

Herald 541

Chapter 541 Preparations For The Defense

As the defeated remnant of Menes's forces entered the city, seeing their dejected appearances and badly mauled state, Cambyses's heart skipped several beats.

With them defeated, and the enemy so close.....Cambyses dared not think further.

And coupled with the losses she recalled, the nineteen-year-old began to feel a stinging headache coming.

Close to 13,000 dead was a large wound for any lord.

Never mind for a small fiefdom like Zanzan.

It was not something Alexander's city could afford to withstand at this point.

Especially not when all those lost were all healthy, young men in the prime of their lives.

And knowing this, the day Cambyses had gotten the news, the girl was so hurt and afraid that she even found it hard to swallow her food for the rest of the day, feeling butterflies swarming inside her stomach.

"Mistress, please eat something," Mean had urged her several times, but that day, whenever Cambyses got close to any food, her throat appeared to subconsciously turn dry and her stomach produced an uncomfortable feeling.

She was deathly afraid of what would happen to her and the city when the enemy army arrived at their walls.

Worse, she really had no one to express these fears and get valuable feedback.

By this it was meant that the people who would have come really handy in this situation, such as the Queen Mother, or Mikaya were absent, leaving Cambyses with only the twins, who had been cajoled by their grandfather to skip this year's Jtaama.

And these two princesses were really of no help in the military side of things.

And so with the current circumstances, Cambyses decided to immediately send a messenger bird to Alexander informing him of the situation, and further asking him for advice and if possible even reinforcements, though she knew the latter was very, very unlikely.

And as she waited for the news, Cambyses got to work preparing the city for the inevitable siege with the help of Menicus and Bartholomew, intent on producing a strong, fortress-like defense.

And once they were reinforced by around another 37,000 men, which was the army defeated at the hands of Perseus, she decided to call a council meeting as soon as possible.

And given the urgency of the situation, with Perseus being so close, the leader met up just a day later the army entered the city, where the council members met to discuss what to do next, i.e.- whether to fight, surrender, or escape.

"Surrender is out of the question." Cambyses sitting at the head of the chair, where usually Alexander sat let this be known perfectly clearly.

This was the city they had, and if this was gone, even if they would all survive, Alexander would become a pauper.

And this was not even mentioning the new things the city produced.

Cambyses would rather die than hand all those valuable things over.

And this was unanimously agreed by all the other members too, as expressed by the leader of the council members-Menicus.

"Haha, yes of course surrender is out of the question. We have fought so hard to gain this city, how can we simply give it away?" He loudly claimed.

This strong stance was a no-brainer for a variety of reasons.

The biggest one probably being due to their loyalty to Alexander.

He had treated them well, and with the generous remunerations he had given them, being with him seemed like the safer choice.

And so if they surrendered, along with Zanzan, their own fiefdoms, and peerages would likely also go.

And this was not to mention if they surrendered without his or his wife's permission, as he was not here, they could bet every single gold coin they had that Alexander would come to exact revenge.

And given his battle accomplishments up until now, surrendering to the enemy without even fighting sounded craven.

And this was not even taking into account the people of Zanzan, who would surely not accept such a decision and might simply start a riot.

Thus all the military leaders had a strong incentive to fight till the end.

Hence the surrender option firmly crossed out, Menicus turned to Cambyses then prudently suggest,

"Although we will never surrender, but perhaps it would be better for my lady and her entourage to leave for the capital on a ship."

"A siege is a brutal affair, and surely the lord will have a better peace of mind knowing his wife was safe."

It seemed Menicus preferred that Cambyses escape, which actually came out of him from the genuine goodness of his heart.

But here Cambyses flared up like an enraged cat, *Bang*, even smashing her fair hands against the hard table to say, no, to shout, "My husband left in charge of this city. And I will be in charge of this city till the day he returns or till I die and crumble to dust."

"I'm not leaving!"

"No one is leaving!" I think you should take a look at

"We will defend the city to the death!"

Cambyses's loud and absolute proclamation somewhat surprised the men, as they had thought perhaps the trailer sex would prefer the company and protection of her much stronger husband in such trying and dangerous times.

But seeing her revolve, Menicus, who had thought of wanting to say something more, decided not to bring this topic up.

Instead, he could not actually help but let out a sign of amazement, saying, "It seems that we have all underestimated your courage, my lady. We apologize," as the old even lowered his whitened thatched head.

Following which he turned to face the other council members and point out, "If a girl like her can stay, what does it say about us men if we can't? Right boys, haha!"

The old man very crudely tried to raise morale and then noticed the nervous and for some even ashamed faces.

They could not believe they were beaten in terms of courage by a young girl.

And hearing this it was Grahtos who loudly joined first, confidently saying,

"That's right! What does losing one battle matter? I have lost countless battles in my life, and I'm still here aren't I"

This certainly helped lifted some of the gloomy mood, as then, seeing his comrades join in Melodias, the calmer of the members too threw in his support, which was meant to be a short uplifting speech, but which then transformed into giving an almost epic speech,

"That's right! We might have lost the battle, but is that the end?" Melodias loudly posed, as he then loudly claimed, "No!"

He then pointed outside, to the scenery outside the window,

"Look outside! Look how downcast the sky is. Look how bleak everything looks."

"It is now winter."

"It is now cold, freezing, and unforgiving out there, with no shelter, no food, and even the water stings when you drink it."

Melodias spoke from experience, as their three days march had not been kind, either to him or his men.

In fact, because they had not packed much warm clothing, it had been brutal, and it was only the fact that Zanzan was in close proximity, and the soldiers knew they would be able to soon have hot food, and warm beds when they reached the city, that gave the defeated army the strength needed to go on.

Or else, as Menes had suspected, a mutiny would have surely taken place.

Or at the very least a general desertion of the army.

Thus with the elements turning hostile against any force, not in protected cities and shelters, Melodias was confident Perseus would not be having a pleasant time, as he pointed out,

"The enemy has decided to attack us at such a time! A time where Goddess Gaia turns her wrath against anyone not in their homes resting."

"Not only that, he wishes to win a siege at such a time!"

"He thinks we are so easy that he can brush off the cold winds, the icy waters, and the freezing temperature to take our city.

"A city that has stood against Tibias's aggression for centuries!"

"A city whose walls have never fallen."

"And the deluded king he thinks he can do what all his predecessors failed to do now? In this weather?" Melodias mocked Perseus with an incredulous voice, smirking at the man's decision, as the man hardened his voice to at last claim,

"Well, we will show him just how mistaken he is!"

"We will make the king understand through the blood and bones of his men just how strong we are."

"Let's see how long he can last against our walls."

"The walls that have been thickened to twice their size, and the wooden gates that have been replaced by an iron portcullis.

"Nothing would make us happier than to see for the foolish Tibians to smash their heads against our walls."

Melodias's long speech highlighted to the military commanders that they still held considerable defense against the enemy and thus the general pessimism about the whole situation managed to subside quite a bit.

After all, in any siege, you are hoping the enemy will break before you, and so there is always the lingering question, 'Will we be able to withstand a siege?'

While Cambyses screamed manically in her head,

'That was exactly what I said to you idiots months ago!'

'So why are pretending that this idea is something brand new that you thought of right now!'

'If you power-hungry hyenas had just stayed behind the walls, the winter and walls enemy would have simply killed the enemy for us.'

Chapter 542 Preparations For The Defense (Part-2)

Cambyses was convinced that if they had listened to her, they would not have needed to even lift a finger to defeat the enemy.

As such Cambyses's lungs jumped up to her throat as it urged its owner to give a diatribe of scalding rebuke, wanting to chastise all the men here for killing 10,000 good men, and perhaps even losing another 3,000 as prisoners.

But she held back...for now.

Because she understood now was not the time to point fingers and be at each other's throats.

That could wait after the threat was over.

It was also because of that same exact reason that Cambyses had not even chided Menes for his loss, even when the giant had publicly apologized to her.

This had happened the very day Menes had returned, in fact, the very moment Menes had entered the city, as Cambyses was there around the gates to see the state of the defeated army with her very own eyes.

"My lady, I have no excuse! It is also my fault and I take full responsibility," This was the very first thing the armored man had said right when he saw Cambyses was this, as he lowered his head in shame,

And seeing this Cambyses kept a very respectful face and only said, "I have heard all the reports, generals. You have done a good job to get these so many men safely back."

"For that the people of Zanzan are grateful."

Before dismissing him, "The general must be tired. Now please go rest," making the reception be cordial but somewhat cold.

And after that interaction, Cambyses simply feigned being all understanding about Menes, not caring to bring any criticism on him, because she felt the person to do that should be her husband Alexander, and it should be upto him to decide the kind of punishment if any should be imposed.

And to that effect, she had even written about this specific topic in her letter to him.

So with all those done, Cambyses now concentrated on coming together and tackling the external problem.

And as the decision to battle a siege was taken, Cambyses informed the men of the preparations that they had already taken.

She began, "Once the news of the loss reached, we got to work preparing for the siege."

"First and foremost Lord Menicus has properly inventoried the food and firewood stocks and secured them in cement warehouses."

