable.

And then there were the people.

Whereas she had observed the people of Zanzan move with great urgency and energy, here she felt all the men and women were half asleep.

Meaning the people of Adhan worked less.

So even if she did not care how these peasants lived, she knew she had to improve some of the things here, even if it was just to make them work a bit harder.

So the intelligent woman made up her mind to talk to Ptolomy about it, while in the meantime, the long procession slowly made its way to the crowded outer city, which seemed to have gotten a bit busier due to the presence of so many pilgrims.

After a while, the escort finally crossed the outer city and once the gates to the inner city were opened and they were let through, Alexander felt he had entered a completely different world.

Gone were the narrow, dingy roads, the overcast alleyways, and that ever-present putrid stinging smell of rotting fish in the air.

Instead, they were replaced with clean, even somewhat floral air, magnificent architecture, and beautifully paved roads lined with rows and rows of rose bushes.

Alexander could easily understand how the people living here would be able to ignore the people living outside.

Because out of sight was out of mind.

And this perfectly explained the differences in their living conditions.

And this thought was many times reinforced as Alexander and his group were slowly led up the winding hill to the gate of the palace, which gave him plenty of time to observe the differences between here and the outer city.

He found that the renovations here had been immense.

In fact, it was almost as much here as it was as little there.

Any sign of damage that might have been caused by Alexander seemed to have been erased and scrubbed away, with all burnt structures apparently having been replaced and all the destroyed houses rebuilt to their former self.

No, it was even better than their former self, as almost every house Alexander could see seemed to have a fresh coat of paint.

It was pretty apparent where all the administration's time, energy, and funding went. I think you should take a look at pandasnovel.com

But in a way, this was also not wrong.

As pleasing the nobles who held all the power was clearly more important than placing the peasants.

And in that very endeavor, the inner city seemed to have given a fresh new face, with colorful flags, paintings, and even new sculptures dotting the landscapes.

All to make the annual pilgrimage as delightful and comfortable as possible for the guest who might have started for Adhan as much as six months ago.

And this effort seemed to have worked, as Alexander found this part of the city seemed to be sizzling with energy and activity, with horses, carriages, and finely dressed servants moving to and fro with haste.

Finally, after close to three hours of being escorted, the long line of armed soldiers at last approached the palace, as instantly Alexander felt a lot of curious gazes scan him from all sides, their owners all wearing lavish clothes and holding refined postures.

It seemed he was late to the party, and almost all the guests for the Jtaama had already arrived, who were all seemingly interested to see this 'barbarian' who had caused all this mess in the first place.

Alexander naturally ignored such looks and concentrated on crossing the lavish front walkway of the palace, at the very mouth of which stood Lady Inayah's father, Iyazid, the person in charge of the country's finances.

"Welcome! Welcome, Your Highness! And welcome my lords and ladies," The old man with a thin, wrinkled face and an equally thin beard greeted the group jovially, starting with the one with the highest peerage, the Queen Mother.

He still appeared quite spry for his age and could be seen running to greet the Queen Mother and the imperial princess as they descended from the carriage.

This was followed by Pasha Farzah, and ultimately Alexander himself.

pandasNovel.com "Ah! This here must be Lord...Pasha Alexander!"

"Great! Great! Welcome to Adhan!" He said after sizing him up, adding,

"I heard you were young, but truly seeing is believing! Ahh youth! We old fossils expect great things from you, hahaha!"

The old man seemed to talk very fast and very animatedly, as he then even began to pat Alexander on the shoulders during his greetings as a sign of familiarity.

The man really knew how to socialize, which was a given as he was one of the biggest merchants in the country.

While Alexander humbly bowed a bit and cordially replied, "It is an honor to finally meet you too Lord Iyazid."

"Lady Inayah speaks frequently about you. Especially about how you always wanted to meet me, but had to postpone it repeatedly due to health complications."

"So it pleases me greatly to see you in such great shape."

"Praise the Gods!"

Alexander had a pious tone at the end.

"Haha, yes. Praise the gods! Praise Ramuh!" The old man put on a wide grin at Alexander's humble attitude, as he then went to greet his daughter and then quickly invited the group inside.

"Come, come, His Majesty is waiting." He gestured the invite.

And once inside, the group was immediately led through the lavish corridors and opulent architecture to the heart of Adhania- the magnificent throne room.

Tall, grand, and imposing, it was as lavish as one could expect, being made of the best stone in existence, decorated with the most expensive luxury one could have, and handcrafted by the finest master craftsmen Adhania had.

The granite floor was covered by a giant thick red carpet that had been intricately embroidered, from the ceiling hung numerous chandeliers each costing nearly as much as a city, and attaching the marbled pillars on either side were purple linen clothes of the highest quality.

The whole room was dripped with luxury and steeped in culture and history.

And to Alexander, it seemed the room had a unique air to it, one somber and heavy and regal.

In this special room, at the very end sat Ptomoly, on an elevated platform or dais, wearing a fabulously jeweled crown and clothed in purples, while behind was a purple curtain or baldachin that matched his garb, and he was flanked on either side by two fully armored guards.

As a bit lower to the dais were rows of nobles standing on either side of the walkway.

"Long live the king," The group brusquely covered the short carpeted distance from the throne room door to the foot of the dias, and performed a solemn bow, as Ptolomy chuckled,

"Hehe, I'm glad that you are all finally here. I was starting to get worried."

Chapter 524 Cambyses's Note

At the sight of the group performing a collective bow, Ptolomy leaned back on his throne with a small smile before gesturing with his hand, "Haha, get up! Get up! Quick!"

"We are all friends here. No need to stand in ceremony."

It seemed at least his mannerism and speech had improved.

And he was especially in a good mood upon laying his eyes on the Queen Mother and Hellma, both of whom seemed radiant and well.

"Thank you, Your Grace," The group got up saying such, and after a few bits of small pleasantries such as him asking Alexander about him and his family, they were excused with Ptolomy saying,

"You must all be tired. Please rest. We have prepared the best Adhan luxuries has to offer to comfort you."

And as Alexander turned around to leave the throne room after bidding the king goodbye, he very accurately felt most of the gazes of the nobles present in the court fall on him. all of which seemed to contain all sorts of emotions in them.

There were curious gazes sent his way, mainly from many of the young maidens who wanted to see how this 'young barbarian' looked, intrigued looks from many of the nobles who could not help but be astonished by the youth of this successful warlord, and the most common of all, disgust and hate, both because Alexander had slaughtered a lot of their kin, and also simply because of plain old racism.

'The honor of his throne room has been tarnished by the presence of this low-life,' Many pure-blooded nobles cursed Alexander in their hearts.

While Alexander fully aware of such thoughts accepted the looks and then simply shrugged them off like rainwater bouncing off him.

These people could do nothing but stare and cuss.

So he saw them as much as worms as they did him.

Hence instead of minding about those nobles, he focused on the beautiful maid who was escorting him to his room, a voluptuous woman in her early twenties with thick auburn hair similar to the Queen mother.

"I have never seen you here. Are you new?" Alexander made small talk as he made his way to his residence, a luxurious room he had stayed in before.

