

Herald 551

Chapter 551 Alexander's Reaction (Part-2)

First and foremost, the Queen Mother worked to alleviate the tense Alexander was in, as she made her promise in a hard, steely voice.

And credit where credit is due, it did reassure him.

The man had been so preoccupied with the news of the loss that he had subconsciously skipped the fact where Cambyses notified him of the large number of defenders and the reasonable amount of food she had.

And recalling that, Alexander felt that if he was on the opposite side of the wall, he would not be confident of his chances of taking the city quickly.

"That's right. I have personally seen the walls of Zanzan. and they are likely even more formidable than Adhan's." And from the side, Pasha Farzah added this.

But for Alexander, though this was all up and good, and his city did not seem to be in imminent danger of falling, but still he wished to rescue it using an army, rather than just hoping that the Tibians will bash their heads against the walls repeatedly and finally give up.

"So how can you help me, Your Highness?" Thus trying to hold the Queen Mother to her word, Alexander made his question directly, wishing to extract as much benefit as possible.

But the cunning woman did not bite so easily.

And ended that meeting for the time there, saying, "I will need to talk to His Majesty regarding the specifics. But rest reassured we will give an answer as soon as possible."

"In the meantime please be patient my lord."

This ending would appear quite abrupt, but it was true that Alexander had just informed them of the situation.

So naturally it would take some time to assess and evaluate the situation and then respond accordingly.

And so over the course of the few days, Alexander sat on multiple meetings regarding this.

But in much contrast to the Queen Mother's promised aid, the king was willing to offer very little.

"Seelima tells me that you have 50,000 men, enough food, and walls as good as Adhan."

"So against just 40,000 men what are you afraid of?"

Ptolomy here did not actually try and plot against Alexander, but genuinely felt it was not a big deal.

And when he laid out those facts like that, it did seem somewhat like that.

So coupled with the fact that Adhan itself was quite weak, raising an army and marching 800 km on during the winter to rescue a city that was so well-defended did not make any sense to most people.

After all, Zanzan was built as a fortress to handle threats just like that.

And so many felt that this was just Alexander's nerves acting up as he never experienced how hard it was to take a city before.

And it some respect this was true, with perhaps one of the best pieces of evidence being the first Punic Wars, where the Romans tried to take the island of Sicily from the Carthageans, a landmass which was in their backyard and had to spend more than two decades to get it.

For a landmass of just 25,000 sq km.

Because the Carthaginians engaged in bloody sieges and after bloody sieges.

And even when Rome did get Sicily, they did not actually do it by conquering all the cities on the island, but by forcing Carthage to relinquish control over them, as the latter was exhausted after the bloody 23 years of war.

So it was actually reasonable for Ptolomy to ask Alexander to be patient and have trust in his retainers in defending the strong city.

But for Alexander, being patient was not an option.

So when he heard this, he actually wanted to shout, 'All of you have had your balls cut off, or never had a pair to begin with.'

He was fully incensed that after all he had done to put the darn monkey on the throne, Ptolomy was too cowardly to risk himself even that little when Alexander was in so much trouble.

And so ditching the man and that snake of a woman as Alexander currently felt, he went to find Lady Inayah, wanting to ask her to help him charter a ship so that he could at least return to Zanzan and head the defense of his city by himself.

No matter what others said.

But upon the request in her room, the ebony lady simply pointed to the window, drawing attention to the raging blizzard outside, and said, "Do you not see the weather my lord? How do you expect any ship to leave port during this?" as she added, "I would even say that you should count of your luck as it is quite fortunate that your messenger even bird managed to get here when it did."

"Just a day later and it would have already been eaten up by the storm and you might have not even known anything."

Lady Inayah was right about the bad weather, as Alexander had not been able to yet send a return message to Cambyses due to the on-and-off hailstorms and blizzards that were going on around Adhan the entire past week.

'Of all the time this could have happened,' And as he gazed into what simply looked like a white sheet, Alexander could only curse this.

As for hearing Lady Inayah say that he might have even missed the news if it got delayed a bit, Alexander was not sure if that might have been actually better. I think you should take a look at

As currently every second he spent in Adhan knowing his city and its people were in danger felt like he was being pricked by a needle.

So given he could not leave now, he tried to figure out when he could.

"My lady, your sailors should be expert navigators. Surely they can somewhat predict the weather? Perhaps they can say when this blizzard will die down?" Alexander had a very hopeful tone to his voice.

But Lady Inayah was quick to shut off that avenue of travel for him for quite some time, saying, "Well, dear Alex, I'm afraid I do not actually need to ask my sailors when they can sail their ships."

"Because every year from November to January and some years even February, we generally do not travel south."

"Nevermind to Zanzan which is at the very southern point."

"As to why?" Lady Inayah turned to Alexander to give a few trivial knowledge,

"Do you know why that part of the Central Ocean is called the Mad Sea?"

"Well, it is because of the waves during the winter."

"Travelling by sea to Zanzan during this time of the year is impossible."

"At least by our ships."

Lady Inayah added the last bit because she felt that Alexander's new ships might be able to do it in the future.

But such 'potential might' was of little consolation to Alexander right now.

And so he could only put on a sour face.

While Lady Inayah guessing what Alexander was thinking next asked,

"Are you thinking of going by road then?"

To which Alexander frankly nodded.

There was nothing to hide there, as he added, "I was told the road from here to Zanzan was one of the best in the country. So I hope to get there in a month."

Putting his five hundred bodyguards on horseback, Alexander felt a month might even be too long.

If he pushed himself, he was confident in covering that distance in two to three weeks.

But Lady Inayah was there no rain on his parade again here, shaking her head and saying, "I'm afraid given the amount of snow we are having here, you will not be even able to make it in two."

"And that is not even considering the wild beasts roaming all around, the possibility of the weather turning worse, or even some hostile nobles seizing the opportunity to make you disappear."

And as Lady Inayah listed these hidden dangers, Alexander only felt more restless.

"So what should I do?" He gripped his teeth as he posed in a frustrated tone.

"Oh Alex, you poor boy," And seeing this, the older, mature lady stepped forward to caress his cheeks, truly feeling sorry for the young man, as she slowly whispered in a sultry tone, "You are too tired."

"Rest!"

"And leave everything to your aunt. She will soon make you feel better."

And as she said this, Alexander felt the pair of hands gently push him onto the bed, and though Alexander knew this was not the time, but as he felt the comfortable sensation of him sinking into the soft mattress, as his nose took on the familiar comforting scent, as he heard the rustling of clothes around him, as his eyes were soon presented with that beautiful scenery of Lady Inayah's bare body, he decided to let himself go for the moment.

He had been too tired the previous few days, unable to properly eat or sleep due to all the worry, and so decided to enjoy the comforting warmth of his motherly woman to take his mind off everything.

And Lady Inayah as usual did not disappoint, where she used all her skills to tire Alexander out and lull himself to sleep.

And once he woke up, refreshed and energized, she gave him this piece of advice, "If you really want to raise an army, why don't you ask your retainers that are here?"

"That's why most nobles fight wars you know."

And Alexander had thought about that before but skipped on it due to concerns about loyalty.

But now....

Chapter 552 Lady Inayah's Past

After their little tussle on the bed, and Alexander's light nap, he woke at night, though he could not say at what time.

The sky was still blanketed by heavy clouds, and the outside was pitch black, making any such deduction impossible.

Not that Alexander was very concerned about it as currently he was feeling famished.