"These silos are fireproof and so we can sleep easy knowing is no fear of the enemy or saboteurs setting them alight," Cambyses said the most important thing very first, and after knowing their food supply was safe, the news did work to soothe many a worried heart.

And she further reassured the surrounding men by saying,

"Additionally he says that we have enough stockpiles of grain to last close to a year with proper rationing. Particularly due to our winter harvests being so much."

"So as long as the walls hold, reinforcements will certainly come."

This got all the men to nod in unison as there was no way Tibias could maintain a siege for a year.

They would surely be attacked from other sides by many of the hostile nobles who hated Tibias.

And even if they didn't, even for Alexander to raise an entire army and march it from Adhan, it would at best take six months.

Thus, knowing this, and aware of the general difficulty of overcoming a siege against a well-fortified city, the military leaders started to feel confident about their chances.

While Cambyses after having addressed the most pressing concern, listed the other additional steps she had taken,

"Also, the city watch under the lead of Bartholomew has rounded up all known and suspected criminals and many have been sent to the coal pits to dig the new firewood."

"This will prevent any crime and stealing during the siege."

In times of sieges it was common for criminals, gangs, and thieves to hoard food, and having seen such scenes many times, it was Menicus who had advised Cambyses to take these steps.

And when the girl had hesitated a bit saying that many of the suspects might be innocent, Menicus said, "These men left alone will be too dangerous. Even if 99 of them are innocent, just 1 of them might be enough to destroy us, " and then reassured her, saying, "Besides we will only keep them until the enemy is defeated. After that, we can even give them some coin to smooth the thing over."

Hence Cambyses was finally convinced.

Thus, with the streets cleaned of the criminals, Cambyses then listed her next action, saying,

"The city guard has also imposed a general lockdown on the city, forbidding anyone from lingering in the streets after dusk."

"With anyone caught to be tried as a spy and thrown into the coal pits."

"Then, as Lord Menicus suggested, we have started to implement a rationing system, where the wall defenders will be given two meals a day, and the rest only one."

"And lastly we have arranged for regular sermons to be held by the twin princesses to placate the populace."

"Mass prayers and songs are arranged to be held and both the temples will remain open during the day for the mourners." "I think you should take a look at

The loss on the battlefield and the subsequent imminent siege naturally had ruffled the feathers of the populace and thus Cambyses had asked Azira and Azura to help calm the people down.

And here the two girls proved to be a godsend, as if not for them, their eloquence in dealing with such circumstances, and their fame as the Saintesses of Rmauh, the people of Zanzan, who had been already sucked dry by the three-year drought and the war with Tibias, this last loss might have been one too many.

'War! War! War! We have had nothing but war for four straight years.'

'My husband, my son, my father, my brother...gone...all gone.'

'Damn to them. Damn to it all,'

Many such howls of despairs of mothers, widows, and sisters would be heard.

And seeing this Cambyses had felt that the city might lose the will to fight before it lost its walls.

Hence she had instructed the girls to do this of her volition and had even rejected Menicus's suggestion to let the girls escape the city.

After finishing her long speech, Cambyses looked around to see if the others had anything more to add, but naturally, as this defense was planned with Menicus's advice, none found anything missing.

So with the internal situation of the city stabilized, now the preparation for defending against the external situation needed to be done.

And here, at last, Menes, who had gone a bit taciturn following his defeat decided it was no time to mope around and joined in the conversation, taking charge and loudly saying,

"The enemy is at our doorsteps. We must prepare our men as soon as possible."

"So our first and foremost priority is recruiting more wall defenders."

"For that, I propose taking in many of the returned soldiers. And especially hire the crossbowmen who fought against Djose."

"They will need not to be trained on the new weapons after all."

"And I also propose increasing production of both crossbows and the bolts."

"For I believe that these new bows will be critical to enable us to hold the walls."

"And lastly, I remember Lord Alexander saying that the instant bow will be a miracle weapon in the hands of expert men during sieges."

"So I propose making new units equipped with them and assigned to defend critical points."

Finished laying out his strategy for the defense of the city, Menes then looked around to see if anyone had any objections.

But heard no objection, as the other sat quietly and approved.

Thus the rest of the meeting was composed of discussing the various details such as their weapon stock levels, the number of men available, their distribution along the walls, and even the kind of remuneration each of the fighting men would be given.

Regarding the matter of money, Cambyses did not hold back one single bit, instantly saying all the defenders would be given the same wage as the regular army for every day they fought, and that even if anyone died, the deceased's family members would be given a similar pension to the army's.

After all, Alexander had quite some money in his treasury, and all the gold in the world would not matter if they lost the city.

Thus Cambyses let the gold flow freely.

And as for the matter of manpower, well Zanzan was a city of close to 200,000.

Meaning even accounting for the women, children, and the infirm, it had at least 50,000- 60,000 available men to defend it.

So with so many people actively defending the city, being able to repel the Tibians seemed to heavily favor the defenders....if one did not take into account the existence of the catapult, a siege machine that was said to revolutionize ancient warfare.

Most famously Sparta had been powerless against Athen's large walls before the invention of this weapon.

But with its inception, many of Athen's allies fell to it.

So Tibias certainly had a chance.

But it was not like Zanzan had no cards of its own.

The crossbow had revolutionized medieval warfare as it let untrained peasants be expert marksmen.

Hence the playing field seemed to be evened out.

Thus it was to be seen who the victor would be between the clash of spear and shield.

Chapter 543 Alexander's Days In Adhan (Part-1)

As Perseus's army drew near, Cambyses put all her energy into preparing for defense.

While also hoping to get a reply from Alexander.

And what was Alexander's reaction when he learned of the defeat?

Well, before he got the news, the man was actually living quite the high life in the capital.

Fantastic food, sweet wine, comfy bed, warm room, and the best women were all given to him without restraint, and all these luxuries seemed to feel a few times better given the current season- winter, which made Alexander be totally snug up in his room and be attended to hand and foot.

And thus, this was how a typical day for Alexander went for the two weeks he could live without a care in the world.

In the morning, Alexander would often stay in his comfy bed quite late, given the biting cold outside, choosing to be wrapped up in his thick, fluffy blanket to fight the chill that would inevitably permeate his room all throughout the night, with him most of the time being accompanied by the nubile Maya beside him, acting as his bed warmer.

Sometimes Alexander would even have one or more of her sisters sleeping with him, all spooning against him from either side, their bare voluptuous bodies both massaging him and making the bed smell a sensual, sweet scent.

If Alexander was feeling particularly frisky, he would even keep his little brother warm inside one of them all throughout the night.

Then, after waking up, he would be served a warm breakfast, most of the time in bed by the maids, which usually consisted of a thick porridge with meat or fish, white bread, some other side dish such as buttered or jammed bread, eggs, tart, etc, alongside various seasonal fruits, all of course accompanied by wine.

Ah! Drinking first thing in the morning.

After finishing this, if Alexander did not have any appointments, he would have some free time on his hand.

So he would use this time to either laze around, such as taking in the sight of the Life Sea from his balcony on the second floor while humming to himself, or drinking.

Or he would take a walk around the palace premises to see all the various maids, servants, and slaves working about.

And sometimes he would even peek into the throne room to see how the court proceedings were going.

And with Alexander engaging himself as such, soon midday would arrive, and lunch would be promptly served.

This meal Alexander usually ate with the king and his close lords, such as Pasha Farzah and Iyazid and sometimes even the Queen Mother, while listening to them discuss some tidbits about the happenings in the court that day and sometimes even about the nation as a whole.

After lunch, it would be the lords' time to relax.

So some would take their horses out for a ride, go on short walks, or even have a small picnic with their family in the outdoors, taking a sit around the many gardens dotted around and being served by their many servants.

While some of the more comfort-loving nobles would simply take a small nap and wake up around dusk.

And as Alexander stayed in the palace and saw the nobles enjoy as such, he finally began to understand why palaces like the Buckingham Palace or Palace of Versailles covered so much area and were so big.

Because those places were not just houses for its inhabitants to live in.

But they were their entire world!

They were designed as such so that the nobles could get all the comforts, luxuries, and entertainment inside the premises, and never have to leave.

And to make that happen, Ptolomy appeared to have gone all out, as the real party would begin once the dusk fell.

A grand feast would be held almost every day, where the nobles partied with the best food, wine, and music money could buy.

The menus would be lavish and extravagant, with meat being the only real choice, as fish and vegetables were seen as the food of peasants.

So for almost two weeks, Alexander ate every kind of meat there was- pork, beef, venison, lamb, bear, peasants, chicken, fowl, ox, fox, badger, etc, the list could go on, cooked every kind of way- boiled, braised, shredded, barbequed, and skewered to name a few.

In fact, the amount of meat was so much that after a week he even had trouble cleaning his stomach, forcing him to visit the palace apothecary and ask for some medicine to relieve his indigestion.

Though perhaps he might have preferred staying that way given the state of the bathroom. I think you should take a look at

Because there was the slight issue of all the toilets being communal, meaning Alexander would be many times accompanied by many other half-naked men doing their own business at the same time as him.

For a modern man, it was disgusting.