And along the way, he pointed out that if such an eye-catching woman like her had been present before, Alexander would have certainly noticed.

"Yes. My name is Maya, my lord."

"I arrived at the capital just three months ago."

"And now, I have been assigned by His Majesty to be my lord's exclusive maid."

"If lord pasha has any requests, please inform me, and I will try to fulfill them to the best of my abilities."

The beautiful maid had a very stoic, professional tone to her answer and expressed neither joy, nor sorrow, nor excitement at being able to serve Alexander.

"Oh? Any requests? Like those too, hehe," Alexander sniggered the joke.

But the stolid maid did not seem to catch the tone, only seriously answering, "Yes, of course. I will perform any acts my lord wishes."

"And if lord Pasha wants me to arrange for more women, I will surely endeavor. Two, three, four, I can get my lord how many you wish."

"I can even arrange them according to your tastes."

She spoke quickly, seeming eager to please him.

And the detailed options given to him certainly surprised Alexander.

"You don't seem like the normal maids here," He said so as he had not met such kinds of maids during his last visit.

And this got a nod from Maya who informed, "Yes, maids like us are new here."

"We have been specifically trained to only serve high-ranking peerages like Pashas, and Emirs (adult princes who were brothers and cousins of the king) and exist only to please them." Her voice was low and servile, adding,

"I heard all our preceding seniors seemed to have suffered an accident."

"And so we are the only ones of our kind here."

Maya here had very cleverly managed to use euphemisms to remind Alexander that his soldiers had violated and killed many of the maids in the palace when they had raided it in search of Amenheraft, and as these special maids were quite beautiful compared to the others, they had suffered the most casualties by Alexander's soldiers.

"Haha," Alexander could only chuckle hollowly at this accusation as he tried to wipe away the awkwardness by roughly grabbing the soft peaches of the maid from the back to have a taste and then whispering, "I hope you have been trained well. Because I will depend on you to warm my bed every day."

This kind of brazen action right in open daylight made the inexperienced maid flinch at first, but she quickly composed herself and gave a confident smile,

"Of course my lord, anytime. Would you like to start now?"

The professional girl seemed ready to strip right then and there if Alexander ordered.

But he was only joking with her and so said, "Maybe later. Let me first make rest a bit."

At this the maid gave a solemn nod of acknowledgment, and as they have finally arrived at Alxx's designated room, the maid performed her very first duty.

"Oh Your Lordship, there was a message for you from Zanzan. Here please see it,"

She said suddenly as she brought out a small scrolled paper from under her apron and handed it to him.

The presence of this note certainly surprised Alexander.

'I was thinking of sending a message to Cam after I got here. So why is she sending me one?' He wondered curiously as undid the knot on the string binding the paper and slowly rolled open the message. I think you should take a look at pandasnovel.com

And once he started to read the message written within, the first thing he did was this.

"Fuck!" Alexander swore this curse out aloud.

Because this was the following message, written using the smallest font that was still possible to read,

"Husband, hope you are doing well."

"After about two weeks you left, Camius got the news that Tibias is planning on attacking us."

"Menes is currently organizing the army to fight them."

"Keep us in your prayers."

Short, succinct, and to the point, the message was highly potent with bombastic news.

And the surprising information it held made Alexander's heart restless with confusion and unease.

'Why is Tibias attacking us now?'

'What about the treaty? Fuck! My 15 million ropals.' He cried indignantly.

While Cambyses's report also made Alexander totally confused about Tibias's intention to launch another war so soon after the brutal 3 years war had just ended.

Alexander was sure the country yearned for some peace.

And it was based on this assumption that he had made that peace offering, pretty confident that it would be enough to bring tranquility to his borders for the time being.

And he had even given them a large lump sum of money upfront to grease the wheel.

So, he was totally fluxed about where he had gone wrong.

Hence he dropped his head down and read and re-read Cambyses's message in the hope of finding some extra hidden line he had somehow missed which could explain this discrepancy.

But naturally, there was no such explanation.

'Dammit Cam, how could you leave out the details?' So Alexander gritted his teeth and chided Cambyses for not giving all the information, as he then tried to douse his burning desire to know until further messages reached him.

But Cambyses had her reasons for omitting such details.

παΠdasNovel com Or reason- singular.

And that was that she also did not know the reason behind the impending attack, or why Tibias had decided to break the treaty.

She, like Alexander, was also one day simply informed of this out of the blue, in her case by Camius, who had come to her office unannounced one afternoon.

This uninvited visit certainly surprised the acting lord of the city, and her heart had skipped a beat thinking it was bad news.

And her instinct proved to be on point that day, as after Camius took a sip of the wine he was served as refreshment, reported, "Some of the merchants I have contacts with inside of Tibias has told me that their king has called a levy.

"And instructed all the peasants to report to their lords as soon as possible."

"This can only mean one thing."

"War!"

Camius had a rare instance of solemnity and graveness to his voice, much different from his usual light, frivolous tone he liked to carry himself with as he made the ominous prediction.

"What! Didn't we just conclude a treaty!" At this, Cambyses slapped her palms against the hard table as she almost stood up from her chair.

She did not, she could accept Camius's deduction.

There had to be another explanation.

"..." But Camius only gave silence as his response.

It was clear that Tibias had decided to break the treaty

After all a treaty was just a piece of paper.

It had no way of coming to life to enforce anything written on it.

"..." So for a while, the two pair of eyes stared down at each other, with Cambyses giving a hard look at Camius as she waited for him to answer as if trying with her eyes to pressure him into giving an alternative explanation.

But Camius would not budge.

No matter how inconvenient the truth was, it was better than lying to oneself.

After all, once the truth was accepted, one could start to prepare himself for the upcoming challenge.

Chapter 525 Council's Decision

Camius was the type of pragmatic person who thought it was far better to face one's problem head-on rather than burying one's head in the sand like an ostrich and wishing it would go away.

While for Cambyses, she found herself in a bind.

The nineteen-year-old could either accept Camius's analysis and act accordingly and take on a huge burden of responsibility.

Or she could dismiss them as being unsubstantiated and take the easy route.

And she found herself oscillating between the two.

Now this might seem like a weird thing to ponder on as clearly the former was the safer choice.

But there were so many examples of people taking the latter route, the route where the higher authorities rejected their intelligence reports and acted on their own, both this world and Alexander's previous world, that even just listing the names of all such events would be enough to fill a dictionary.

pandasNovel.com And this happened due to a variety of reasons, such as the leaders not trusting the source, feeling those spies were being misled or even double agents, laziness and thinking it was a lot of work, or simply suffering from plain old hubris, believing their judgment to be better than the information presented to them.

Perhaps the most famous example of this would be the leader of the Soviet Union Stalin ignoring all his intelligence networks warning him about the German attack.

Even when the Luftwaffe invaded the Soviet air space for months, Stalin bought the German explanation that those planes simply got lost.

Even when it was reported that the entire German army was stacking their forces by the Soviet border, Stalin only ordered that the Soviet soldiers not do anything to antagonize the Wehrmacht.