It seemed he had definitely skipped lunch and likely dinner too.

And as he let Lady Inayah know about this, the mature lady let out a gentle, motherly smile, informing him, "Mmnn, I guessed you might be. So I had Kesha set aside some food for you. Let me get it for you. Dinner is long over you see."

Kesha was Lady Inayah's personal maid, and as the noble lady said this, she quickly called a short, petite girl and asked her to bring the food over, while in the meantime Alexander washed his face and refreshed himself using the indoor basin, his body relaxing by the warmth of the roaring fireplace lit inside.

And by the time he was ready, the food had arrived.

And most surprisingly it was piping hot.

Alexander was not expecting that given the temperature outside and how long ago it had been likely cooked.

"I had the food be kept in the kitchen. Hope it is still hot." And as she personally served the food for Alexander, Lady Inayah's comment made him unveil the mystery.

"Thank you," And as Alexander felt the care and gentleness behind these actions, these following two sincere words conveyed more genuine affection than an entire book could.

So as he ate the thick soup with bread, he could not help but steal a glance at the pretty lady sitting opposite of him at the private dining table, and take a good look at her.

Alexander of course was not looking at her face because of her beauty.

Though she was plenty beautiful, with bright eyes, a well-built nose, and thick, luscious lips.

Neither was he looking at what she was wearing, which was just a sheer white negligee that could barely hold her marvelous assets, over which she draped a heavy coat to cover her arms.

Though with one which she did not bother to cover her torso, leaving Alexander to freely gaze into the tempting. deep valley forming in front of him.

But although such views were very stimulating for a young man like Alexander, for now, as he ate, Alexander could not help but actually reminisce about his interactions with her.

Unlike the other noble ladies of Adhania like the Queen Mother or Mikaya, Lady Inayah did not seem to have too many knots and twists in her heart, and to Alexander, she seemed like a genuinely good person.

Up until now, she had been always courteous to Alexander, even given his low origin and when he had stayed in Agnirat, the woman had been actually a very gracious host.

So this made it all the more surprising that she would foment a rebellion and even help poison her husband.

Because after interacting with her, Alexander did not feel like she was that kind of woman.

While Lady Inayah, clearly sensing Alexander's gaze, suddenly teased him, "What! First time seeing someone so beautiful, hehe?"

She was not a stranger to such looks and was perfectly okay with them.

While Alexander, hearing this only produced a light smile, and gently replied, "Haha, of course, my lady is very beautiful without a doubt. But that was not currently on my mind" as he then frankly revealed his thoughts,

"No, I was just thinking I do not know very much about you that's all"

"Especially why you choose to take part in the rebellion. I simply do not feel that you are that type of person."

"Oh, that?" Lady Inayah seemed a bit surprised at this sudden turn in the conversation and her voice turned down a few octaves, but did not choose to brush it off.

Instead with a simple wave of her hands, she very easily said,

"Well yes, normally I would have never participated in such a risky, even suicidal plan."

"Because at first, even many of us did not think the rebellion had any chance of succeeding."

"But we went with it anyway."

"For each of us had a clear motive."

"With mine being primarily revenge," Lady Inayah said an interesting word, as she then very openly revealed her past,

"You see Alex, I caught Aloxmer's eye at a royal party about 15 years ago.

"He later said to me that it was my swaying butt that had caught his eyes that day... the pervert," Alexander very keenly noticed how Lady Inayah gritted her teeth in hatred as she said that word, as she continued,

"And it was then and there he decided to have me as a mistress."

"But there was a problem," Lady Inayah gave a pause here, before turning to look squarely at Alexander, "And that was I was already married."

"And not only that I had five kids, two boys and three girls!"

"So if he wanted to have me as a concubine, he needed to get me divorced." "I think you should take a look at

This was a bombshell of a news to Alexander, as he had never known that or found any evidence of it, and had always thought Lady Inayah was a bachelor before becoming part of the king's haram.

Mikaya even said so when one day she had said that her father was also one of her suitors, but lost her to the king.

So what gives?

And seeing Alexander's shocked face, Lady Inayah could easily guess where his confusion was and calmed him by saying, "I can guess what you are thinking, But let me finish," as she continued

"Now, for a king as powerful as Alozmer, getting me divorced was as easy as breathing."

"Simply expressing the slightest desire was enough for his cronies to pressure my father and my husband."

"And the funny thing is when I first heard the king desired me, I was even somewhat eager to do it myself"

"Ahh the folly of youth," Here Lady Inayah's voice turned a bit melancholic as she recalled some of the less-than-savory times she spent in the king's haram.

But nevertheless, she quickly recovered from that before continuing to retell her past,

"And if that was what Alzomer wanted, if all he wanted me to do was to divorce my husband I would have had no problem with it."

"My marriage with that man was loveless and deary anyway." Lady Inayah sounded quite dismissive of her ex-husband, though her story was actually pretty standard given almost all noble marriages were loveless and political.

"But that was not enough for Alozmer. The beast did not want to simply divorce my husband."

"He actually wanted to kill him and all my children too!" Lady Inayah's lips visibly shivered as she said this, as she recalled,

" I still clearly remember what Alozmer said to me when he gave that order, 'You should be blessed to be able to bear my child. You do not need any other man'. Fucking bastard!" This was probably the first time Alexander heard this elegant curse, and it even came from deep inside her throat, showing just how much she hated him.

"And even when I bawled out my eyes, or even when my father protested on behalf of me at court, he refused to budge."

"Alozmer even had my father twenty lashes in front of the whole court just for that."

"So my husband and two sons were executed were ultimately executed. They were three and five."

"And I only managed to keep my daughters alive by tempting him by saying, 'Your Grace, my daughters will surely grow up to be nation-destroying beauties.'

'And then we four mother and daughter can serve you together.'

'Surely you would like that!' "

"And the pervert let them live just because of that."

"But there was no way I was going to hand over my girls to that beast."

"I might have suffered myself, but I would be damned if I let them suffer too."

"And that's why I killed him."

As Lady Inayah finished her long count, by the end of it she had returned to her usual self.

The events were so long ago, and given that she already had her revenge, Lady Inayah found the story much more palatable now.

While, Alexander, as he heard this, could only nod and curse Alozmer.

Killing a woman's husband and sons, and then taking that woman as a concubine.

No wonder the previous king was said to be mad.

No one except a madman would do such a thing and not expect to get stabbed in the back.

"Alozmer died too easy," Alexander made a throwaway comment, before asking Lady Inayah, "Are those the daughters I met in Agnirat?"

"Yes, the two you met are from my first husband. I did not have any children with Alosmer."

"Even the mere thought of it detested me."

"And he did not want to get me pregnant because he feared it would ruin my figure."

"So I managed to escape that fate." Lady Inayah appeared to release a sigh of relief as she said so before voluntarily adding,

"As for my third daughter, *sigh*, my eldest daughter, Iktifa died of a sickness some years later I become Alosmer's mistress."

That helped Alexander solve the mystery of meeting only two daughters, as he could only say, "My condolences," before refocusing on his food.

Alexander really did not expect that an innocent question would reveal so much about Lady Inayah's past.

Chapter 553 Lady Inayah's Advise

As Alexander ate his meal, the atmosphere suddenly turned a bit awkward, as it seemed that the two of them had run out of things to say.

"Oh, are you not interested why you never knew this secret before? Why everyone acted as if I had no husband before?" And as that stifling silence overtook the table, Lady Inayah at last added that reminder, before giving the answer by herself,

"Well, it's because Alosmer had commanded so."