Alexander was able to avoid this issue the previous time because there were far fewer people and he was able to monopolize an entire section of the toilet for his personal use.

But now that was not certainly possible now given the number of nobles residing here temporarily.

And so for a modern man to be exposed to such 'horrific' sights and ...oh the smell, Alexander felt extremely uncomfortable and even ashamed when doing his business.

Due to this the man then even started to go to the toilets in the middle of the night, regardless of him having to fight the bitter cold of the unheated palace in the process, just to avoid the embarrassment.

And sometimes as Alexander would drag his sleepy, shivering body, he would sardonically lampoon, 'Too bad it's not mixed. At least then I would have some eye candy.'

While Alexander could only shake his head in dismay at the barbaric sanitation arrangements, he would have to give credit to the various hired performers who sang, danced, and even did tricks for the court every night.

They were quite nice, at least a lot better than what Zanzan had at the moment.

The singers and dancers were the usual kinds, both men and women playing various instruments, and singing melodious tunes, being also even accompanied by classical, and exotic dances.

The songs' lyrics and music were quite catchy, and even Alexander, who did not understand enough Azhak to keep pace with all the words found himself tapping his foot to the tune, enjoying some of it.

While accompanying the dances were naturally designed to be provocative and sensual, as many of these performers wore revealing clothes and showed off their curves through their movements, for many saw these performances as opportunities to move up in life by catching the fancy of a noble and becoming his concubine for the females, and lover in the case of a male.

And even if that did not always happen, they did expect to be heavily tipped for their night services.

And to that effect, though Alexander had no interest in choosing any of the singers or dancers, he nevertheless got sent a pair of cute minstrels by Pasha Farzah as a gift after one of the performances.

The brunettes appeared in their early twenties, and Alexander was happy to indulge them, both because he found the sisters attractive with their cute dimples and long hair, and also because he felt refusing them would likely slight Pasha Farzah.

And after tasting them, Alexander had to say the pasha's gift was well worth it, as the two experienced women gave Alexander quite the night, with one sister sensually singing mellifluous moans, while the other displayed quite the flexibility, even doing a pose where she brought her legs to touch her hands in a kind of handstand, and letting Alexander experience a position he yet had to.

'I should buy some gymnastics for my haram,' Alexander even thought for a moment after the pleasurable memory.

But for all the music, singing, and dancing, if Alexander had to choose, the highlights of the shows would have to be the tricks the performers did.

In fact, they might be even the highlight of his visit.

Not because they were any good or anything, but because of how surprising and bizarre some of them were.

Sure there were the usual jugglers and various other acrobatic performers, but there were also some of the other more exotic ones, such as a group who competed at one another to see who would spit the farthest, a duo who tried to up one another at who could fart the loudest, and a man who showcased the various funny faces he could make to name a few.

And though Alexander found some of these a bit funny, particularly the last one as it seemed to remind him of Mr. Bean, the rest of the court seemed to laugh their heads off at every one of the tricks, their collective peals of laughter vibrating across the large hall room, and even diffusing out into the city.

Alexander even noticed the usual regal Queen Mother let off a few guffaws as at other times her lips trembled as she attempted to hold back laughing out loud like Pasha Farzah was doing sitting near her.

It seemed this was what passed as peak entertainment for this period of time. Chapter 544 Alexander's Days In Adhan (Part-2)

The time after Jtaama was a big money-making day for all the performers not only in Adhan but all over the country.

For according to the customs, the following days after the pilgrimage was a cause of huge celebrations.

But of course, the one in the capital city certainly appeared to be the biggest one, as drove after drove eager performers flooded the city in hopes of landing a lucrative gig and making it big.

Because for many, the money they made from these short few days would have to be the amount they have to make last for the entire year.

And so after the pilgrimage ended, the city that seemed quite dreary until now suddenly did a one-eighty, with music, dances, and songs capturing it in their grasp and letting its people drown themselves in revelry.

And since this was the first major celebration after the drought ended, it seemed Ptolomy had gone out big, employing many of the entertainers, and giving out generous coins, both to liven the atmosphere and also to improve his image as a benevolent king.

But among all these entertainments, though Alexander did not disapprove much of them, there was one form of entertainment that did not please Alexander at all.

And those were freak shows.

In there, people with various physical deformities, autism, people changed by diseases such as leprosy, skin conditions, dwarfs, and many other types of unfortunate souls that looked different from the norm and hence rejected by society were paraded for the entertainment of other people in cages or in customers, who pointed and laughed at them.

And seeing this, Alexander surely hoped to one day bring these shows to a close.

Because he knew the people being paraded here were likely suffering abuses at the hands of their organizers.

After all, who could have guessed the people others were laughing at for being less than human were being treated as less than human?

But he also knew even if he were to raise these issues now, he would only get laughed at.

Because for most of the nobility, even for moderately good nobles like Pasha Farzah, this was simply not an issue to concern himself with.

Even if it was true that those people were being treated horribly, the other nobles would probably not care, saying this was their master's right.

After all, remember these people still practiced slavery, where they could legally do almost anything to the men, women, and children they owned.

So for now, Alexander could only sit in front of the stage and put a placid face hiding his disgust, as the world's hairiest men, the shortest dwarf, the ugliest woman, or the woman with the beard, to name a few were introduced.

And though Alexander found the performance distasteful, the rest of the court seemed to love it, jeering, taunting, and laughing at the so-called freaks.

Nothing says it's the ancient times like a bit of racial superiority.

But fortunately for Alexander, such shows happened only twice.

And outside of these mindless entertainments, there were also literary types involving play, and other literary works.

Two very elaborate plays were held in the outdoor premises of the palace where famous acting guilds built stages and performed for the king and his entourage.

And though the play appeared uninspired to him, as it depicted a king, here likely the ruler of Adhania, winning a battle against the barbarians, it was nevertheless something one could pass the time with if he was bored enough.

In the following days after the plays, there were various other competitions regarding many works of literature held, where aspiring poets recited both classic and new poems, actors played out famous stories, and writers told stories, their topics being varied and diverse, ranging from describing mother nature to portraying human conflict, to love and loss, to even include philosophical thought.

Some even read out stories that could only be described as propaganda as they glorified 'Adhania the motherland' while throwing out shade at all other countries.

And among all these poets and writers performing their acts, there were some who were hired by the court full time to just do this, to flourish the arts and culture of their time, and to show to the world that Adhania was the best nation in the world.

Because just like in Alexander's time when a country's scientific and technological achievements were seen as the benchmark for its civility and advancedness, in this time period it was one's mastery of literary arts that proved who was the superior culture.

And hence the court employed many scholars.

But in this competition, the court hired literates were not the only participants.

For among the performers, there were also many aspiring young scholars too, all of whom hoped to showcase their literary skills in these events and if they were lucky enough, be noticed by some nobles or even the king himself who would then take them as their patrons after being impressed by them.

With the intention of the nobles being, as mentioned earlier, to be able to show off the literary works they collected or produced, that being was a source of major pride and bragging rights within the Adhanian circle of nobility.

So it was customary to proudly show off one's collection of books to other fellow nobles when they came to visit, and many nobles even regularly competed with each other over whose collection was better.

As for Alexander, hearing the scholars recite poems using words he even doubted were Azhak, and listening to stories that were not so good as the troupes were all predictable, or simply not that good in of itself, he had a hard time keeping his eyes open. I think you should take a look at

Which many other nobles noticed and gave him sneering looks, saying to themselves, 'As expected of a bumpkin!'

Not that Alexander cared.

While his allies such as Pasha Farzah and Lady Inayah would only produce slightly wry looks at Alexander's general disinterest.

They had already spoken to Alexander about this before even in Zanzan, pointing out,

"Alexander, we noticed that you have no poets or writers. Why don't we give you some?" and even added,

"It is quite important to produce some literary works. The Adhanian nobility really values these."

But Alexander had simply brushed these concerns off, giving the simple excuse, "I'm too poor to afford such luxuries. Maybe later."

Alexander was certainly not poor, and so hearing his lame rejection, his allies understood that Alexander simply had no interest in engaging in literature.

Which they reasoned as being due to Alexander being low-born and less refined than them.

Whereas the real reason was because Alexander was simply more interested in the sciences than the arts.

But that did not mean Alexander was not interested in hiring some of the news poets and writers and then taking them back to Zanzan.

But it was not because he was interested in their writing or literary works.

It was simply because he wanted these men to be teachers.

Zanzan had a severe shortage of anyone who would could hold a pen, or..in case a quill, and Alexander felt these men would at least be able to help children learn to read or count.

But Alexander decided to wait a bit on that thought because he did not know if these men would agree.

For some of these men, this literary craft was something they practiced for their entire life, and asking them to give it all up to be a teacher might very well not sit well with some.

Hence Alexander decided to talk to Pasha Farzah about his plan first, also remembering that he had also already asked the aged lord to supply such men to him.

Thus Alexander was in no hurry.

While Alexander enjoyed these plays, performances, and tricks every day, after each of the many performances held at night finished, the nobles would still not retire.

Instead, then actually the nighttime festivities would begin, where Alexander would keenly notice a noble going to bed with women, who many times were not necessarily their wives or concubines.