And even when a German soldier had defected to the Soviet side on the eve of the German offensive and warned the Soviets that the entire Wehrmacht was about to crash into them literally hours from now, Stalin still did not buy it.

Instead claiming that the soldier was a foreign spy sent there to sow discord between the friendly nations.

So it was really not that far-fetched to think that Cambyses would choose to dismiss Camius given that the reasons for Tibias not attacking them were much more plausible here.

And Camius might very well be just jumping to conclusions without knowing the full picture.

After all, the story could easily go like this- the Kaiser family had asked for Tibias's help to attack the Margrave, and Perseus's levy was for that.

So as the girl tried to come up with an answer from behind her desk, she really regretted not being able to contact the one person she wanted advice from the most-Alexander as at the moment he was still on the ship, and so was unavailable to be contacted via a messenger bird.

Cambyes felt she could really use his input here.

"Is there a chance they are attacking someone else?" She tried this alternative answer as a last-ditch attempt.

But got a shake of the head.

"Tibias has only one land neighbor-us."

"And they will never launch an offensive across the Mad Sea during the winter. The waters around here become too turbulent around this time of the year."

Camius gave a wry smile as he answered.

"....." Hearing this Cambysis slightly closed her eyes to try and think, until a while later she reached a conclusion.

And that was to take Camius's word more seriously than her own imaginary judgment.

Hence Cambyes decided to convene a council meeting the morning after to let the others know of the matter

And there a decision on how to handle the threat was soon reached before noon and it was the unanimous decision of the lords to err on the side of caution and verify Camius's claim.

So to that effect, the following courses of action were decided to be taken

"Lord Grahtos will be in charge of sending scouts into the mouth of the Cisran hills to keep an eye out for any army."

"While here in Zanzan, we will raise an army of 50,000 infantry and cavalry under General Menes."

"And if we do spot the enemy, we will march out to meet them."

Menicus the eldest council member officially announced the group's decision.

While Cambyses seemed to prefer this alternative strategy, "Couldn't we defend from inside the city?"

"Our walls are thick and strong. And we have enough food until reinforcements can arrive from the other nobles."

This was certainly a viable strategy and appeared riskless in Cambyses's option.

But she was shut down by the other military leaders.

"My lady, please have trust in us military veterans. We know what we are doing." Menicus felt that hiding behind a wall was exactly what a woman would do and so curtly shot back.

'Real men take charge and destroy the enemy in open combat, thus earning great honor and glory,'

As an old traditional military commander, Menicus certainly preferred such open and aboard tactics compared to abhorrent sieges and turtling.

While Menes, hearing Menicus's barbed reply quickly chimed in to try and make the answer much soother for the girl, comfortingly saying,

"My lady, even if we hole ourselves inside the walls and stay safe, Tibias can then lay waste to our countryside."

"Kill, rape, and plunder the people." I think you should take a look at pandasnovel.com

"Will the people still follow us after that?"

"Also remember, we have all our brick-making kilns outside the city. That will surely be destroyed."

"Where will our various construction projects go then?"

"Thus it will be prudent to defeat them before they can reach us."

Menes appeared surprisingly diplomatic in his speech.

And he was joined by Melodias, who pointed, "Mmmn, also remember that Cantagena is losing its war with Exolas because it's always running to hide inside its walls."

"Now it has lost all its courage to even fight Exolas on open ground."

"We should never let that happen to us."

With all these said, it was apparent that

the military leaders had decided to that in the case of an attack, the Tibians would be intercepted at the Cisran hills, about 100 km from Zanzan city.

Now Cambyes certainly wanted to say some more things in defense of her strategy.

But she ultimately kept them to herself.

She knew she lacked even a tenth of the prestige that Alexander did, and so it was the military leaders who decided how the campaign would be conducted.

And these men had seemingly made their decision.

And it was due to a few reasons.

There was of course actual strategic reason.

But there was the reason that in the event of a siege, their own fiefdoms which they had just begun to develop would be demolished.

They naturally were reluctant to see that.

And lastly it was because they wanted to achieve a glorious victory over Tibias and earn credit and accolades.

After all, there was little honor or achievement in successfully defending a siege as compared to winning an outright victory.

And it was only human for all the council members wanted to showcase their ability to advance their careers and peerage.

Thus the three reasons combined to produce the determined course of action.

While Cambyes hid her pout and said to herself, 'Hmmp! If husband was here, these old coons would be simply nodding and bowing. Hateful!'

Cambyes was kind of right here.

If it had been Alexander who had made the suggestion, the other members would have certainly given it a much deeper thought.

But Alexander had earned that privilege of making the other give pause and consider what he said for a second.

And he had achieved that by showcasing his ability again and again in multiple, stacked against the odds, battles.

Something that Cambyses was yet to replicate.

Hence it was only natural for the much more experienced military commanders to ignore her.

Would you rather trust veterans with decades of experience?

Or a nineteen-year-old girl?

Besides, it was not as if Cambyses was 100 % correct either.

Because her decision was based without knowing about the torsion catapult, whose addition would have drastically changed the equation.

And so, only time would tell who was right.

All these decisions were made while Alexander was incognito because he was still making his journey across the sea, and due to a lack of space on that small piece of message paper, Cambyses had condensed everything to the main points, only letting him only know just the critical bits.

After all, she didn't think Alexander could accurately convey a detailed battle plan through the bits of scrap paper a pigeon could carry.

"Lord, is something the matter? You seem....?" The maid Maya finally revealed a trace of emotion in her voice as she watched Alexander stand stock still like a statue, only occasionally jittering his head slightly looking at the paper.

He had been so excited to receive his wife's message that he had read it the moment he got his hand on it and didn't even bother to enter his room or dismiss the maid.

And it was Maya's concerned voice at last broke Alexander out of his shock.

"It's okay. You can leave," Immediately then he gave this reply in a hard, robotic voice, all his joy of getting here having evaporated before he turned around without looking even once at the maid as he at once set off to find Pasha Farzah or Lady Inayah or even the Queen Mother.

It was vital that they came up with an appropriate response as soon as possible.

Chapter 526 The Jtaama

"What are you getting so worked up about, brat?" Pasha Farzah let out his slightly frustrated growl at Alexander as they sat around a table.

They had managed to meet on that very evening in a secluded part of the palace after Alexander had the others know about the message.

And it was here they seemed to disagree with the interpretation of Cambyses's message as pronounced previously by the aged pasha.

Who was then buttressed by Lady Inayah,

"I agree with Pasha Farzah. The Tibians should lack any ability to engage in any war with us for some time. Are you sure the message said that?" She cast her doubt at the report.

But with clenched teeth, Alexander repeated,

"The message clearly said Tibias was attacking Zanzan. What do you want more? A video?"

He still could not believe they were arguing about something this basic.

The others did not understand the new word, and thought in a Thesian expression, while from the side, the Queen Mother nodded her head affirmatively at Alexander, saying

"Yes, the message indeed did." While before pointing out, "But it did not say how they arrived at that point. Nor what the Tibias was doing."

"Is it a siege?"

"Or is Tibias attacking the countryside?"

"Or is it engaging Zanzan's army?"