"To pretend that I never had a husband. Or son"

And that finally explained to Alexander why Mikaya said the thing she had.

While Lady Inayah ended her reminiscence by saying,

"And so after this many years, people have simply gotten used to it."

"Many may have even been forgotten."

She had a very light tone to her voice as she quieted, but Alexander still imagined detecting a trace of emotion hiding within her.

It appeared despite whatever flaws that man might have had, he was at least better than Aozmer.

And the truth was even now Lady Inayah would sometimes imagine what would life be like if she was with her first husband.

But those memories were increasingly becoming blurry over the cruel passages of time, as it slowly chipped at her memory.

"I see," While feeling the deep atmosphere, Alexander could deeply nod and go back to eating.

And as that uncomfortable silence returned, it was Lady Inayah who again broke the silence, flashing her hands around to lightly say,

"But enough about this old woman's troubles. You tell me about your own problem!"

And as soon as Alexander was given that way out he quickly grabbed it and began to eagerly discuss his own pressing concerns, such as his fear about his city, his frustration at Ptolomy's casual disregard, and finally his thoughts about wanting to reinforce it.

And as he asked if Lady Inayah had any good idea, she naturally suggested simply using the forces of his retainers under him.

Now, this idea of course had crossed Alexander before.

After all, significant parts of all high-level noble's armies were almost always composed of forces from his retainers.

But for Alexander, that immediately raised the question of loyalty.

Given Alexander was an outsider and Adhania's inherent dislike for them, as well as the incident of some of the nobles already breaking the armistice and attacking him, and then again being burned by Tibias, it was understandable that Alexander had developed a somewhat cautious nature.

And hence felt that if he revealed a weakness now, even his retainers might turn on him.

His half-paranoid nature could not make him trust them.

So much so that in fact, when he had informed others of his predicament, he had been careful enough to keep it just between the top levels of the court, i.e.- Ptolomy and his close retainers.

But now, given Ptolomy would not give him any troops, and the others such as PF really had no men to spare right at the moment, with Lady Inayah's urging, Alexander felt that turning to his retainers might be the last option.

And as he considered the option, he asked Lady Inayah this a very skeptical voice, "Will that be safe? Will the nobles comply? I have not told any of them for fear of them joining Tibias!" wanting her opinion on his new retainers

To which the ebony lady a first looked a bit surprised as if she had not even considered that, before she simply started laughing loudly, her glorious peaks shaking temptingly in the process.

And the reason for her laugh was actually because she really could not believe someone as smart as Alexander had actually done something so needless.

So she pointed out, "Haha, oh Alex, why are you bothering about something so trivial now?"

"Have you not realized it already? There was a huge battle right in your territory."

"Which is right next to their territory."

"You think any of the nobles are unaware of this? That they can be unaware of this?"

"Why are you even concerned about that?"

Lady Inayah's tone was as if she was pointing out a child's little mistake before ending her sentence with a teasing smile, and this, "My, my dear, Alex, when did you start slipping? *Tsk*, *tsk*!"

With only these words and that crafty smile, suddenly all the gloom and heaviness that had lingered in the room due to all the previous serious topics seemed to melt like dew under the morning sun, while it also made Alexander instantly flush for he felt he had just woken up to his mistake. I think you should take a look at

She was right!

The Tibian border city of Thesalie was about only 100 km from Zanzan.

And so given that such a huge army had crossed the border and was making its way to Zanzan, of course the neighboring nobles there would know something about it.

After all a moving army would be many times described as a moving tornado or locust swarm, laying waste to much of the landscape, especially crops around that area.

So there was little chance of hiding it.

And as Lady Inayah bought Alexander's attention to this point, he could not believe he hadn't thought about that before.

'Darm! The shock of the loss has completely fried my way of thinking,' Alexander wanted to slap his forehead for this complete oversight.

But fortunately, his mistake did not cause any major harm and he still had the time to fix time.

So he quickly lightly bowed his head towards Lady Inayah and very gratefully said,

"Thank you for your guidance, my lady. Without your help, I would have led myself quite astray."

To which Lady Inayah only breezily chuckled and teased, "Haha, think nothing of it. After all, it is an elder's job to teach her juniors,"

Before her tone suddenly sultrily as she noticed Alexander had finished eating, and so she very coyly whispered, "Well then my lord, how do you intend to reward me...for helping you?"

"And to compensate me for bringing up this old lady's past. Hmmm?"

At this point her fingers were already trailing very suggestively along Alexander's chest, her nails digging into the flesh, while her eyes become very amorous.

"..." And Alexander could only gulp.

He had always noticed Lady Inayah would call him 'my lord' when she wanted to have sex with him, which was actually a technique she had picked up over time, after noticing that men like to have their egos stroked especially during the intimate act.

While Lady Inayah, seeing Alexander offer no resistance, quickly got him out of his chair and started to lead him over to her bed, giggling, "Hehehe, well come, my lord, the night is still young."

"And I can think of one very special way you can repay me."

Lady Inayah seemed to be in high spirits.

And Alexander went along with light footsteps, while also rolling his eyes inside his head a bit.

For they had quite the session just that very afternoon, where Alexander vividly remembered quite comprehensively filling Lady Inayah up in all three avenues, even making her leak copiously from two of them.

And so could not believe that still had not been enough.

But the fact was the middle-aged lady who was around the same age as the Queen Mother could be said to be in the most mature and fertile stage of her life, with her libido at the peak, meaning she simply liked that act.

And the other fact was Lady Inayah also liked sleeping with Alexander, especially after his transformation down there, as he could poke her at spots deep inside the canal and make her feel things she had yet to experience.

Hence the eager invitation.

And with Lady Inayah being very interested in round two and with Alexander having little to do to pass the time other than this, what little clothing either of them had were very quickly discarded.

Thus soon Lady Inayah's melodious moans started to echo across the room, as well as quickly followed afterward by the accompanying wet sound of flesh slapping against each other as Lady Inayah rode Alexander especially fiercely as if she was trying to forget all the previous bad memories that had been stirred up through this act.

And as if to stimulate Alexander even more, and make him thrust harder, the sexy woman even turned around as she rode him, showing him her huge naked, caramel butt and that forbidden second pink hole that keep peeking out, the sight of which really worked to make Alexander gouged out her insides like no one had done before.

While for Alexander, as he engaged in this pleasurable act, could not help but thank the shiva drugs, for he felt without that he would never have been able to satiate this hungry cougar twice in just one day.

But even with that miracle drug, it drove Alexander deep into the night to satisfy this hungry, mature woman.

Though he did manage to do it eventually, with it being quite late when the two exhausted bodies finally drifted into a deep peaceful slumber, as Lady Inayah at last felt her world of worries and previous unpleasant events be erased into a world of white pleasure, while Alexander was sucked too dry to worry about anything else.

And hence both of them woke up early morning feeling very refreshed.

With Alexander, after having a quick breakfast, immediately decided to call a meeting with all nearby nobles of Zanzan and actually managed to sit with them at midday that very day.

Chapter 554 Convincing The Nobles Against Tibias

Once Alexander woke up the next morning, he gave himself a bit of time to think over some of the things he had discussed with Lady Inayah.

And as he thought, reminisced, and analyzed them, he found that he had missed another critical possibility.

'Wait! If the nobles did know about the attack, why hasn't any of them say anything to me?'

'They should have found out about it weeks ago!'

Alexander soon had that doubt.