Sometimes he would even notice a group of noblemen and women enter special rooms together.

But Alexander did not dive his head any further than that.

He did not know if those girls were simply working girls, slaves, maids, or something else entirely, and frankly, he did not want to know.

Instead, Alexander focused on the liberty given to him by Ptolomy to choose between a wide range of girls before coming to bed.

And though he sometimes chose one or two new ones, he mostly stuck to his new maid Maya, for whom it was actually the first serving a guest.

Thus Alexander like a gracious master would many times go deep into the night teaching the new girl all the ropes on how to please a man, making her take many exotic positions and exploring many of her nooks and crannies, and causing her sweet canary voice to sometimes even drift out of the room.

And it was as such that Alexander spent some carefree days, where the party in the court went for almost two weeks non-stop. as the capital had finished celebrating its yearly pilgrimage, and where Alexander finally got the chance to meet with many of the members of the Adhanina court.

Chapter 545 Meeting Amenheraft Face To Face (Part-1)

In the two weeks Alexander partied and enjoyed his time in the capital, he also got to know the people.

Particularly he got to know them in a special party held especially for him, which was arranged by Ptolomy to inaugurate him to Adhania's noble circle.

There, at the large ball, dressed in their finest, Alexander got to meet almost all the nobles that had come for the pilgrimage, including both who were loyal to Ptolomy and those who detested him.

There were of course a few from both sides.

On the friendly side, Alexander met his most recent retainer Jamider (Earl) Tikba, along with a few of the other twelve, exchanging some close pleasantries with them.

But such friendly interactions were rare like chicken's teeth.

Instead, most of the time, Alexander was given the cold shoulders from surprisingly both sides, as many nobles irrespective of their faction saw him as an outsider, and also hated him because of the indiscriminate massacre he had carried out in the capital when he conquered it.

Thus, it was only with Pasha Farzah acting as a guide that he was able to even exchange some pleasantries with the newly converted nobles, while the opposing side pointed their nose high into the sky and shrugged him off.

And though the other side did not want to even talk to Alexander, that did not actually stop him from knowing them, as with Pasha Farzah acting as a gracious mentor helping him learn who was who, Alexander quickly memorized all the important people there.

"That man with a mustache laughing is Matbar (Marquiss) Uzek...the one whose son you almost killed"

"Over there is Matbar (Marquiss) Tareeq, Nanazin's father. I'm surprised he is even here."

"This is DJose's second son, Fais, who came instead of his father. Wonder why DJose didn't? He is quite religious....?"

"The tall man..."

In this way, over the length of the party, one by one Pasha Farzah patiently introduced many of the big shots of Adhan, and even added some commentary to them.

While in this process of roaming his eyes, Alexander too noticed some memorable faces he recognized.

There was the face of Jamider (Earl) Yuusiq who had refused to join him, the countenance of Jamider (Earl) Bahram who had tried but failed to retrieve his men from him, and a few other nobles whose names Alexander did not know the names of but knew by face that they had participated in the alliance against him.

While Pasha Farzah at last introduced Alexander to the most important group of people there.

"That is Vivizan, Pasha of Ankut. He is the one currently giving shelter to Amenheraft," He said, drawing Alexander's attention to an old, hunched-back, frail old man with a cane at the center of the room.

And looking at him, the very first thing that Alexander thought was wondering how did he make the journey here in that physical state.

It seemed to Alexander that a stiff wind could blow the man over.

But such thoughts were quickly drowned as his eyes then registered the people surrounding him.

There was a portly man who kept sending him a deathly glare every five seconds, which Alexander easily recognized as Muazz, and there was the smartly dressed Manuk, who was one of the participants that drew the armistice and at last there was the man himself.

"I do not need to introduce the people there now do I?" Pasha Farzah chimed from the side as he noticed a look of recognition dawn on Alexander, and simply let the boy observe the group.

And so Alexander finally got to meet the man with whom perhaps his entire story started, the one whom he had defeated twice in battle, and the one who was perhaps the biggest obstacle in his path- The former king of Adhania, Amenheraft.

This was the first time Alexander got to see the man in the flesh for real, as at the previous times he was fully clad in armor, and so Alexander made a distinct point to memorize the physical features of the man.

Dressed in luxurious garments, with many of his fingers having rings, each graced with precious jewels, the now dethroned king was a tall, handsome figure. with broad shoulders, and a strong body, his bulky silhouette exuding a sense of strength and energy.

He had a square chiseled face, on which he kept a well-maintained French-cut beard, its color matched perfectly with his neatly cut short hair, while his most prominent facial features were his eyes, which seemed to almost glow with a glint, their gaze sharp and ever watchful.

Alexander still vividly remembered gazing into them when the man had escaped via the Life sea, and seeing them again, Alexander felt a sense of power and authority that Ptolomy simply lacked.

And once Alexander finished scanning the man, he would easily concede without a doubt that at least physically and in demeanor, Amenheraft looked much more regal and king-like than Ptolomy.

After a while of focusing on Amenheraft, Alexander then moved his eyes to the last person in that small group and it landed on a woman.

Dressed in a full-sleeved green gown that was heavily embroidered and fashioned, she was beautiful enough to stand out even among all the ladies there, with a heart-shaped face and jet-black hair that was fashionably lifted into the sky and jeweled to glitter like the stars.

'She must be the wife. I believe she is called Akhemisa' Alexander recalled a piece of information he had learned before.

But it was not the status of this woman that had mainly attracted his attention. I think you should take a look at

Instead, it was the boy that rested on her arms, appearing to be around two-three years old, while additionally there was a slight bump on her belly, clearly showing she was expecting.

And seeing the cute, plump boy staying gracefully on his mother's lap, Alexander was a bit surprised to see him there.

Because this was the first time he had seen a noble lady carry a baby herself, as this task was usually left to the maids.

The nobility even did not breastfeed their children, much preferring to use wet nurses.

Hence seeing the odd one out, Alexander guessed that this was likely because the woman loved her children very dearly, and was very protective of them.

And after looking at the healthy boy with a healthy red glow to his skin for a while, he somewhat whispered so that only Pasha Farzah could hear, "It seems even if Amenheraft goes, we will still have to deal with his successor."

Alexander did know that Amenheraft had a successor, but seeing it for himself made it all the more real.

"Yeah. Maybe even two." And the old man pointed at Akhemisa's swollen belly as he spookily replied.

It seemed that with perhaps another backup on the way, cutting off the snake's head to quell the civil war would not likely work.

Even if Amenheraft was gone, most likely his retainers would rally behind his son or even daughter.

"Perhaps they will die during infancy," So Alexander even made the heartless wish for the death of two innocent children, hoping they given the low level of medical technology, the children would not be able to pass the vulnerable age up to five.

After all about half the children died during their infancy, unable to reach childhood.

And hearing this Pasha Farzah not only did not disapprove but even gave ideas to Alexander, pointing out,

"If we can somehow feed her a large dose of legumnum.... perhaps we can induce even a late-stage abortion."

"But the question is how."

"There have been already attempts on her son's life."

"And so by now, the security around her is very tight."

"Escapically regarding food."

"She only eats what her own cook makes."

"Notice that she has not even touched or eaten anything in the whole party."

"The girl is obsessed with her son's life, and also her own, intent on living through to see him grow up."

Pasha Farzah gave Alexander quite the information report, proving his spies really had their eyes and ears on places that mattered.

And as for Alexander, he only listened and nodded.

He did not even ask if Pasha Farzah had anything to do with the assassination attempts or if it was some other party.

He did not care.

Instead, he tried to think if he had a way to poison the mother and son, and if possible even Amenheraft.

He first thought of the assassin's teapot he had used to Diamous, and then also of using poisoned ice cubes in drinks, where the poison would dissolve as the ice slowly melted.

And while Alexander was immersed in such macabre thoughts, Amenheraft, who had by now noticed Alexander's gaze on them, turned around to lock eyes with him and then stepped forward to greet the man who had stolen everything from him.

Then, completely ignoring Pasha Farzah who was standing next to him, Amenheraft greeted, "So this is the barbarian dog Ptolomy has chained to usurp us!"

He did not make the slightest effort to hide his hostility, his eyes glowing with hatred and nostrils flaring as he addressed Alexander in a loud, crass voice.

And he was intentionally loud enough to let the entire court hear his voice. and as his voice carried over, the whole ballroom went pin-drop silent moments later as the up-until-now somewhat merry atmosphere turned very frosty.

It almost seemed like someone had opened all the windows in the hall room and let the cold, wintery air in.

Chapter 546 Meeting Amenheraft For Face To Face (Part-2)

Alexander was not really surprised by Amenheraft's hostile remark.

In fact, he was already prepared for such a greeting when he had known Ptolomy was going to hold this party with nobles from both factions.

This was even something he himself had asked for.

Because Alexander wanted to at least see all the nobles on both sides and know who was who.

And perhaps even make a name for himself by winning some verbal bouts.

Hence, unconcerned about the rude greeting, it was only after he felt a man approach him that he broke away from his train of thought of wanting to kill Amenheraft's wife and children and brought his focus back to the party, only to find a pair of eyes drowning in hatred.