"Without knowing this, it is very much possible that the threat will be gone before we need to do anything."

The Queen Mother sounded very optimistic as Alexander's army had proven itself against Djoise.

While the last person to join them in a rare showcase of responsibility- Ptolomy pointed out,

"The letter said 'Keep us in your prayers'."

"That clearly shows that the decisive battle is yet to occur."

"And given Zanzan's recent battle achievements, I do not see any reason to worry."

Like the Queen Mother, he too was supremely confident in his tone.

And it seemed Ptolomy had decided to use this moment as a rare opportunity to display his intelligence.

"....." Alexander stayed silent hearing this.

It seemed the others had made their decision.

And even he was swayed by them, because even to him, Tibias attacking them right now did not make sense.

And so here Lady Inayah decided to end the meeting by saying,

"Lord Alexander, let us wait a bit longer.

"You have already sent a message to Lady Cambyses just now and she will certainly write back to us with more details."

"We can decide what to do next then."

And three days later, a messenger bird from Zanzan did come to Adhan, proving Lady Inayah right.

The short message only read, "Our scouts have noticed 40,000 Tibians leaving the city of Thesalie."

"Menes has moved out to meet them with 50,000 men."

"Pray for our success."

Thesalie was a fortress city situated at the mouth of the Cisran hills, and the gateway to Zanzan for Tibias.

Meaning, Tibias was just starting to enter Alexander's territory, which further meant his lands were yet unscathed.

Thus this message very much soothed Alexander's heart.

παΠδαςNovel.com He was also very confident in Menes's ability and given that they were up against phalanx units in hilly terrain, facing an outnumbered enemy, Alexander did not see any reason they could lose.

'Tibias must have thought we are weak with no men to defend ourselves with,' He could only guess that the reason for this attack was the same as Djose's.

And after letting his allies know of this, he waited till the pilgrimage was over before he could sit down to discuss work with Ptolomy.

And this Jtamma was quite the spectacle to observe.

This three-day event revolved fully around the Life Sea, and on the first day both men and women dressed in special white robes were seen chanting special prayers led by priests and priestesses as they walked around parts of the Life Sea, exalting and praising Ramuh.

On the second day, they followed this up by bathing in the Life Sea in a very specific, ritualistic way. I think you should take a look at παΠδαςnovel.com

Here both men and women took part in the ritualistic absolution simultaneously, and due to the sheer, white clothes they wore, soon the scenery turned very pink as the wet clothes did little to hide what was underneath it.

In fact, Alexander would say the clothes actually alleviated the scenery as by making the clothes stick to their bodies, it made their attractive bodily features more visible while also hiding the blemishes and spots on the skin.

Thus under the mild winter sun, all the women seemed to show their perky frontal assets, the deep ravines in between, and their engrossed buds, while below many revealed their thatched mounds, their creamy thighs, and tight, large flanks.

And it was not much better for the men either who let everyone see their perfect abs, their powerful thighs, and the outline of their packages.

Alexander almost got a nosebleed observing this spring scenery from all the way back from his second-story room that overlooked the sea, who obviously did not participate in this due to his different faith.

But strangely, he also noticed none of the men or women seemed too bothered by it.

And this was because bodily relations were forbidden for all three days of the pilgrimage and the people seemed pious enough to suppress such lust.

With the second day's absolution complete, the following third day, the people honored Ramuh by making a sacrifice of either a goat, cow, or some other animal along the shore of the Life Sea, while praying and chanting from their religious scripture all the while.

And once they slaughtered the animals, the carcass would then be taken by boats further into the sea, before they would be thrown overboard.

Canonically this was done to rejuvenate the life sea, as the people of Adhania believed this was from where all life originated, and as it gave life, according to them, naturally its potency would decrease over time.

So it was only logical that new life had to be added frequently to replenish the stock.

In fact, once the drought had started, sacrifices to the life sea had increased by some magnitudes, which had only resulted in Adhania having much less livestock.

While for Alexander, after knowing the reason for the sacrifice, he could only be grateful that they did not practice human sacrifices.

Because he would not have been at all surprised if slaves, criminals, and even just regular people were sacrificed to 'power' the life sea.

And Alexander was not quite sure how he would have reacted if he had to ally with barbarians who committed such heinous acts.

So he certainly dodged a bullet there.

Now, what Alexander did not know was that Adhania did at one-time use to practice live human sacrifices.

And their choices would include people from all forms of life.

There would be slaves sacrificed as chattels to work for Ramuh, criminals sent to him to be judged and perhaps even be redeemed, ordinary people who wished to meet the god, heroes, and war generals who wanted to join the god's divine army, priests who wanted to become saints, and even noblemen and ladies who were drowned in the Life sea to become Ramuh's consorts.

And they were also not killed like the animals were, using a sharp knife to give them a quick, painless death.

Instead, they would have their hands and legs bound, and heavy rocks tied, before they would be thrown overboard from boats and ships, causing them to die after two to three minutes of unimaginable agony.

With the reason for doing this being so that Ramuh received the sacrifices in the freshest condition with no bodily harm.

But this was not to say all these sacrifices would be forced.

In fact, many would volunteer.

Not the slaves obviously.

But for the others, this seemed like a shortcut to heaven.

So there were even records of fights breaking out over who got to 'die.'

Thus before the sacrifice, all would be dressed appropriately, with the slaves not needing much work as they would in tattered rags, but everyone else would garb themselves in their finest.

The civilians in their nicest tunics, the soldiers and generals in full armor and battle gear, and the nobles in their most expensive clothes.

But this practice was eventually put to a stop by a king from a few generations ago.

This happened because once, his favorite consort wanted to sacrifice herself to become Ramuh's consort, and the king was so smitten by her and such detested the thought of even a god laying his hands on his women, that he arbitrarily changed the customs to make the sacrifices only animals

And as for those who disagreed with him, well he sacrificed them to the Life Sea as a mockery of their protest.

'Since you want to keep this tradition of sacrificing people, then sacrifice yourself first.' The king had famously said.

Now, after the animal sacrifices began, it soon became very population, because the amount of Legummum growing around the shores began to suddenly increase.

Which was seen as vindication by the gods of the king's decision.

While in reality, it was because the plankton that lived in the Life Sea and gave it its pink color reproduced much quicker due to the presence of greater biomass as animals had more meat than humans.

And as their number increased, the legummum's growth also increased with it.

These acts were conducted during the three days of the Jtaama, while at night they ate a very specific meal, performed holy dances, played music, and recited from the scriptures.

Until it finally ended.

Chapter 527 Analysis Of Each Other

The Jtaama ended on the third day with a giant party held that very night, where to celebrate the absolve of all their sins, the noblemen and women eat, drank, and danced to fully their hearts' content.

Ptolomy had also invited Alexander to this party, but he decided to decline it, saying this was a religious occasion and hence it would be inappropriate for him to come.

And he had stayed adamant about his decision when even Lady Inayah had euphemistically alluded to some 'special celebrations', hoping to entice him, but he had reasoned to himself that if he took part in them, he would also likely be required to contribute to them.