And so he continued to think more about it, trying to find an answer.

But ultimately, no matter how much he thought about it, he could not guess as to the reason why.

It just did not make any sense to it.

'Fuck it. I will ask them directly.' So Alexander at last decided that and then pushing all other thoughts to the back of his mind, he eagerly went to attend the meeting with the nobles.

Where he very frankly informed them of the situation of his city.

"So that is the situation. I hope my lords will lend me the strength to defeat the invading Tibias." Alexander formally requested.

And as he frankly admitted his predicament, the following was immediately said by Jamider (Earl) Yuusiq, which inadvertently helped answer his previous doubts

"Hmmm, we had indeed gotten reports from home that Tibias had crossed the border. But we were also reassured that my lord's army was shadowing them."

"*Sigh*, to think even they lost."

This lord's territory was 80 km west of Zanzan or right at the mouth of the Cisran Hill's gateway into Tibias, and so it was little wonder he knew of the invasion.

But he had not rung any alarm bells and returned home immediately because those very reports also reassured him of Alexander's army being sighted in the vicinity.

Whereas now that that force had been defeated, and the enemy was free to pillage the land, this man quickly started to get restless.

"*Sigh*, yes, that is unfortunate." As Lord Yuusiq said this, Alexander was quick to join in, confessing,

"We thought that we would be able to defeat Tibias with no problem and hence did not tell others, thinking that would distract them from the holy ritual."

"But now that the situation has come to this...." Alexander could only shake his head, trying to show that the situation was critical and they needed to act now.

"But didn't you my lord say that a peace treaty with Tibias had been signed? That we would have peace?" While from across the room, another room pointed posed this.

To which Alexander heavily nodded and said, "Yes, I did."

"Because Tibias had indeed promised as such."

"*Bang*, But who knew they would such treacherous knaves?" He heavily pounded on the thick table as he said so, his anger both genuine and fake, as he attempted to show he shared the same kind of hatred the people of Adhania had towards Tibias.

"Hmmm, to think they would attack so soon! And in the winter too! I can't judge if they are dumb or brilliant!" At Alexander's outburst, another shordar (baron) from the side made this comment in a cool, analytical way, as he struggled to determine if the challenges of trying to supply an army in winter were made up for by catching the enemy off guard, with many of the lords away at the moment attending the pilgrimage.

"Yes! Given the weather, if not for Lord Alexander or Lord Yuusiq, we would not have even known our territory was in danger for months!" Another noble interjected in a relieved tone.

Now, this particular comment might sound strange to some as messenger birds should have been able to reach them in the capital at some point.

So hearing the man say this, one would think the reason he said this was because his territory was much more inland and his scouts would not simply detect them on time.

But that was not actually the act, as that particular man's territory really neighbored Jamider (Earl) Yuusiq.

And the actual reason why this man was totally in the dark about Tibias's attack was because not every noble could afford to maintain messenger birds with a large number of places.

For instance, this particular noble was not important enough and had not the financial backing to be given a messenger bird from the capital, which he could then take home and afterward use to relay messages back.

And this was the case for most shordars (barons) and talukdars (viscounts), and even many Jamiders (Earls).

So for most nobles, the only real way to get a message delivered was with a guy on a horse.

And as this discussion continued, one noble seemingly gave some startling details.

"Hmm, attacking in the winter...is certainly unorthodox."

"But it is certainly not unheard of."

"I remember that when I took part in the war with Tibias, they did attack us during such times, catching us off guard and wreaking havoc on our supply lines."

"Their king Perseus especially likes to use that technique."

"And it is very much possible he is leading his army his time too."

"The man loves to lead from the front."

As the noble said this, Alexander felt he had learned more about the enemy in a few seconds, than he had done in the last few weeks. I think you should take a look at

While another man next to that noble very helpfully also added,

"Yes, that is likely."

"I also consider him a renowned military leader. Having fought against him, I even think he might be one of the best in the world,"

"So it's not very unjustified that Lord Alexander lost."

It seemed that some of the nobles appeared to think that there might be a method to the madness for Tibias attacking in the winter.

But hearing this, another noble, one who had recently joined Alexander's retinue only joked, "Haha, well if all it took was beating Amenheraft to become the world's best tactician, then well all would be."

"As my lord here said in that party, the former king is no military strategist."

"Or else how could he not take Tibais even with such a large army?"

This man seemed to be of the opinion that Amenheraft was a pushover and flaunted that in front of Alexander to show his new allegiance.

But Alexander was not impressed.

He felt that was not likely the case, as though the former king might have had his deficiencies, but still, Alexander thought he was at least half competent with his military command.

And even if he was not, the people under him certainly were.

So Alexander had no doubt Tibias was put under heavy pressure by his attack, for three continuous years at that.

And given that Tibias had still managed to come out of it with relatively intact territory, even after being outmanned and outsized, Alexander made sure to take a serious mental note of the man who had managed to achieve this, their king- Perseus.

And as Alexander contemplated this, suddenly this snarky remark rang out from an inconspicuous corner of the room,

"But isn't Tibias and you usurpers be supposed to be allies? So why are they attacking you?

Trouble in paradise?"

As soon as Alexander heard this he instantly turned his head to see the owner of that remark and his eyes narrowed as he recognized it to be Manuk's.

The man had been unable to keep himself quiet when he heard his liege being insulted.

While for Alexander, seeing this unpleasant sight, curved his lips up and taunted, "Well, well, I already knew your side lacked manners given your leader's greeting."

"But to come to another noble's meeting unannounced."

"You guys are finding new lows every day."

He could not believe that this guy had managed to get a whiff of the meeting so quickly and then even slip in unnoticed.

Though Alexander could guess it happened probably because he had called not only the fifteen nobles serving under him but other neutral and even hostile ones.

For just Alexander's retainers were not powerful enough to fight a 40,000 large army by themselves.

While Manuk, hearing Alexander's taunt simply smirked, as if that remark had just slid across his skin, and chuckled, "Haha, well one can't be too careful about foreign spies like you."

The insinuation here was clear and hearing this irritating man spew such divisive things in his time of need obviously irritated Alexander.

And so he decided to shut that topic once and said to Manuk in a concluding tone,

"Whatever deal Tibias had with His Majesty was before I came along."

"Now all those agreements are null and void."

"Now I have been made the Pasha of Zanzan. And I intend to keep it."

After saying this Alexander quickly turned to gaze across the long table where many of the noblemen sat, and flashing his palms declared,

"I will not give a grand speech to convince you to join me."

"I'm sure many of you are very eager to sit back and watch the two foreigners tear each other apart."

"But let me remind you of the kind of history you have with Tibias."

"And the kind of history you have with me." Alexander stubbed his index finger on the table as he said this.

"So you can choose to live in a Zanzan ruled by Tibias and get the kind of treatment you would expect from them."

"Or you can choose to defend your lands."

"And in exchange, I will give you the same trading benefits I gave my retainers till the armistice ends!"

Chapter 555 Preparations For Tibias

Alexander's strategy here was pure and simple.

Be a nouveau rich and throw money at the problem.

And in keeping pace with his tune, as soon as Alexander finished his speech, Lord Prantik, one of his earliest converts quickly stood up to say, "That's right! Lord Alexander is very generous. I can personally attest to that."

"All the various new things you saw were made in his territory. And he has agreed to sell a lot of them to us very cheaply."

"If you join us it will surely benefit you!"

He was then quickly joined by a few other nobles who too chimed the same tune, offering to tell all the details about the deal to those interested.