And facing this hostile reaction, Alexander reacted nonchalantly.

Because if someone had stolen Zanzan from him like he took Adhan from Amenheraft, he too would be quite pissed off.

Thus, as he faced the glaring eyes, and felt many curious eyes from all around land on him, he decided to respond to Amenheraft calling him a barbarian.

So first he politely greeted him, coolly saying, "It is customary in my land to first greet someone when meeting for the first time. So let me say that it is nice to finally meet you too, Your Grace." before sarcastically smirking, "And Your Lordship should be a bit mindful of his manner. Because if someone were to judge us just from the conversation right now, they might mistake who the actual 'barbarian' was here."

Alexander held back nothing in his barbed reply, and as the ballroom was stone silent at that time, it helped to carry his reply to all present ears.

"*Pooh*" And hearing this, when the Queen mother failed to hold her guffaw, and let out a short burst of laughter before quickly suppressing herself, the silent hall room also helped to take that sound clearly all around.

Which was quite humiliating for Amenheraft.

As for why the experienced Queen mother had failed to hold in her laughter, well it was because she knew Amenheraft was not the type to show his emotions so openly.

Usually, whenever she had met him, Amenheraft always would have a regal air around him, and speak in a deep, winded aristocratic way.

Hence, seeing now how he had broken etiquette so blatantly and spoken so crassly, the Queen Mother felt that the loss of his capital must have hurt him more than she had expected.

Thus, feeling amused at Alexander's witty remark and taking pleasure at Amenheraft's fall from grace, the regal woman failed to control herself for a moment and let out a laugh, before quickly endeavoring to reapply her cold, nonchalant facade.

But in attempting to do, she somehow made it worse for Amenheraft, as after her distinctive sound, a few more such short giggles, and smirks started to appear all around.

It seemed that laughter truly was contagious.

And though all of these tried to be equally silent and small so as to not laugh out loud and break the etiquette of opening laughing at a noble which was considered very rude, the short chortles actually produced a slight crescendo that seemed to make as if the entire ballroom was laughing at Amenheraft.

"Hahaha, good brat, good," While Pasha Farzah, who was standing just opposite to Alexander really did laugh as if the whole ballroom was laughing, holding nothing back,

And as for Alexander, after returning a light smile to the aged man who had heavily slapped him across the shoulder, he, like the Queen Mother, went on to think that Amenheraft must be really, really salty about losing his capital.

And they were right in their conjecture, as what stung really him the most was not the fact that he had lost his capital, but more so how he lost it.

Amenheraft had everything under his control the entire time, everything in his palms on his hands, when suddenly, the next second it was not, sniped away by a thief.

And then before even he could understand what was going to he was forced to escape the city.

That day still haunted Amenheraft in his nightmares, and as a matter of fact, even now, he would many times wake up in the middle of the night with sweat all over his face having weird and fearful dreams about that very fateful morning.

So, when he saw the main culprit behind it all, Alexander, strutting around, wearing fine clothes, eating good food, and drinking the same sweet wine as him, the man, who also might have had a bit too much to drink was momentarily unable to control his rage and frustration, resulting in the imbroglio.

But as Amenheraft stood like a block of wood in front of Alexander with a red face, wishing to kill the man but having to hold himself off to honor the sacredness of the days following the Jtaama, it was the old Pasha of Ankuut had come to his king's rescue.

"*Cough*, *cough*, Manuk has told me you had quite the tongue youngster. Is that how you managed to deceive Ptolomy?"

"From a mere slave to a great Pasha! How else could it be?" The old man had a broken, cackling tone to his voice.

And here he said this to try and stoke the jealousy of other nobles, many of whom were indeed prejudiced against Alexander's peerage, envious of what an outsider had managed to do that they were not able to accomplish in generations.

And so when Vivizan insinuated that Alexander had Ptolomy manipulated him to get his position, it did tickle some hearts.

Now the accusations were not really false.

Alexander did a bit strong-arm the man to give a lot of concessions.

But these were old issues, that Alexander did not feel like rehashing, simply saying,

"How Adhan, Zanzan, and 10 billion ropals were split up is open knowledge"

"So what happened with me and His Majesty is clear to everybody with half a head."

"There is little point in trying to divide us using such weak attempts."

As Alexander coolly parried back the shot, the old man was still not done, snarking,

"Hmmp, profiting off pitting brothers against brothers. You all foreigners are despicable!" "Murderers who kill women and children in their homes. Burn them alive. Rape and plunder." "And if all that was not enough you brutes even steal from the gods."

"Even calling you barbarians would be being too gracious."

The old veteran politician really knew how to stir up a crowd as he very deftly weaved in all of Alexander's crimes along with his race.

To which Alexander returned with a breezy chuckle, I think you should take a look at

"Haha, all those crimes you mentioned were actually committed by the palace guards. Many of whom we already captured and punished."

"We even have survivors we rescued who can testify to that."

This story was old news, and Alexander recited it word for word.

But he also knew this excuse lacked much weight behind it.

So afterward he flashed his palms and in an understanding tone continued,

"But I get what the esteemed Pahsa of Ankuut is really trying to say."

"He is indirectly saying that it is I who am responsible for this civil war."

"That without me there would not be so many deaths and so much misery."

"But is that really true? Did I really cause all the destruction?"

Here Alexander paused a bit to see the reaction of the court, and pleased with seeing everyone's eyes be on this exchange, he continued,

"No! I will say is not my fault."

"Because if you will remember when Lord Amenheraft defeated Agapios not once, but twice in one day, my and my soldiers only had one wish, and that was to leave Adhania and return to Thesos, our motherland."

"And that was the only thing we wanted to do," Alexander repeated to emphasize the point.

Before his tone turned a bit taunting,

"But when asked to be allowed to do so, your king, Amenheraft refused."

"And not only he refused, he even led the army against us."

"At a time when he had no reason to."

"At a time when his numbers doubled ours."

"Only for glory and heroics."

"And on the way, he then got fooled by the appearance of gold and silver in our camp."

"And landed himself in a trap."

"Foolish!"

"Imagine a king as rich as him getting tempted by the gold of some poor mercenaries."

"How foolish he is!"

Alexander loudly jeered, then turned his head around to ask the court,

"So ask yourself, who really is responsible for your condition."

"Who really let the situation go out of control?"

"With a king like him, is it any wonder you are in this mess?"

"Amenheraft called His Majesty an usurper when he greeted me."

"What usurper?"

"Who did His Majesty really usurp the throne from?"

"When we entered the city, we were only 1,500 horsemen."

"If your real king wanted he could have easily pushed us out."

"But the foolish kind did so such thing."

"Instead he fled."

"Like a coward. With his tail tucked between his tail."

"Along the Life Sea to his current den."

"And what was even worse about this shameful escape was that the craven man did not even take his two daughters with him, hoping we would kill them, the two saintesses, and then have a war with Pasha Farzah."

"So His Majesty Ptolomy did not usurp anything."

"Amenheraft simply left it empty."

Alexander very grandly declared.

Chapter 547 Meeting Amenheraft For Face To Face (Part-3)

Alexander's grand speech made both sides of the room remember some key details.

While it also made the nobles note of Alexander's uncanny ability to turn black into white, with many finding it fascinating.

Because just listening to his speech, one would think that Ptolomy had not taken the throne from Amenheraft, but was graciously handed it over.

Even Pasha Farzah was impressed by how Alexander was able to twist the logic, using mostly true events to portray his side as the just one.

So to help his teammate out, the veteran fox too quickly added, "That's right. His Majesty is no usurper,"

"He only took on the heavy responsibility of guiding the nation when its previous leader ran, leaving the seat vacant."

"You can't be a coward and run away from your capital, and then still be expected to be the king."

Pasha Farzah loudly accused Amenheraft.

"Yo..you..." And Amenheraft was caught so unprepared by this attack, that he could muster no comeback.

Everything they said was technically true, only that it was said in a way that seemed to portray him as a coward who ran whereas Ptolomy stood and fight.

But that was not at all true how it happened.

The reason why he ran and Ptolomy did not was because the force attacking him was friendly to Ptolomy.

In fact, Ptolomy too had run when Amenheraft retook the city after defeating Agapios.

So Alexander's grand speech really had no basis in logic.

But it did not need to.

Because it had basis in people's hearts.

People loved to compare things one to one, even if they were apples to oranges.

And so for some, it made them think that Amenheraft had really lost his place as king, as opposed to Ptolomy stealing it.

"Bullshit! It's like they say, empty vessels make the most noise." This angry retort was said by Manuk, who could no longer take Alexander twisting the words and decided to join the fray, angrily pointing and protesting,

"You say Ptolomy is not an usurper!"

"We all know how the king you serve is only being propped up by foreign powers."

"If you were not then why would you want to open our country to outside trade!"

"This is clearly the foreigner's goal. To have us sell our country."

As the archpriest said this, he even quickly turned to face the crowd before Alexander would respond, addressing them as such,

"My fellow nobles, I would like you all to recall that Matrak was given special permission to trade with the outside world due to their great contributions to our country."