And Alexander had no intention of doing that.

Thus Ptolomy ultimately accepted Alexander's refusal, before declaring that they would host another similar party later that month so Alexander could attend.

So, as the noblemen and lady downstairs took part in pleasures of the flesh, Alexander decided to enjoy this new maid he had been given.

And while these merriments were occurring in the capital city of the country, far south of it, on a hilly patch of terrain, a battle was soon about to erupt.

"My lord, we have managed to get a good look at the enemy. They seem to number around 40,000." A scout who had been deployed to forward reconnaissance reported this to Grahtos, who then swiftly took it to Menes's ears.

"Hmm, we have only set out a week ago from Zanzan, and they are already so near. It's good that we set off when we did." The tall, strong general tell commented with a sigh of relief, feeling that as the enemy was just a few days march from reaching Zanzan, a large, pitched battle was imminent.

And from the side, Melodias chimed affirmatively with a large smile, 'Yes, any later and our lands would have been pillaged. Lord Camius has truly performed a great service, haha!'

It was not a secret to these high-level personnel that Camius was the leader of Zanzan's spy network.

And its potency was proved right and now.

"Mmmm, yes. Without him, we would not have had the time to form an army and would have only been able to garrison our troops and defend. That would have been truly painful." Menes hummed the agreement, feeling proud of his former colleague.

He knew that even now Zanzan was such a cramped city that gathering 50,000 people in one place was tough.

And if in addition to that fact, there was an enemy already attacking them, which would also then require the walls to be defended, then raising any army would be very, very difficult.

So, for the council members, each letter of Camius's intelligence was valued its weight in gold.

"Yes, it is truly impressive what Camius has managed to do in just a few months. I hear his wine is considered a delicacy in Thesalie." At Camius's praise, Grahtos too chipped in, then recalled how after the decision was made, the previous levy system placed during Djose's attack was once again implemented and 50,000 men were very quickly recruited, armed, and trained with practiced professionalism.

And he did while rubbing his hands together.

Because with November right around the corner, the temperature was changing from just simply chilly to biting cold.

And it was this phenomenon that caught the attention of the last council member in the group, Heliptos, who cussed, "But still, these Tibians must be out of their mind to come to attack us in the winter. I'm freezing here."

This also made Grahtos add with a slight nod, "Yeah. And there is not a decent city or fort all along the way for us to rest either. Many of our horses are suffering in the cold."

But here Melodias decided to remind them, "That is to be expected. Zanzan was originally meant as the first fortress against Tibias. So obviously, there is only rough wilderness from the mouth of the Cisran hills to Zanzan."

"That is right. No noble would want to develop a territory so close to the border either and let it become free forage fodder for Tibias. That's also why Zanzan is 100 km from here." Menes added to the conversation.

And at last, gave Grahtos his responses to the scout report,

"Tell the scouts to keep an eye on the marching army. And we will shadow them from this side of the river bank, looking for an opportunity to attack."

Menes's instruction alluded to the geography here, where the most notable landmark was a relatively large river called the Diannu ran from the Tibias, through the city of Thesalie, and close by Zanzan city.

And the scouts specifically reported the enemy army was on the other side of the riverbank, where the terrain was flatter and more conducive to their phalanx style of fighting.

"Yes, general," Came the unanimous reply from the other leaders, and soon, about three days later they caught sight of the main Tibian force on the opposite bank.

"There indeed is 40,000." Although the scouts had reported it as such, Menes had always found seeing to be more believable, and this number reassured him of his stronger position.

But he did choose to engage then and there. I think you should take a look at panDasnovel.com

Mainly because he could not as the enemy was on the opposite bank, and fording a river to attack a well-prepared phalanx was not the smartest move.

And so also, for the next one week, Menes's army was closely stuck behind its Tibian counterpart, tailing them from the opposite side of the river.

And in all this time, none of the Zanzan scouts succeeded in spotting the war elephants even once.

This was because they failed to get too close to the enemy army due to the presence of their own light cavalry, and also because Persecus had naturally taken steps to camouflage these beasts which were his secret weapons.

Now, one would think hiding such huge beasts in a flat terrain would be hard, if not impossible.

But Perseus was no flower born in a palace.

He was a great warrior king even before Amenheraft's attack and had only grown in the last three years, really polishing off his skills.

So the genius king had found a way.

And he did this by always making sure that his cavalry was ridden adjacent to the war elephants and instructed the 4,000 riders to kick up as much dust as possible, so that a screen of dust clouds was formed around the war elephants, thus obscuring the giant animals from any nosy, prying eyes.

And given that it was winter, with the ground being bone dry, such a phenomenon was easy to produce on this hard, flaky soil.

Thus though Menes had the greater numbers, the surprise a horde of charging war elephants had meant Persecus had the overall stronger cavalry.

Now, Perseus himself, who was there to personally lead the army, seeing the size of the army they were meant to deal with, was not overly confident about his chance, as evidenced by his exclamation,

"They have responded so quickly? And they actually outnumber us?"

"This was not what that Clive from the Kaiser family said."

"Hmmm, that's right. They also do not seem like the poor, malnourished, bastards that he told us about," From the side, the king's trusted friend Leosydas chimed back, gazing hawkishly at the properly armored blue troops at their tail.

"Swindlers and snakes," Perseus thus cursed that envoy for misleading them.

While this friend suggested, "Perseus, tonight let's go over to that camp and have a closer look. I'm interested."

Meaning Leosydas was asking his king to ford a river with a small contingent and get as close to the Zanzan camp as possible to get a better view himself.

This was a very bold suggestion, and if Alexander was in Perseus's place, he would have certainly snapped at the suggestion of such a dangerous plan.

But this was the difference between the warrior king Perseus, and the prudent, half paranoid, Alexander, as the former readily agreed within a heartbeat with the short reply, "Yes, let's."

Perseus was after all a very bold man.

And his soldiers loved him because of that.

παΠδαςNovel.com So later that very night, a dozen or so horsemen crossed the icy cold river and stealthy approached Menes's embanked camp and got as close as they could without arousing the sentries on duty, before using their sharp eyes to observe the soldiers in camp.

It was fortunately a clear moon-lit night and so much of the camp was clear for them to view.

And there, they were surprised to see the order and discipline in the camp, as there was little din and clamor coming from it, the soldiers strode with purpose, there was no loitering, and the guards in full uniform patrolled the site with a straight back and firm footsteps.

Thus after finishing their reconnaissance, Leosydas famously said, "These do not look like poor, hungry peasants or ill-equipped, rowdy mercenaries to me. We will soon find out what they can do."

This image had formed in them naturally due to Clive, who in his negotiations had obviously downplayed the risk of attacking Zanzan, sprouting similar rhetoric as Muazz had done to Djose.

And so seeing the actual enemy, Perseus too gave a grim nod to his friend's analysis.

But if it would be any consolation to the belligerent king, the situation on the opposite camp was not as nearly rosy as it appeared on the surface.

Chapter 528 Pre-Battle Troubles

While the Tibian king was surveying Menes's camp, the general himself was currently inside his war tent, dealing with a huge problem of his own.