And as this enthusiastic wave permeated across the room, it was a turn of events that certainly was not favorable for Manuk.

So he smirked and taunted,

"Heh! You think the esteemed nobles are like you, lowly mercenaries that can be bought and sold?"

"These men have something an outsider like you will never have! Dignity!"

Manuk wished to appeal to the present nobles' inherent pride to reject Alexander.

But was quickly countered by the following, as Alexander put on a mirror smirk and taunted in the same tone, "You mean dignity like yours where you said you would defend the nobles of Zanzan, but then tucked tail and ran when many really did call for your help?"

"That kind of dignity?"

Alexander was of course referring to how after he defeated Djose's forces, Amenheraft did not have the army to stop Alexander from subjugating his neighbours.

And this reminder stung Manuk almost as much as it reminded all the nobles about their current standing.

Which ultimately caused Jamider (Earl) Yuusiq to stand up and be the very first one to declare,

"I stand with Lord Alexander on this one. Regardless of our personal differences, it is Tibias who is our main enemy. And I intend to heed his call and fight them with him!"

Now, to recap this lord was the only one of the 12 nobles who had refused to bow down to Alexander, and chosen to be only neutral.

So Alexander was pretty surprised to see him be the first one to join him.

But it was not really a surprise given how close his fiefdom was to Tibias, his family's feuding history with Tibias, or how zealous militant of a man he was.

The man loved fights, a trait that served him well given his land's geographic position, and so it was really a no-brainer that he would ally with Alexander to fight with Tibias.

But still, even though this was a predictable move, seeing a great lord openly express his support for Alexander did cause a somewhat of a domino effect as many neutral and semi-neutral actors too promised Alexander, or at least promised that they would think the matter over.

Seeing all of which Manuk could only put on a sour face, as his original had indeed been to make the nobles and Alexander bicker and fight, and subsequently let Tibias destroy both of them in the process.

For the archpriest saw Alexander as perhaps the greatest threat to his lord, even more than Pasha Farzah and the Queen Mother, and thus very much wanted his dangerous card gone.

But it seemed the opportunity this time was gone.

"Thank you, my lords. We will leave in two weeks. Please join me by then." As for Alexander, he was more concerned about acquiring more nobles for his rescue operation and gave this deadline to those who were still on the fence.

And with this done, Alexander said a few concluding pleasantries, and the meeting was at last concluded, one could quite successfully indeed.

And for the next two weeks, Alexander really focused on the journey ahead, as he sent ahead scouts to survey the roads, prepare provisions for him and his men, and also hold regular talks with the nobles to discuss how they would raise an army to attack the enemy once they reached their destination.

Because calling up levies and organizing them took a lot of time.

The weather also cleared up enough for Alexander to send a message back to CM, the small note reading,

"Defend the city to the last man."

"Do not surrender. Do not accept any peace terms."

"I'm coming within 2 months max!"

"Cooperate with Menes. Take care of the twins."

And as Alexander watched multiple birds carrying the same message flying off toward Zanzan, he could not help but worry he had been late in his reply.

Because the date of CM's message was about a week old and he feared how much things had changed by now.

With the only consolation being that CM had not sent a second message pleading to him again, meaning the situation was likely not that desperate...yet.

So with that hopeful thought, Alexander then turned his attention to the next matter, which was meeting with Pasha Farzah and the Queen Mother to discuss his current situation and discussing many important details.

First of all, he concluded a deal where he secured emergency provisions for his city in case it needed extensive rebuilding, which included both materials and grain, as well as a loan if things became that bad. I think you should take a look at

He then asked for advice on some of the diplomatic matters regarding how to proceed with Tibias in the future, like how to punish them for taking his money and attacking him anyway, and how to conduct prisoner exchange with them if it came to be.

Additionally, he also asked them if they could spare some men for his upcoming campaign, but here the Queen Mother regretfully said she really had nothing to give, which was natural given she was no military commander.

Whereas the aged pasha did, albeit begrudgingly, hand him a thousand of his elite men, but with a threatening caveat attached to them at the end,

"Brat! If anything happens to them, these very men will very much...you...." Pasha Farzah did not finish the sentence, but the implication was clear.

If something happened to Azura and Azira, while it was unlikely Pasha Farzah would truly fight Alexander, at least their cooperation will undoubtedly come to a screeching halt.

"I have told you before, your granddaughters will share the same roof, same food, and same fate as my family."

"I have already written to CM to take care of the princesses' safety. There is no need to remind me."

At this latest threat/reminder, Alexander replied the following in a wooden voice.

This was not the first time the worried man had raised this issue, as at one he had even asked Alexander to evacuate Azira and Azura by sea to another city belonging to one of his retainers.

And each time Alexander gave the same above answer.

Because he knew as long as he had Azira and Azura, he would be able to undoubtedly be able to fleech some kind of benefit from Pasha Farzah.

And that 1,000 men was his proof.

"Hmmp, we will have a very serious talk about Azira and Azura after all this is over brat."

And how could the shrewd pasha not detect this?

So he made this throwaway remark, alluding to his intention of moving his granddaughters away from Zanzan given its frequent proximity to danger.

Alexander said nothing to this because he first had to make sure that they got out of this alive first.

It was not only the Queen Mother, Pasha Farzah, and the nobles that Alexander met with.

He met with Ptolomy too in the meantime.

But not to discuss his city.

Instead it was to discuss the things he was originally in Adhan for.

Those had been put on hold due to the recent bad news, but before he left, Alexander was eager to get at least something done.

Or he felt that his trip would have been totally wasted.

It would be like he had come to the capital, spent some time there, lost a load of men back home in the meantime, and then scampered back home empty-handed.

Alexander did not want to do that.

He at least wanted to show his retainers he went to Adhan for a reason, and despite all the difficulties had come back with something.

Hence to that effect, he sat down with Ptolomy to get at least one of his deals done.

But then the question became which one?

Well there was convincing Ptolomy to equip the northern barbarians and attack other provinces

But Alexander figured that would need a lot of greases, both personally for Ptolomy and for also the court.

Because this was a very dangerous double-edged sword tactic.

So the next option was opening up Adhania to outside trade.

But again that too needed a lot of talking and time to convince others.

The general aversion Adhnaia had for trade with the outside world was made very evident to Alexander during his exchange with Amenheraft.

So that only left Alexander w with two options.

One was him wanting to buy a lot of street urchins and low-class, neglected people of the society from Adhan to his city Zanzan to repopulate that region.

This option naturally was rejected given it was unknown whether he might have a city soon.

Hence the only real deal Alexander could realistically make with the time frame was the coinage deal, and so he sat down with Ptolomy to discuss his right to mint the ropal, in exchange for him transferring some technologies, particularly how to make brown sugar and paper.

Chapter 556 Visiting The Royal Mint

As discussed previously, there were several reasons a noble would want to mint his own coin.

There was the factor of economic control where minting one's own coins allowed the noble to exercise greater control over their own local economies.

For instance, first and foremost by issuing their own currency, they could regulate the flow of money, set exchange rates, and even manipulate the value of their coins to suit their interests, thus providing them with quite a bit of degree of economic autonomy and influence over trade and commerce within their territories.

Then there was the symbol of authority as a personal coinage served as a powerful symbol of sovereignty and authority.

By minting their own coins, nobles could showcase their status and legitimacy as rulers, with many times their images, inscriptions, and emblems on the coins reflecting the noble's lineage, titles, or significant events related to their reign.