"And what happened then?"

"Were they grateful? Did their pasha stay loyal?"

"No!"

"Instead he fomented a rebellion."

"And he even killed His Majesty."

"Why?"

"The real reason is because he was tempted by foreign powers."

"These you people must not be allowed to rule this country. Or else our dear Adhania will soon cease to exist."

Manuk appeared to be able to spew the amount of bullshit as Alexander, which was not surprising given he was the archpriest and hence very adept at giving sermons.

As Manuk spoke these alarmist words using the proposed trading plans, Alexander was actually surprised.

He did not think they would get to know about it so soon, or that their reaction would be so intense.

While from the back, Lady Inayah spookily sighed a bit, knowing this reaction was inevitably due at some point, as did the Queen Mother.

It seemed this was simply how the Adhanian court was.

As for Alexander, after hearing about this, and sensing many curious gazes turn suspicious and even hostile as they learned of the intended plan, he quickly tried to think of a way to alleviate these concerns.

But he found it difficult.

Because what Manuk had done was the classic trick of throwing lots of accusations at once in a short period of time.

And if Alexander was to address them one by one, then it would take too long, and that would simply lack the impact Manuk's speech had.

After all, it took a few seconds to make a whole host of accusations, but it might take an hour to explain all of them.

So Alexander simply avoided that landmine and said this, "Whether opening Adhania for trade will make the country flourish or turn it destitute remains to be seen."

"But please remember that all the other countries around us heavily trade among themselves and they still exist as individual countries don't they?"

"Even in Adhania itself, as Priest Manuk has pointed out, Matrak trades with Thesos."

"And whether that has destroyed the province and replaced it with Thesians, or if it has enriched its nobles and people is clear for all to see."

"So I believe the man is simply trying to spread fear and misinformation here."

With this said, Alexander declared,

"And remember, the decision to open trade is not even final."

"There are many nuances to the plan which Priest Manuk has conveniently skipped"

"Thus I advise all interested to check up on how we intended to start doing trade." "I think you should take a look at

"Because it will be really small."

At this point in his speech, Alexander gestured his arms toward Ptolomy, and continued,

"And His Majesty has already promised that if anyone refuses to open his territory to trade, he will respect their wishes."

"He is not a tyrant like Amenheraft and will never force his own decisions upon his retainers.... as it should be."

Alexander flashed a knowing glance to Ptolomy as he said so, and though nothing like this had been ever discussed, the king could only nod and smile, "That's right. We will always respect each and every noble's decision."

And with this, though not eliminate, Alexander at least was able to deactivate Manuk's bomb, as the nobles were reassured they would be able to tune off the trade any time.

A result that did not at all suit Amenheraft's faction, as Pasha Vlvizan roughed coughed out,

"Bah! What trade! Our fathers and forefathers stopped trading with the outside barbarians for a reason."

"What do we need to trade for?"

"What does our great country lack?"

"You youngsters are simply hoodwinked by this fork-tongued devil!"

The old man now appealed to the nobles' culture, heritage, and ancestry.

And in this time period, people viewed such things with a great source of pride, with many simply following what their father and their father's father did.

Reasons and logic did not work there, with the most recent example being Lord Nibraz's family still using chariots just because they had done for generations.

And hearing this, Alexander did not actually feel corned.

Instead felt he felt that he got the chance to say a piece he had been wishing to for a long time, but what not gotten the chance to.

So began with the words, "Yes, it is true that the previous generous of Adhania's nobility banned trade."

"And they did what they thought was best for the time."

"But times change."

"And it would be foolish for us not to adapt with it."

"Especially when the only reason is the words of only one man."

Here Alexander paused a bit agins to flash his palms in an understanding manner,

"Now, I know what many of you might say."

"That those are not the words of any ordinary man."

"And those are the words of a king, a god-king, someone chosen by the gods."

"But ask yourself this, has he really been able to guide you the last few years?"

"Unable to properly respond to a drought sweeping across the country."

"Getting into wars."

"Having a civil war."

"Losing his capital."

"Those really do not seem like the works of a being blessed by the gods, do they?"

"And even after those fiascos, his decisions were questionable."

"After His Majesty Ptolomy had taken the throne, we did send peace delegations to the man you follow, proposing to live in peace and harmony."

"But he refused to even entertain them."

"And what was the result?"

"A huge battle!"

"And the destruction of his 100,000 army, along with the crippling loss of so many of his retainers."

"The loss of many of your own kin, your fathers, brothers, sons."

"And for what?"

"So that you could have access to Adhan, to the Grand Temple, to the Life Sea?"

"So that you could perform your pilgrimage safely?"

"Well, do you not have all these already?"

"Did you not just accomplish our Jtaama already?"

"During which part of pilgrimage did you find His Majesty's accommodation to be lacking?"

"So what was the point of declaring war on us if, after his loss, Amenheraft had he come to us for a peace treaty anyway and then gotten exactly what he would have gotten if he had just accepted our previous terms?"

Each of Alexander's analyses felt like feral bites to Amenheraft, as the young boy completely thrashed him in front of everyone.

And what was supposed to be Amenheraft using his aura and prestige to suppress the boy, was now turning into a full rout for him.

While Alexander, after crossing Amenheraft to his heart's content let out a bombshell,

"And so I urge all nobles and particularly the pasha to not blindly follow Amenheraft, but move according to what best suits you."

"Because His Majesty has no qualms with any province staying neutral in this conflict."

"In fact, we would be even open to reducing the temple tithes to anyone choosing not just to switch sides, but just to stay neutral!"

Chapter 548 Meeting Amenheraft Face To Face (Part-4)

"What!" As soon as Alexander said his offer, it got this particular loud shout not actually from Amenheraft, but from Ptolomy himself, who was astounded.

Promising other nobles deals and concessions was his privilege.

When did Alexander get that power?

Ptolomy was incensed.

And so the favorable impression he had developed just now when Alexander helped strengthen his claim to the throne instantly went down the drain.

Even Pasha Farzah and the Queen Mother were surprised by this announcement and this time they actually sided with Ptolomy as they felt it was quite unwise of Alexander to declare such a huge commitment without consulting them first.

This was not only being rude to them but even foolish.

Thus along with Ptolomy, they too sent angry scowls toward them.

While Alexander being all such negative emotions being directed towards him remained unmoved.

He had done so even knowing such a reaction would likely occur.

Because he knew if he were to talk to the others about it, there would be endless talking and discussion, and before they could come up with an answer, the time would have already passed and the nobles would leave the capital.

Thus Alexander decided to make the offer seemingly out of the blue offer.

And it was quite the offer, as the tithes were one of the main and most time even the only real obligations they had to the royal family.

And in exchange, the royal family officially guaranteed them safe access to the afterlife.

While in this life, a large portion of the money was actually used in service of the nobles themselves, like using it to pay for the maintenance of the temples in one's territory, the wages of its priests and priestesses, and the services like free food and medicine, even education they sometimes provided to its people.

But still, when the remaining donations from all eleven provinces were added up, it did end up being a significant amount of money landing in the royal family's coffers.

It was a major contributor to making the royal family become the richest family.

And Ptolomy had held off promising on reduction of the tithes even till now, declining to promise that to sway potential nobles to his side knowing full well that Amenheraft's faction was clearly the stronger one as he still held hope to subjugate the nobles and institute the same ruling institution that his forefathers had implemented.

And it was because of this that Alexander's promise got Ptolomy really riled up.

"No! That will not happen!" And so overriding Alexander's arbitrary decision, Ptolomy shouted to rebuke the offer.

Which Alexander did not actually find surprising.

If Ptolomy had not done it even when faced with the current situation, he was not going to do it with simply a sentence from Alexander.

So with a chuckle, he turned to face Ptolomy and say, "Of course, I'm not saying we should do that now."

"But that we should keep that door open."

"Over the coming years, we will have some major battles which will claim who knows how many lives."

"Who can say how the results will turn out?"

"Hence I believe it should be prudent to leave a way out for those who do not want to be a part of it."

"Of course, there might be many nobles right now itching for a fight."

"But who can say how things will turn out in the future?"

"Maybe some will want out."

"Maybe some will be too devastated."

"Maybe some will simply be unable to continue."

"For those nobles, I believe a pre-existing peace offering should exist."

At this point, Alexander turned to Ptolomy to say, "Thus I do hope that the court will soon make a concrete list of benefits offers to those who are willing to stay out, or even want to change sides during this conflict."

Here Alexander was clearly indicating to Ptolomy to use the tithes system to attract or at least strip away Amenheraft's allies.

And as if that plot was not enough, Alexander then turned to target the big boss himself, as he then quickly turned to look at Amenheraft to say, "And you, Lord Amenheraft, please know that we do not wish to necessarily kill now."

This surprised Amenheraft for the moment, as Alexander had very much tried to kill him back at the gates of Adhna, and likely would have killed him during the battle for Adhan.

But putting those doubts to the side for now, Amenheraft concentrated on what his sly fox of a man was saying, as Alexander continued, I think you should take a look at

"We are aware that many in Adhnaia see as the divine envoy of the gods or even a god in mortal flesh."