"General, we only have enough food to last five days. And the next shipment due at least a week away.... possibly two." His adjutant, a large man named Synadus reported with a slightly fearful tone to his voice.

"And that is with rationing?" Menes furrowed his brows as he sought the confirmation.

"Yes," Came the instant answer.

And it made the black man's face turn gloomier.

He knew that when his subordinate said one or two weeks, he solidly meant two and more, not anywhere close to one.

Synadus had only added the one week to console his superior and make it appear the next supply run was closer than it really was.

Which meant the army had to resort to rationing, where the soldiers would be given just one meal a day as opposed to the usual two.

And given that in the army the one thing soldiers most looked forward to was the meal, halving it was not a wise idea.

So Menes first cursed at the man responsible, "Fuckign Heliptos. Useless imbecile. Can't even properly plan this small campaign."

So the reason why this problem had occurred was not at all because of the distance or the long supply chain or enemy sabotage.

But simply because the people in charge of the logistical support had messed up, i.e.- Heliptos and the people under him.

These people, both due to incompetency and also simply lack of manpower as Alexander had a critical shortage of educated men, had failed to properly give out orders pertaining to the proper resupply of the army, meaning they failed to accurately plan for almost everything.

They badly calculated the number of food carts that would be needed in this campaign as instead of using arithmetic functions such as multiplication and division to determine it, they simply winged it using an eyeball estimate.

They also failed to properly divide the food carts into groups so that one group could deliver the food while the other restocked back at Zanzan.

In that same vein, these carts' schedules were also mixed up and not properly coordinated.

And lastly, the route they were to be sent along was badly chosen.

With all this resulting in the army not being properly supplied, as although the food carts were supposed to keep coming to them in a steady stream, in reality, they arrived in staggered stages in large batches.

This happened because these carts either started later than they should have as many even did not know when they were supposed to leave, or many did not have enough horse carts or draft animals necessary to carry the amount of produce intended for them, or they simply got delayed due to bad weather and terrain.

All of which resulted in a logistical disaster, as when the baggage train did not properly come, the soldiers starved.

And when they did arrive, many times two or three contingents would arrive simultaneously, making it a hassle for the army to store all this extra food.

This would also slow down their movement speed to a crawl as they would now be burdened with all this excess food they have no use for yet.

Which ultimately meant that the lean, mean, fast army Alexander envisioned was turned into a malnourished, sluggish force, that struggled to either move or keep itself fed.

And if one wanted to really dig down and point out the culprit for this, surprisingly it would not be necessarily Heliptos, but actually, Alexander, as this had mainly occurred because he had prioritized loyalty over competence when choosing many of his council members.

Now this had its benefits, as Alexander did not have to look over his shoulder every second of the day in fear of a coup, and he could employ many of his policies unchallenged.

But it also meant these men were not very good at their jobs.

And this fight between the human quality of- 'loyalty' and 'competency' was an eternal struggle any king, or dictator or strong man had to always struggle with,

The consequence of which Menes was being made to feel.

Who hearing that food rationing had been implemented said,

pandasNovel.com "Soldiers get more easily hungry in winter. And a hungry soldier is a rebellious soldier."

"So cancel the rationing and institute regular food servings. And make sure they receive the normal servings."

Menes instructed as such because he did not want the servers to cheat and give the men lower proportions.

And although this was certainly a generous move, its drawback was evident, as expressed by a shocked Synadus,

"But sir! The food.....? What will we do once it's all gone?" as he then subconsciously pointed his finger towards the flaps of the tent and said, "It's already winter and we cannot properly forage."

"Please reconsider!" He at last pleaded. I think you should take a look at pandasnovel.com

To which Menes in a very hard, determined voice replied, "The food will not be an issue. We will force a battle within the next two days and finish the snake before that can happen."

"....." Synadus did not repeat the difficulties of attacking across the river and only stood shocked at the bold order.

His mind was currently in turmoil.

According to military law, he was obliged to obey his superior.

But according to any good conscience, he really had a hard time obeying it.

And seeing this hesitation, Menes lightly barked, "What are standing there gawking at? Go! Do what I said."

Before adding, "And bring me the other leaders. I will convince them."

This childing from his superior instantly broke the military man out of his stupor, and with an instant salute and a loud "Yes," Synadus walked out of the tent to adjust the food ratios and inform the other leaders of the meeting.

'Whatever happens, happens to his head' And as the adjutant diligently carried out the orders, he decided to delegate all the blame on Menes's head

While in Menes's tent that morning, the leaders posed unanimously rejected this hasty plan, saying,

"No way! Without Alexander, the army is already low in morale. So forcing a fight through a river in this state is too dangerous. The army might even break at the first hit."

This was said specifically by Melodias, who was quickly joined by Heliptos, who said with large nods, "That's right, that's right. Let us keep tailing them. And once they reach closer to Zanzan, our supply troubles will be solved and then we can attack."

When Menes heard the main culprit of this situation speak about supply troubles so casually, it naturally irked him, and so gritting his teeth he growled, "You have the nerve to talk about supplies. We are in this mess because of you, you idiot!"

"My men are starving because of you. We are all starving because of you."

Mene said this because Alexander had strictly ordered all members of the army, from the lowest soldier to the highest general receive the same food and portions, meaning when the rationing was introduced, the commanders got the same amount of grub as the grassroots soldiers.

And so for a big man such as Menes, this meant a half-empty tummy and an irritated mood.

At Menes's light tirade, Heliptos shrink a bit and lowered his head in shame, as this was not the first time the giant general had lambasted him.

While seeing this, Melodias quickly jumped in to try to keep these two allies together, saying, "Now, now, Lord Menes, Lord Heliptos did not do it intentionally. This is also his first time managing such a huge army so far out and it is only natural that he would make mistakes." ,

"And besides, he is already suffering from it just as we are."

"Look! He has already gotten so much thinner!"

It was indeed true that Heliptos had never done anything close to this, as when he was in the mercenary, everyone carried their own things at regular times, while in a campaign, it would be the employer's headache to provide them with food and drinks.

So this was really his first rodeo so far from the city, as was everyone else's.

And this reminder made Menes cool off a bit and not say the things he wanted to say, which was,

'We should cut some of his fat off to feed the men'.

Instead, he very boisterously called out, "It is precisely because our morale is low that we should take this bold initiative."

"To inspire the soldiers with a grand victory!"

"To show we are just as capable as Alexander."

"Or do you want us to run back to Zanzan with nothing to show to the young boy?"

This taunt hit its mark, especially with the age thing, and as most of the military leaders were eager for military achievements, they could not openly suggest a defensive posture after this.

It appeared Menes was an adept commander, being able to rally people behind him, as after seeing the other leaders slightly grimace and twitch their lips, the giant man pressed his advantage to say,

"If you want to be meek and passively follow the enemy as they kill, rape, and plunder our lands, then say so."

"But if you do not, then let our soldiers eat their fill the next two days, gain their strength, and attack on the dawn of the third."

It did not take a genius to figure out what option the other leaders ultimately chose.