It served as a tangible representation of their power and reinforced their position in society as for most people, the face engraved on the coin served to remind them of their fiefdom lord and was also likely the closest they would get to ever seeing their fiefdom lord or any noble for that matter in their lifetime.

Afterward came profits and seigniorage, where minting coins could be a lucrative source of revenue for nobles.

They could charge a fee, known as seigniorage, for minting the coins, which essentially amounted to a tax on the coinage.

It was kind of like a weird income tax, where a noble generated revenue by mining money for himself, reporting it as income and then taxing it, all for it to end up in his own pocket, which was a legal loophole if there ever was.

But this a perfectly legal system, and it was not only like it was a hallmark of only this period of time, as even in modern countries in Alexander's previous life, this was a legitimate tactic, where printing money actually generated tax earnings for a government.

So all this meant that by controlling the minting process, nobles could generate income from the production and circulation of coins, contributing to their wealth and financial stability.

And lastly there was the already discussed convenience of trade through standardization of currency.

The combination of all this made Alexander very much want the rights to the ropals, and even though Ptolomy was at first a bit reluctant, saying things like, "Shouldn't Lord Alexander be more focused on solving his immediate predicament?" but with Pasha Farzah and Queen Mother and even Lady Inayah's father urging, he soon acquiesced.

Among them Pasha Farzah's urging stood out the most, exalting Ptolomy as such,

"Your Majesty, it is quite alarming for Tibias to attack us."

"Hence I believe we should give Pasha Alexander all the tools he needs to grow and become powerful as soon as possible so that he can defend his lands!"

With his formal request, and under Queen Mother's urging in private, Ptolomy at last gave Alexander the right to mint the ropals, in exchange for his brown sugar and paper-making technique.

And two days later even took him on a visit to the royal mint to show how each coin was made so that Alexander could set up his own facilities and most importantly of all hand over the precious die, which was the blueprint using which the ropals were printed.

Alexander naturally had never been to the royal mint before, and so as he stepped out of his carriage, he was a bit surprised to see the mint being actually housed inside a temple, being guarded by very strong-looking men garbed in the distinct priest uniform over their armor, while similar men and women of faith were seen going in and out of the building.

Its size was second to few other buildings in the city but interestingly it was not really grand, as if it wanted to stay as inconspicuous as soon, giving it the appearance of being just a large temple for some exclusive purpose that the public did not know and which was only accessible to the clergymen.

After getting over his initial surprise, as Alexander gazed at the mint and thought about it for a second, he actually found the mint being inside a temple not too strange, for it was pretty normal that the theocratic Adhania would choose to enshrine the place where their wealth was literally created inside a

god's personal house, both as a sign of respect and security, believing no one would dare to steal from a god.

"There are many mints under the royal family. But this here is the largest and most produces the most coins." It was Ptolomy who said this as he led Alexander inside, with him choosing to personally accompany Alexander given the importance of the building.

The existence of many mints making the royal did not surprise Alexander at all, as one mint could never make enough coins quickly enough or distribute them fast enough.

So these mints that the royal family had were all placed in strategic locations, taking into consideration factors such as accessibility to natural resources so that the precious metals can be easily gathered, the availability of trade routes so the freshly minted coins can be easily released into the market, and lastly administrative convenience, which both meant security concerns and ease of controlling the mint. I think you should take a look at

"My liege, my lord, welcome. We are honored," As soon as Alexander and Ptolomy and their entourage entered the temple, the one in charge of the mint, a bald priest named Jilam trotted over with a great smile and a flushed face, bowing and greeting them, and then proceeded to give them a tour of the place.

Entering inside Alexander noticed the internal structure of the mint to be huge, being fortified a wooden complex consisting of various buildings and workshops, with huge ceilings but actually very few windows, deliberately done so as if to shield all eyes away from peeking, making the inside a bit dark, for the soft glow of many large lit braziers inside could never compete with the sun itself.

Alexander also found the inside quite warm given not only the light source but also all the smelting going on, which actually made it very comfortable given the current outside temperature, though he dreaded to think how this place would feel like in summer.

Having had these thoughts, Alexander then found his eyes very strongly drawn to a giant hearth that stood in the middle of the building, one around which many priests seemed to be working.

And noticing Alexander's gaze, Jilam quickly introduced, "Ahh, this is where we collect, refine, purify, and alloy the metals to the desired composition for the coins."

"We first receive our metals, either from the nearby mines or from general traders, and are all melted in that furnace into appropriate proportions."

Jilam very succinctly gave the description of the use of the huge hall room they were in, with the process he described seemingly being quite labor-intensive, as Alexander figured there were at least over a hundred priests, present there doing just that.

And once Alexander had some time to view all of this, Jilam then offered, "Your Grace, let us now go to the main workshop. That is where all the coins are made."

So at the priest's behest, the entourage quickly entered through a narrow corridor, and along the way, Alexander noticed that guards were posted along every entrance and exit way, obviously there to ensure the security of the minting process and the valuable materials involved.

And these armed and armored priests were posted there for both their competence and their loyalty and knew their job well enough that only people they knew by face could go in or out.

But naturally, Alexander's group was let in through as if they were the wind, and so after some twists and turns they turned up at a room whose entrance read 'Engraving Room' on a giant wooden plaque.

Here, Alexander peeked inside to see talented many artists and engravers were busy creating intricate designs on metal dies, which looked exactly like the ones on the ropals.

It would not be wrong to say this room was the heart of the mint as this was where the pressing die for the coin was created.

And it was a very skilled process indeed.

Following this was the die-preparation area close to the engraving room where the newly engraved metal dies made of bronze or iron, were shaped and polished to ensure clear and precise coin impressions.

There came the dedicated part of the workshop called the 'Coin striking area' where skilled minters were seen placing the prepared metal blanks or planchets between the engraved dies and then strike them with hammers or mechanical presses, the pressure from which would imprint the design onto the planchet, creating a coin.

And seeing the coin being made, although Alexander knew about this before, he still was surprised how each coin had to be made by hand.

It was truly a laborious process.

Then he was led to the last room, which was actually a Quality Control Station, where there were inspectors examining random samples of coins to ensure they met the required weight, purity, and standard of workmanship.

It was the work of this station that worked to keep the people's confidence in the ropal, as they worked to prevent fraud and maintain the public trust, using scales and measuring instruments to check the weight and size of the coins, and also various other strange techniques which Alexander could not understand to determine the gold purity.

All to ensure every coin met their standard before they were released for circulation.

And seeing all this came an end to Alexander's visit to the mint.

Chapter 557 Reaching The Outskirts Of Zanzan

Alexander returned from his visit to the mint with a few pre-made dies and even a ropal gifted to him as a souvenir.

And as he held up the coin which had a hole in the middle, and noticed the various markings along its borders, he felt he had learned many new things today.

First of all, it finally became clear to him why the ropal, and for that instance, many other ancient coins in his previous life too, had a hole in the middle.

This was done so that the coin's size was large and convenient enough to hold in one's hand without having to add too many precious metals and hence make the coin's value too big for everyday use.

Then, aside from the usual engraving on the coin, came the small markings along one side of the side.

These were actually codes, detailing the coin's origin and production details, including the mintmark, which identified the mint where the coin was produced, and the control marks, which indicated the responsible authorities overseeing the minting process.

Alexander was actually impressed very by this small detail, understanding that whoever had designed the process put a lot of thought into making it.