"Many believe worshipping and following you will lead her to eternal happiness, both in this world and the hereafter."

"So killing you would be politically too unsavory."

"And something we would like to avoid at all costs if possible."

"That is why we are proposing to offer you the position of Grand Priest of the Grand Temple of Adhan, and as such the leader of all the temples in Adhania, if you just simply abdicate all your and your progeny's rights to the Adhanian throne!"

Alexander's offer was a momentous one, as the position being offered to Amenheraft was similar to the Christian Pope.

Typically, it was the King of Adhania that held that title, and so for Alexander to make that offer was like him spitting the authority of the king.

And hearing the offer, Amenheraft would be lying if he said he was not even at the least bit tempted, as evidenced by his eyes slightly shivering when Alexander's deep eyes gazed at him.

As for Ptolomy, his lips quivered with the desire to say 'Hell no! He dies,' when Alexander turned to greet him with the same deep eyes.

According to him, agreeing to such an offer would simply mean dividing his power in two, and if Amenheraft got all the temples under him and the influence that came with it, him fomenting a rebellion just like Ptolomy did was given.

Ptolomy at least had that little bit of sense in him to understand that if he agreed to such a deal, then he would never be able to sleep easy knowing his far more capable brother was not only still alive but was likely actively plotting against him.

But before Ptolomy could rain on Alexander's parade once again, this time the Queen Mother quickly stepped forward in his stead to loudly say, "We can agree to that! If you Amenheraft relinquish your right to the throne, the royal family will make adequate arrangements for you and your family, and promises to guarantee them an honorable and dignified life."

The Queen Mother roughly could guess what Alexander was trying to do here, that was trying to undermine Amenheraft's, or at least his faction's will to fight.

As the genuineness of these offers was something to discuss else entirely.

And as so she decided to match her tune with him for the time being, though unlike Alexander, Seelima did not make any specific promises to any post or peerages but only gave a general promise of her word.

Because the promise that Alexander had specifically made was really too much, even as bait to get Amenheraft to step down.

But the unindented consequence of this lukewarm reply with no grand prize was that Amenheraft understood that Alexander's offer was not serious, and was likely made up by the man on the spot without consulting Ptolomy first,

So Amenheraft too offered a similar kind of counteroffer with a scoff, "Heh! Then if Ptolomy abdicates the thrones, I too will give him the title of Grand Priest of the Grand Temple of Adhan." which diluted the initial one's impact.

But Alexander knew how to take the good with the bad.

So he simply laughed, "Hahahaha," without retorting to Amenheraft, and then decided to end this little conversation there.

So he turned to the surrounding noble to say his closing statements,

"Well, esteemed nobles of Adhania. You have heard what we had to say."

"But to reiterate again, please be assured that His Majesty does not have any conflict with any of you."

"That is if choose not to fight and simply stay neutral, nothing will change around you."

"You will continue to thrive as you always have."

"And the country of Adhania will continue to function as it did for the past thousand years."

"So I hope that you will please consider carefully before wanting to go to war with us and produce needless bloodshed."

"And that goes for you too Lord Amenheraft. The door to peace and negotiations is always open for you."

Alexander gave a deep look and a slight nod with his chin at the former king, who only scowled and gripped his goblet tightly, as the veteran politician saw the young man finish his speech, before turning away to rejoin the crowd.

And for the rest of the party, much of the conversation only revolved around what was just said.

Many of the nobles in Ptolomy's court were approached by neutral, and even those wishing to be neutral, as they asked for the details of what Alexander had just said, while the nobles from Amenheraft's faction convened to try and figure out the opposite side's angle.

Chapter 549 Small Seed

The questions that many of the more ambivalent nobles asked their fellow men belonging to Ptolomy's faction covered a whole range of topics, from whether the palace guards really did kill many of the nobles, to the details regarding the country opening up, to even the extent of how solid was Alexander's promises of safety if they stayed neutral.

And all these questions were very broad and penetrating too.

To which the people being asked such inquiries each reacted differently.

The truth was none of them also knew that Alexander was going to make these offers, and so they themselves were almost as flummoxed as the people asking them.

Thus some responded truthfully and said they did not know, some winged it with their own interpretations and addendums, and some simply exaggerated everything, parroting what Alexander said but dialed a few notches higher.

While the small group that Alexander himself joined, consisting of the top leaders such as Ptolomy himself, Pasha Farzah, the Queen Mother, and Lady Inayah's father, and lastly the new grand priest of Adhan whom Alexander had only officially met today, an old man named Ollosh.

And as soon as he joined, the old man jumped up to say, "My lord, that offer! You could have at least confided us in a bit!"

Here he was of course referring to Alexander offering to give Amenheraft the control of the grand temple in exchange for peace.

And the reason for him reacting so strongly was naturally because that was currently his position.

"That's right! Making so many absurd demands! Are you drunk?" And seeing his lackey bite, the master so joined the fray, as Ptolomy glared at Alexander with a hiss.

While Alexander put on a placid face, swearing to himself inside, '*Sigh*', it is so hard to live with idiots.'

It seemed the reason for him doing as he did went above these two's heads.

But fortunately for him, there were at least some intelligent people in Ptolomy's council too, such as the Queen Mother, who stepped forward to gently chide Ptolomy, saying, "Now, now, Your Majesty, Lord Alexander surely had his reasons for doing what he did. Let us not be too harsh on him," before her voice turned all flirtatious and charming, as she whispered into the man's ears, "I will tell you all about in bed."

As the mature woman did this, Alexander could see Ptolomy's face visibly turn soft, his anger dissolving like butter into nothingness, as a red hue flushed across his face.

As soon as Ptolomy heard this promise, the man could care less about what Alexander said or did, for his head was only filled with the thought of what fun times lay ahead of him.

In fact, as the Queen Mother made the open remake, Ptolomy even wished to close the party then and there so as to start the happy times as soon as possible.

It appeared Seelima had truly Ptolomy wrapped in her fingers.

And seeing this, Alexander was perfectly okay with it for the time being, because according to him, having a puppet king under the spell of a sorceress was sometimes far better than having an uncontrollable manchild lead you.

Especially if that sorceress was on your side for the time being.

And so sending a grateful nod to Queen Mother, feeling relieved that he would not need to explain his play at a party where there were prying ears everywhere, he decided to move on to mingle a bit more with the crowd.

While at the same time, Amenheraft's advisors were busy discussing that very speech.

Because though the move might have gone unnoticed by the childish Ptolomy, it certainly did not escape the far shrewder Amenheraft.

"Is he really a slave!" The regal man clenched his teeth as he swore.

This was the first time in his life that the man was thrashed so badly in a verbal exchange and in front of so many nobles for that matter.

He felt humiliated like no other.

And it particularly stung him because in his previous years as the crown prince, and then the king, no one had ever dared to speak to him as such.

So he was in a very bad mood indeed and even chose to exit the party shortly after without much notice.

Amenheraft felt that just today's event was enough to make him fight to the death.

And as Amenheraft left, sensing their leader's foul temper, his retainers did not urge him to stay and simply left him to his own devices that night.

But they did meet up over the following days, their main topic being how to counter Alexander's last speech.

Because that had not only damaged Amenheraft's reputation by openly revealing some of Amenheraft's strategic mistakes, but also gave many nobles an incentive to stay out of the fight.

So the opposing side went into crisis control mode, calling their members and explaining many of the criticism Alexander had laid bare, and giving their own spin to the story.

While also promising various monetary and political benefits, such as land and booty of other nobles to urge their nobles to fight. I think you should take a look at

This aggressive stance was taken because the conclusion Amenheraft and Co. reached was that Ptolomy's side was weak and desperately wanted some peace.

This was indeed true, particularly in the case of Alexander, who wanted some time to grow and more preferably goggle-up parts, if not the whole of Tibias without being distracted.

So naturally the tactic that Amenheraft's group came up with was to deny the opponent just that.

Hence the offers.

As to how effective either side's strategies would be, be it Alexander's urging for nobles to stay neutral and prosper or Amenheraft's urging to fight and grow, that remained to be seen based on how both sides implemented their plans.

While Amenheraft's people focused their effort on that, Alexander was busy with his own stuff.

Among which first and foremost was receiving a call to a meeting the very next morning of the party by the Queen Mother.

Because if Alexander thought he could get away scot-free without any chastisement, he was grossly mistaken.

Although Ptolomy did not care to hold Alexander afterward as the man simply forgot about the whole thing, the other did not, as Alexander entered the room to find Queen Mother and Pasha Farzah sitting.

There the mature woman angrily hissed, "If you are gonna make such out-of-the-blue announcements, tell us about it before, would you! What do you take us for?"

"And who do you think you are? Making promises left and right!"

Although the Queen Mother had not shown it at the party, she was indeed peeved at Alexander going all solo.

To which Alexander simply chuckled and apologized, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I never thought I would get the chance to say those things."

"So when I did, I went a bit too far, haha."

But Alexander did not at all sound sorry, and seeing the man slouching opposite to her, Seelima could only glare.