Chapter 529 Menes Vs Perseus (Part-1)

Menes bringing in Alexander's age was a genius move on his part, as given the young man's achievements, the other leaders were eager not to fall behind.

And hence, when the usually aggressive Menes suggested this risky, bold option, the other military leaders were pressured by their peers to ultimately choose it.

So then the question rose, 'How to attack?'

And Menes seemed to have even found that, a way to cross the river relatively safely.

So he laid out this plan to his commanders, "The Tibians will stick close to the river as they need a large supply of fresh water, just as us."

"So I propose sending our scouts forward to find a relatively shallow part of the river."

"Once we find it, we will camp somewhere close to it."

"And then we will wait for the enemy to get ahead of the spot so that we can cross it."

"And attack their rear!" This last sentence was said not by Menes but by Heliptos, whose enthusiastic interjection clearly expressed his thoughts about the proposal.

The plump man clearly loved it.

And so did the other leaders, who could be seen one by one nodding their heads.

This was certainly feasible.

And so, for the remainder of that morning, the men worked on ironing out the details of how that maneuver would be exactly done, as 50,000 men doing anything, much less crossing a running river produced a lot of noise, and they had to find a way to distract the enemy rear guard so that they would not be alerted and let the main enemy force know.

That would be a disaster as the enemy cavalry would be able to cut them to ribbons, while their missiles troops peppered them with arrow fire.

But also, letting the enemy get too far ahead of them was also not an option, as then they would be able to escape before Menes could attack, meaning the latter would starve.

So Menes needed to properly place his camp just the right way to ensure they were just within the enemy's sweet spot.

And hence all these planning and preparations continued for the next two days, as in the meantime, the scouts that were sent out for reconnaissance spotted several shallow parts of the river along their marching route which matched their requirements, with the water at best reaching the hips.

The abundance of such spots was actually natural, given it was winter and almost all the rivers' water levels had dropped, while the cool season also made the waters calm and gentle, making it easy to ford, though inevitably a bit cold.

But it was nothing the soldiers could not soldier through, and so soon the day of the attack arrived.

But here, a slight hiccup to the plan propped.

"The enemy has banked itself right next to the shallows. What do we do?" Late at night, Melodias posed this question nervously to Menes in his war tent.

The man was trying very hard to keep his nerves calm.

"Yes, what should we do?" And this question was repeated by Heliptos, who sounded equally nervous.

Because none of the men wanted to spell out the trouble they were in, i.e.- They only had one meal's worth of food left.

Whereas they were still at least three days march from Zanzan, as Tibias had decided to take a roundabout way to attack Zanzan by choosing to follow the River Diannu.

"....." Menes too was fluxed.

They had only discussed how they would attack Tibias from the rear, but never considered performing a contested river crossing right in front of the enemy.

This was not part of the plan.

And failing to account for this possibility was a major oversight.

But now was not the time to dwell on that.

Instead, Menes knew he had to do something to solve this current predicament before looking back on his mistakes.

After all, an army that was starving was just one step away from mutiny.

And given Alexander was not here to calm these people, the normally racist Adhanians which made up the bulk of the force would likely tear him and his men a new one if given the chance.

And the other leaders also knew this, hence their added fear.

Thus, he forced himself to rake his brains, and as if the gods were smiling at him, finally, a while later, hit him with an epiphany.

"I have a plan. But it will require some sacrifice." He grinned out loud,

While the other leaders really could not care less about sacrifices, as long it was only 'some sacrifices.

As far as they were concerned, if the death of some poor sods could help them gain final victory, they would gladly pay the price,

So they turned to look at Menes with eager ears and hopeful gazes.

And when they heard his full proposal, soon the general's plan was approved with overwhelming praise and adulation.

"Excellent! This plan is excellent!" Heliptos was the loudest advocate of the strategy, both because he truly liked it, but also to oil up Menes and smother his dissatisfaction at him.

While Melodias even quickly moved to give suggestions to properly implement it, saying,

"Yes. But if we want to carry it out, I propose we wake the soldiers right now. And have them prepared and in position by the crack of dawn."

"We should attack at soon the sky clears."

This proposition was instantly accepted by the military leaders, and so with this, the next few hours were used to bring Menes's strategy to life.

Meaning the soldiers were woken up from their half sleep, quickly given a hot meal, properly armed and equipped, made to report to their units, and then finally moved to position, as they then waited for their commander's orders.

But if someone decided to pay attention to the individual men, he would have found them a bit confused and low on morale, as they did not know why they had been woken up like this in the middle of the night after a hard day's march or when or where they were doing to attack.

And their morale would have been certainly lower if they knew they were about to be ordered to cross the freezing river under enemy fire.

Now, all this could have been redeemed by Menes giving a loud, powerful, rousing speech to pump the men up before the battle.

But he decided against it so as to not alert the enemy.

And so for now, the Zanzan soldiers seemed weaker than its counterpart across the bank.

But Menes did not think the difference in fighting zeal to be critical.

It was still manageable in his opinion.

So instead he turned around to ask the scouts who had gone to the very edge of their side of the river to see the enemy layout one last time before the attack, wanting them to describe what they had seen.

And the scout informed him this, "General, the enemy has deployed its troops in the usual formation as it always does when it rests at night."

"There are around four to five thousand (4,000 - 5,000) missile units placed along the river bank to stop any crossings, while the main army is at the back in their main camp."

"We have also tried to spot any trenches, ditches, or ramparts, and only found a trench dug around the front, facing the river."

"As usual their flanks are open."

Now, though this might seem like a gross oversight, but in defense of the Tibians, they constructed this defensive structure every night.

And given the enemy was right opposite to them and they could clearly see them, they simply saw no reason to build further trenches along the flanks as there was little chance of such an attack.

In their minds, the enemy could only attack them across the river and it could only be head-on.

So they did not bother.

Plus there was also the inherent factor of laziness by the soldiers, who detested digging trenches in this cold, finding the dry soil almost as hard as concrete.

And it was this noticeable flaw that Menes had spotted quite a few nights ago that now gave him a last shot at winning this battle.

"Hmm, good, that's good." Thus hearing the scout's report and being reassured that the enemy had not changed its standard tactics, Menes gave pleased nods and before turning to his adjutant, to give the go-ahead for the attack.

"Tell the front units to advance as we discussed."

"And make sure the cavalry is ready."

"We attack now!"

"Yes!" Synadusnadus obeyed with a military salute, and soon military trumpets began to blare from the Zanzan's side.

While on the opposite side of the river, as the sky had begun to brighten, the lightly armored missile troops placed along the front line, gave a lazy yawn and rubbed their eyes in relief, finally relaxing now that their shift was finally over.

When suddenly their ears were blasted by loud honks from the opposite bank, followed by the deafening cries of bloodthirsty man as the 2,000 missile troops and 2,000 light infantry stared with shock and horror at the mass of enemy infantry crossing the river en mass.

They could hardly believe that the enemy had decided to cross the river in broad daylight.v Chapter 530
Menes Vs Perseus (Part-2)

"Charge!"

"Charge!"

"Shout and charge!"