He then also remembered that he had not actually got to see that process, because that was done in the administrative office, where mint officials and administrators oversaw the entire mint, managed records, and handled the distribution of coins to various regions within the empire.

Ptolomy had bluntly told him that it was a royal family secret, and Alexander could easily understand this.

It was likely the royal family was afraid if other powers got to know the personnel involved in overseeing the mint, they could be targeted and influenced.

Hence the veil of secrecy.

Alexander also was not allowed to see the storage vaults for the same reason, where the raw materials, finished coins, and perhaps the most precious of, the valuable dies were kept under lock and key.

And truth be told Alexander had indeed been interested in viewing it, as he was interested in what kind of vault these ancient people would have been able to devise.

But alas, it seemed he would need to hold his curiosity for a little while longer.

With Alexander's return from the mint, he also got Ptolomy to promise to lend him some of the expert engravers and artists for some time once the battle with Tibias was over so that they could teach the new workers at Zanzan about the techniques and also ensure the quality of the new mints.

And as Alexander took his preparations, soon the day of departure for him had arrived.

"Brat! We careful." This was Pasha Farzah's curt way of saying good, while the Queen Mother's was a bit more formal and informative.

"We have made sure to communicate with the nobles through whom you will be going. They will not give you trouble."

"And we have also discouraged AM in trying to do anything during the journey."

"So it should be safe." The Queen Mother reassured him.

It appeared that though Seelima was not able to help Alexander militarily, she strived hard to do so diplomatically.

And for that Alexander was grateful.

"Thank you, Your Highness. May the gods protect us all." He put his hand over his right chest as he said so.

"Mmm, may the gods protect us all!" And the Queen Mother did the same, adding, "And I will return to Zanzan sometime after this is all over."

With this said, and all preparations complete, on one cold but thankfully clear morning, Alexander's entourage which consisted of some dozen nobles, and about 3,000 men that made up the combined bodyguards and wagon crew made their way slowly towards Zanzan through the snow-filled road.

And while on their way, Alexander made some small talk with his traveling companions, paying particular attention to getting to know some of the newer, more neutral nobles who had decided to come with him.

Additionally, he was given this particular piece of good news, when Lord Prantik, who Alexander had appointed to be the intermediary between him and the nobles informed him,

"My lord, we have already sent word to start our levies. Thankfully given it is winter and most men have nothing to do, we will be able to complete it within three months!"

The shordar (baron) seemed very pleased about the reported time frame, and seeing such, Alexander, at least outwardly put on a pleased face. I think you should take a look at

"Good," He nodded enthusiastically.

Inwardly though, Alexander could only lampoon, calculating that since this was November, he would need to wait at least until February to launch any meaningful attack.

Meaning Cambyses would need to hold on at least till then.

This long time certainly made Alexander very uncomfortable.

But actually for the task at hand, the three-month lead time was not really anything surprising if one thought about it.

After all, it took time to issue the levy notices, then for officials to receive that order, and ultimately carry it out, where they had to go out to each and every individual village and settlement one by one, locate and draft all the available men and then sometimes even lead them to the nearby barracks or city garrisons, before at last shipping them off to the main collection point, likely their lord's personal land or manor.

While in the meantime, others had to busy themselves with the task of arranging weapons and armor for them, and lastly, and perhaps most crucially, procuring enough food for them.

Now, a noble could get away with asking his peasants to bring his own weapon, and the serf would be still present with a spear, or if he did not have that, whatever farm tool he had in his shed, a pitchfork, axe, sickle, whatever.

And most peasants were expected to bring their own armor anyway, so on the battlefield you could usually find a range of protective gear being donned by the enemy soldier, going anywhere from being just many layers of clothes they wore over one another for the truly destitute, to sometimes a kind of boiled leather breastplate, to in some very rare occasions some kind of bronze metal piece their ancestor might have left behind, or something they might have even looted from a nearby battlefield.

But even though a noble could get away without properly equipping and arming his men, and sometimes even get away with paying them a pittance, the thing he could not get away from was feeding them.

And he had to feed them well so that they marched, and fought properly without rebelling.

And in this time period when agricultural techniques were so backward, and food was relatively scarce, it meant cost!

A lot of costs.

So when levies were called, Alexander also had to coordinate with all the nobles about this cost.

And it was a set of negotiations that continued even while they were on their way.

So almost every day, after dusk, once they had set up camp and had dinner, Alexander would sit with some of the nobles and get to know their lands, the number of men they could give, and how much food they produced.

And if they produced surplus food, he would even then ask them to bring extra, so that they could spare some for the nobles who did not have enough.

But naturally, such discussions were very hard, as nobles had every incentive to underreport their own stocks while accusing others of doing the same.

And so for Alexander who had to navigate through all this finger-pointing, sometimes felt like tearing his hair out.

But still, in the interest of rescuing his city, he tried to act as best as a mediator as he could.

So he proposed various financial incentives to the wealthier nobles to supply his army with enough food, and even high-level posts within the army.

In this way, their journey proceeded, which thankfully, though was internally certainly very colorful, at least externally was very peaceful, with little outside disturbance or harassment.

Though it was a given, since few people would want to needlessly mess with 3,000 armed men.

So along the way, Alexander got the chance to fully enjoy the cold, winter scenery of Zanzan, and for a modern man whose adobe was in the urban concrete jungles, it was certainly very beautiful.

The road they traveled on was surrounded by forests that seemed to have transformed into a magical realm where the skeletal branches of ancient trees coated with frost, glistening like diamonds under the soft winter sun, the snow underfoot made a sweet, crisp sound, and the eerily silent wood sometimes chimed with the occasional melodious chirping of a bird or the rustling of a small animal in the underbrush, bringing life to the otherwise tranquil atmosphere.

This was not Alexander's first winter in this world for this, this was the first time he got to enjoy it being a bone a fide noble, with most of his other memories of the winter being him shaking and shivering in the cold and many times wet weather as he slaved away at his work.

So it seemed that his increased status had somehow put a new pair of glasses on his eyes, which appeared to make the same scenery appear much nicer.

And in this way, Alexander made his journey across the relatively good road, only experiencing a single delay when the group got caught up in a snowstorm and had to stop for a week, ultimately completing the journey in one and a half months.

Chapter 558 Cambyses's Struggles (Part-1)

On his way to Zanzan, Alexander crossed many a frozen and half-frozen creeks and streams, picturesque small villages with thatched roofs cottages that were laden with snow and had black smokey rising out of them, and many small towns and cities, where the noble or caretaker there received them with grace and cordiality as per the Queen Mother's beforehand instructions.

And these permanent resting points were a godsend for Alexander, for what he most liked was having a hot shower there which was naturally impossible to have while on the road, with the bonus of having a soft bed, a comfy meal, and sometimes even a warm, eager body to keep him company through the long night.

With this steady pace and no major problems, Alexander managed to complete his journey two weeks faster than Lady Inayah had anticipated, in one and a half months, reaching the closest allied city of Megrab, which belonged to a Shordar (Baron) Haziz, just at the start of January.

This settlement was located about 50 km or around two days march from Zanzan and was chosen as the meeting point for all the levies, while Alexander himself, after resting in the city for the night, very eagerly decided to travel to Jabel to set up a small forward camp there the very day after.

The reason why Jabel was not chosen as the main meeting for the men was simple. because it lacked the necessary infrastructure.

And as he approached the city of Jabel, that decision was reinforced, for he still found it almost abandoned with shabby houses dotted across, and very few residents dwelling inside.