The fact was that Alexander's initial results were quite fortuitous as she, Pasha Farzah, and also Lord Iyazid were approached by many hopeful nobles to know the details of Alexander's promise.

Hence, with the good results on hand, the woman found it hard to back up her lambasting.

Thus, the Queen Mother simply let off Alexander with a slight warning to not do such things in the future.

Something that Alexander dutifully nodded to and even threw into the junk pile of his memory the next moment.

Because the real reason he had done so without consulting others was to show that even though he was not a part of Ptolemy's court, he still had enough power to dictate many of its policies sometimes even arbitrarily.

But that did not mean the Queen Mother was out of tricks to punish Alexander.

Particularly, she plotted to have Alexander remain in the capital with the excuse of heading the creation of the list of benefits Alexander himself had alluded to.

And since it was his idea, Seelima was confident that Alexander would not be able to say no.

So the Queen Mother got to work working on that.

While for Alexander, over the next few days, he was busy mutually exchanging gifts with the other nobles, in order to build up trust and friendship among each other as per Adhania's custom.

Here Alexander showcased a lot of his own new products and got quite a few favorable responses.

And then, under Pasha Farzah and Lord Iyazid's guidance, he began to have trade talks with some of them, particularly the ones that the two nobles recommended based on the individual's allegiance and previous record of trustworthiness.

And since most of them had already been convinced by Pasha Farzah and even Lady Inayah beforehand, the talks were quite smooth.

There was no Alexander hitting an unexpected brick wall where a noble pretended to be outwardly courteous to Alexander but then did not seem to want to associate with him due to a variety of reasons, such as race and or status.

With these talks underway, Alxx also sat down with Ptolomy regarding the topic of various technology transfers in exchange for some privileges such as mining the ropals, as well as his idea of arming the northern barbarians.

And just as when the talks were going somewhere, just as Alexander was getting to the meat of trying to convince Ptolomy, all those talks suddenly came to a screeching halt with the arrival of two birds.

Cambyses's message had finally arrived.

Chapter 550 Alexander's Reaction (Part-1)

The messenger bird from Cambyses came early one morning around the first week of November, but at that time Alexander was blissfully asleep.

And he only got around to reading it midday.

The reason for this was that the previous night was especially grand, where Ptolomy made sure to show that the events this year were not at all in any way smaller in scale than the previous years so as to show off his prestige and grandeur.

So Alexander returned to his room pretty late.

And given that soon afterward a blizzard overtook the city, the cold outside weather and the snug, warm room made Alexander sleep in to the point he skipped breakfast and woke up only before lunch.

And as evidence of how horrid the weather was outside, even waking so late, Alexander still found his room to be dark and even a bit damp, courtesy of the raging snowstorm that was still going on.

So it was only after refreshing himself and having a hot meal delivered right to his private room, that his maid Maya came up to him, and said, "Master, these two messages arrived for you from Zanzan." as the auburn-haired girl handed the two small rolled up notes.

Sitting on his couch after his large meal, Alexander was sipping some wine as Maya did this, and hearing so, he quickly put down the goblet and took these notes with great alacrity as he had been expecting such a thing, guessing that it must be about the result of the battle.

And as he opened the knot on the binding ribbon of one of the notes, Alexander felt quite confident about the outcome.

'I wonder how many prisoners we took. Zanzan can always use more people.' Alexander was very expectant.

But such eagerness lasted only moments indeed.

Because the reality was much different from his expectations.

For in that small but still readable font, in handwriting that Alexander clearly recognized as Cambyses's it read,

'Alex, we lost! 15,000 dead and captured.'

'The enemy numbers 40,000.'

'Preparing for seige. Have around 50,000 men. Food for 1 year.'

'Send help if possible!'

Cambyses's note was as usual short and succinct, being less than 30 words, it left out any details and only gave the facts, for space on these little scrolls was as valuable as gold.

And as Alexander read this, Maya clearly noticed how her usually jovial master who always had a breezy aura to him suddenly turn his face stony and hard.

"Bring the candle! It's too dark to read anything in here," Alexander snapped in a harsh tone, making it seem that he had read the message wrong because Maya did not arrange for proper lighting facilities.

But though it was indeed a bit dark, it certainly was not enough to hamper one's sight.

So this was really Alexander being in a foul mood after reading the bad news and taking it out on the innocent maid.

And hearing Alexander address her like that for the first time, Maya's heart jumped a bit in fear, as she quickly grabbed the nearby candlestand and brought it much closer, making the group of burning candles illuminate the texts on the note ever brighter.

And Maya did this as quickly as possible too, as she knew that many times angry masters and mistresses would beat, mutilate and even kill nearby maids or servants when they got any bad news, and though Alexander did not seem like that kind of person, Maya could not help but shiver in terror at the prospect of that happening to her.

As for Alexander, he cared not about the maid's thought, as he refocused on the note again, reading and re-reading again, hoping it would say that actually it was Cambyses who started a siege of Tibias, and was just delivering him the good news.

But naturally, the message was what it was.

The fact was Alexander's army had been dealt a crippling defeat and his only city was on the verge of falling.

And this realization made Alexander's stomach have a sinking feeling he had not had for quite a while.

Recently he had been on such a roll with his battles, that the thought of losing really did not even begin to cross his mind until now.

At least not a loss as devastating as this.

Losing 15,000 men especially felt like a gut punch to Alexander.

So for a while he just sat there, unable to utter a response.

'How? How could Menes have lost? How so badly!' Alexander tried to reason this in his head as he sat on his couch.

With his superior technology and numbers, victory should have been his, Alexander reasoned.

But as usual, Cambyses had not given any details of their loss, and so Alexander was left to figure that one out for himself.

While his maid Maya tried to be as inconspicuous as possible, not daring to utter a sound as she stood next to him, taking note to even dampen her breathing.

She could guess whatever was written on the note must be bad but she did not dare ask.

Because she had heard stories of what happened in situations like this from her other sisters, and she really wished to turn into the air and disappear to avoid that fate.

It was only sometime later that Alexander at last recovered from the shock, and as his eyes refocused on back to the notes when suddenly he noticed the second one.

'Please have more info,' And as he got to quickly tearing it open. Alexander really wished in the second part Cambyses gave a good explanation of the situation. I think you should take a look at

But that was not to be.

Because this message was the same as the last one, with two extra words added at the end, 'Punish Menes?'

Reading the same message again, Alexander understood that Cambyses had followed his instructions to send multiple birds carrying the information, hence the repeat.

As for the missing line in one of them, it was likely that in her haste or forgetfulness, Cambyses had forgotten to copy the last two words.

And as Alexander read the question, which alluded to asking for his permission to hold Menes accountable, well without knowing the details of the battle, Alexander really could not give an answer.

But that was beside the point anyway, as right now Alexander could care less about what Menes did.

That could wait after he had saved his city.

And so grabbing the two small notes, Alexander hurriedly got up without a moment to waste and left the room without a word to Maya, as his mind was preoccupied with finding Pasha Farzah and the Queen Mother to discuss the matter.

"Brat! What is it with you and war?"

"War! War! War!"

"In one year you had as many large wars as I have in a decade!"

And as Alexander pleaded his case to them, Pasha Farzah snapped this in anger.

The reason for which was of course due to the old man being worried about his granddaughters' well-being.

Bad things happened inside a city in a siege, and if something were to happen to Azura and Azira....even the veteran politician did not want to go down that rabbit hole.

While facing this unjust accusation and undue anger, Alexander too snapped, "It was you old fart that came up with that peace plan with Tibias."

"So why don't you tell me why they are attacking me? Even after I gave them so much money!"

Like Pasha Farzah, Alexander too was scared of what would happen to his city and his family, thus tempers appeared to run high on both sides.

But fortunately for the two testosterone-driven males, there was another person still present in the room, someone, who could act as a mediator.

And as the two men got at loggerheads with each other, here the Queen Mother pressed down the men to cool down, saying, "Tibias attacking Zanzan is indeed a mystery. But bickering about it among ourselves will not solve it."

"So let us not throw dirty water on each other, and sit down to talk about it."

And with the interjection from this powerful woman, the two men finally took in deep breaths and calmed down.

After which the Queen Mother opened the talks, as she looked at her copy of the message, and reiterated,

"Now, Lord Alexander had already told us before that Tibias was attacking him before."

"And until now we have been unable to determine why."

"Logically they should not have broken the peace treaty so soon."

"Not after the money we gave them."

"So I suspect it had to be something major."

"Expect our spies to soon report it Lord Alexander," Seelima then turned to Alexander to reassure him about this.

As she then continued,

"But for the matter at hand now, it seems Lord Alexander's army has suffered a defeated in a recent battle."

"And now Tibias is likely laying siege to the city."

"That is indeed bad news."

"Sieges are not good," Seelima's voice here turned a bit low as a few unpleasant memories regarding sieges floated up.

But those were as quickly suppressed as they appeared, as her voice turned upturn and reassuring,

"But the good news is that according to Lady Cambyses, the city has both the men and food to last a while."

"Nevermind its formidable walls"

"The city will not fall!"

"So we do have the time to send help."

"And we will send help, rest assured about that Lord Alexander!"