As the first few rows of Menes's army crossed the icy cold river, their commanders shouted this specific instruction, as they were ordered as such by their higher-ups.

While from the opposite side, the missile troops with practiced adeptness quickly formed up, with the infantry placing themselves at the front to protect the frailer projectiles troops at the back, who then began to launch volley after volley of deadly missiles at the incoming Zanzan soldiers.

And judging by the speed they switched from being passive onlookers to active defenders, it was apparent that these men were hardened veterans.

Most of them had been baked in the crucible of Amenheraft's three years of fighting, and so after their initial shock, they quickly knew what to do.

In fact even their initial shock was not of fear but of incredulity, as they simply could not believe the enemy would force a crossing in such open terrain, under complete broad daylight with no camouflage.

'As expected of peasants and rowdy mercenaries,' Many of the war veterans hence smirked confidently as they were told this about the enemy they were about to face.

While for Menes's troops, the hail of arrow fire, javelin throws, and lead bullets from slingers were proving a difficult obstacle to overcome, as casualties on their side quickly began to mount even through the shield, the chainmail, and the gambeson or linen thorax.

Menes knew these men would face the stiffest resistance and thus had equipped them with the heaviest armor they had to give them the best protection.

But still, the sheer volume of the missile projectiles being launched against them was showing itself to be too much.

Additionally, given the men wore so much armor, it also meant they were slow and sluggish to maneuver, and their movement speed particularly devolved to a crawl when crossing the river, making them become almost sitting ducks for the enemy on the opposite banks, who began to use these poor sods somewhat as target practice.

But still the soldiers of Zanzan pushed on, urged by their commanders, who constantly repeated this particular phrase, "Shout and charge!", "Shout and charge!"

This was a strange thing to chant, especially the first one, as one would expect the enemy to make as little noise as possible when crossing a contested river so as to try not to alert the enemy as much as possible.

And so perhaps if a particularly paranoid man had been present within the Tibian ranks, he would have suspected something.

Such as the enemy being instructed to make too much noise at the front to draw their attention from somewhere else.

But alas, no such shrewd commander was present within the 4,000 forward-deployed troops.

And unfortunately for the Tibians that was exactly what was happening currently.

"Quick! Quick! Hurry the horses and get them across!" Grahtos on the left flank of the army urged his men to hasten their fording.

While on the right flank, the man in charge- Laykash did the same.

Both men knew the forward-deployed infantry were being battered brutally by the enemy artillery and it was unknown how long those poor, green recruits could hold before they broke rank and run.

These men were cannon fooders as Menes naturally had not sent his good troops to draw enemy fire.

And so the reliability of these men holding the line till the battle plan could be executed was highly questionable.

Hence all the cavalrymen knew time was of the essence.

But knowing something and doing something about it were two very different things.

This was because the shallow parts of the river were currently being used by the infantry, meaning the horses had to swim through much deeper water along the two sides.

This also of course meant that the horses moved slower as they waded through the deeper water, while additionally, many beasts were even reluctant to get wet in this cold weather in the first place.

So their riders had to coax, cajole, and even beat these beasts to follow their order, taking up precious time.

The situation was also not helped by the fact that many of the cavalrymen were new recruits that had only joined for a few months after Alexander had decided to expand the cavalry part of the army, meaning they lacked the expert handling skill of their steeds as the Sycarians did.

All of which played to drastically slow the river crossing, and affected their pre-planned attack schedule.

And if the riders could not cross quickly, the entire attack failing was a very real possibility.

So these cavalrymen endeavored to accomplish this task as fast as possible.

While in the meantime, the small contingent of around 5,000 troops or one legion that was sent to the front, composed mostly of new levies, were mostly left to their own, with the main army only cheering their comrades on from the opposite side, them dry, and warm, alive.

While these poor men were in the opposite condition, wet, cold, and many injured, they still tried their best to cross the river and reach the opposite side to engage the enemy.

With their only weapon from the incessant arrow fire being the heavy wooden shield they carried with them over their head.

These soldiers had tried to form a testudo as they moved, but the uneven ground and the act of wading through a literal river made that endeavor impossible, as it was not feasible to maintain unit cohesion when moving through such terrain.

Thus many gaps could be seen even form through the wall of large shields which inevitably let the enemy shoot through them to reap many lives.

And in this particular case, Zanzan's specialty, its secret troops- the crossbowmen were surprisingly of no use, as the enemy was too far away to hit them from Zanzan's side of the bank. While the enemy itself could target the mass of bodies on the water as those men were deliberately coming towards them, thus even making the task earlier for them.

As for the crossbowmen, even accompanying the advancing soldiers to give them cover fire was not a viable option, as reloading a crossbow in the middle of a river was quite impossible.

And so for now, the deciders of the previous battle were forced to simply wait on the other bank and watch helplessly as their comrades tried to slowly, almost with a crawling speed cross the river before being once again set upon by the phalanx infantry waiting eagerly for them.

The river had already turned blood red by then, and it was unknown how long these men could hold under such casualties.

At it was this exact message that soon reached Menes, with the herald relaying this particular message from the legion's commander.

"Lord Menes, the situation at the front line is critical. I'm not sure how long these peasants can hold."

"If you are gonna do something, do it quick!"

Menes too understand the gravity of the situation and knew that the cavalry attack that was supposed to come and attack the enemy's flanks was really late.

And so he barked at another one of his scouts, "What's the deal with the cavalry attack? Did Grahtos fall asleep?"

Menes naturally was irritated.

While the innocent scout bearing the anger of the supreme general would only lampoon in his heart that he was scolding the wrong person, before repeating the challenges the cavalry was facing crossing the river and then volunteering,

"Lord General, let me go and urge the two commander sirs to hurry up."

The poor scout wanted to do both because he felt it was necessary, and also because he felt it would be prudent to distance himself from this angry man for the time being.

"Wait!" But it seemed Menes had not finished speaking, as he then instructed, "Go tell both Grahtos and Laykash to launch the attack immediately." adding,

"I do not care if they are ready or not. Or whether they have enough numbers or not."

"Tell them the front lines might break anytime, and they are to attack the flanks regardless."

"With whatever men they got on the other side of the river."

Menes repeated many of his commands to emphasize their importance.

"Yes, sir," The scout diligently received the order with an instant salute, and quickly relayed the same message to a colleague of his, as each rode off in opposite directions, one to inform the left Grahtos, and the other the right Laykash.

While the herald that had brought Menes the message from the front line was given the following instruction- To go tell the front legion commander that General Menes has ordered the cavalry attack to begin immediately and that he is to hold on till then at all cost.

As in the meantime, on the left flank of the cavalry, Grahtos let out a short cry upon receiving Menes's order, exclaiming, "What! We are not ready!"

Before finally being convinced by the messenger.

But not before he sent back the herald with these words, "Okay, but tell Menes that we only got 500 of the 2,000 men across. The river is deeper than we expected and the animals are scared to cross it."

Though things were fortunately a bit better on Laykash's side, as the water level there was much less there.

And so the young man had managed to get about 1,200 of his 2,000 horses across and was ready to charge.

Hence soon, the two cavalry units were ready for their pincher attack.