Though this was actually natural given what he had done coincidentally around this time of the year, and also given that there was an enemy army nearby, and this city had little defensive structures.

The arrival of Alexander and his bodyguards did not cause much commotion in or around the city, as he intentionally hid his presence, and stayed well away from the city in fear of enemy spies, and only sent some men inside to fish for information regarding Zanzan.

But unfortunately, his spies returned empty-handed, informing Alexander that most of the people inside were old and infirm with little contact with the outside world, and given it was winter and even the merchants preferred to stay home, they had heard nothing except that Tibians had started besieging Zanzan some two months ago.

So with much frustration Alexander decided to go see the state of his city for himself, spending a pretty sleepless night where he only tossed and turned in his bed imagining the worst, and then rode out at the crack of dawn to see the state of the city for himself.

Alexander traveled light, with only twenty of his most trusted men accompanying him so as to minimize drawing any attention from any Tibian scouts deployed forward, and finally reached the outskirts of the city without any incidents by midday.

And as Alexander stood on a hill overlooking the great city, some few kilometers away, the sight that greeted him made Alexander's heart sink!

'How! How is that not here!' He felt his head spin, as his eyes turned small and red, and he could not help crying out loud, "No! It can't be!"

Because although the walls of the city appeared intact, and the Tibians army seemed to be still outside, the thing that Alexander most wanted to see was not there.

And to understand why that thing was not there, one had to go back to the start of November, to the start of the siege.

Around that time, inside a luxurious tent, sat a heavily bandaged man, covered in white linen that bound his torso and his head, giving off a strong medicinal scent.

This of course was Leosydas, who had been badly hurt but as the doctors had promised, still alive.

And next to him was the king of Tibias himself, Perseus, who was seen personally attending to his friend, and was currently changing his bandage.

While the man being treated appeared to berate his 'nurse'.

"You should not have waited for so long. If you were fast enough you could have sealed off the city before the runaway army had the chance to reinforce it. Now the siege will be a hundred times harder!" Leosydas criticized Perseus.

And the man was right was saying this, because if the Tibian army had decided to pursue Menes, given the former was in full formation, while much of the latter's army was scattered and had run off to the wilds, they would have been able to most definitely cut off significant parts of the enemy army from entering to Zanzan.

Instead, Perseus had chosen to rest his army that winning, letting Menes take his sweet time and slowly absorb many of his army's scattered remnants back as he retreated.

This was a gross military blunder that was hard to justify.

And something someone as talented and as experienced as Perseus would have never done.

So what was the reason?

Well, the reason he gave was this, "Pursuing the enemy that knows the lands headfirst would not have been wise."

"You should know better than most that we do not pursue a fleeing enemy past a certain distance."

Perseus was referring to the military doctrine that stated that if one pursued an enemy too far, then there was the chance of going out of formation and opening themselves to a possible counterattack.

"And besides, that enemy cavalry charge had killed a lot of nobles. We needed some time to reorganize our army."

"Many of us wanted to mourn too."

"....." And hearing this hackneyed excuse, Leosydas only pursed his lips in displeasure but ultimately stayed quiet.

Many of Perseus's reasons did make sense on the surface.

But Leosydas felt they were not enough to stop someone as battle hungry and skilled as Perseus from giving up such a good opportunity.

After all, conquering Zanzan city was perhaps the most cherished dream of most Tibian rulers, as it would mark an unmistakable giant step forward toward taking Zanzan province. I think you should take a look at

So why had Perseus really done it?

Well though Perseus would likely never open it in fear of revealing he had let his personal emotions get the better of his military judgment, Leosydas could make a well-informed guess.

And he guessed that it was because of him!

Leosydas felt that Perseus had stooped his army to give his friend to recover, as he feared moving around would open his wounds.

And this was probably a legitimate concern, as Leosydas had been unconscious for three days after the battle, and if Perseus had indeed marched his army, the stress of him being dragged in a cart would have most likely made Leosydas's perilous situation much worse.

He might not even have made it going by the accounts of some of the doctors, who at some of the initial points thought Leosydas had already crossed over.

And thinking this Leosydas decided to stay quiet, both because he did not want to sound ungrateful, and also because he was glad to be alive.

No one wanted to die after all.

So he changed the topic.

"How has the interrogation been going? What do we know?" Here Leosydas of course was referring to the prisoners they had captured.

"Haha, well we have some good news!" And hearing this topic Perseus very eagerly piped up, recounting,

"The soldiers have all said that their city lord is not here."

"That he is at the capital, Adhan. That's a thousand kilometers from here"

"They even cursed saying that if they had been led by him, we would have certainly lost."

"Haha, the gods are truly on our side this time!"

Perseus sounded very, very pleased as he said so

He of course did not buy the soldier's claim about Alexander's military skills, but nevertheless, he was glad to attack a city without its ruler.

Experience told him that the defenders of such cities always suffered a morale deficit.

And this good mood was shared by Leosydas too, who nodded and commented, "That is indeed good news."

"I heard that this Alexander is somewhat accomplished in military strategies. So able to take his city without him being around is indeed good."

It seemed both men thought the capture of Zanzan was in the bag, and felt Alexander's absence was more of a convince than a golden opportunity.

Which was not too callous given the new siege weapons they had.

Also it had to be remembered that though eager, the two men were also prudent to thoroughly try and exploit it.

And hence they were optimistic but not drunken with happiness.

After informing Leosydas about the interrogations, Perseus then additionally informed him, "After we got this information, we also quickly sent a messenger with peace terms to Zanzan. He should be back soon."

An action which Leosydas approved as he added,

"Mmm, hopefully it will be good news. A city without its lords to be besieged is in a perilous position after all."

"Maybe whoever Alexander left in charge will panic and agree to it."

"Yes, that is my thought too. And I also offered them some tempting terms to sweeten the deal..hehehe."

Here, after a long time did Leosydas see his friend produce a sly chuckle, and it was quite evident how much of that piece of papyrus the man was of the mind to honor.

And Leosydas commented nothing about it.

Conquering Zanzan was all that mattered, and they were willing to do it through hook or crook.

Chapter 559 Cambyses's Struggle (Part-2)

"Esteemed lady, my lords, His Majesty is a generous and benevolent lord."

"He will not treat you unjustly. Please accept it!"

"I strongly urge you!"

This loud pronouncement was made by the peace delegate whom Perseus had sent, with the man being met in the hall room of Alexander's manor in the presence of Cambyses and the other council members, where he read out the terms Tibias was willing to offer.

Which basically said that Tibias was willing to spare the city and its inhabitants, and allow safe to anyone who wanted to leave if they surrendered the city.

"Hmm, I remember the last time it was a man named Leosydas. Where is he?" Sitting at the head of the table, a place where Alexander usually sat, was a stone-faced, somber Cambyses, who asked so very coldly.

In fact, the words sounded more like she was making an observation rather than an actual inquiry.

"Lord Leosydas is busy preparing the army for the siege. That is why I'm here." The delegate quickly answered as such, hiding the fact Leosydas was injured, and instead trying to pressure the other side with the word 'siege'

"Why is he preparing the army? What happened to your king?" But inadvertently this caused Cambyses to follow her question with the following, her eyes narrowing into a slant arc.

And the delegate could only unconvincingly mumble this, "They are both preparing the army."

Which made everyone at the table ask themselves, 'Both were so busy that one of them could not be spared even for a peace deal that could end the war?'

This could obviously not be true, and as they thought as such, the delegate keenly noticed a subtle change to a more confident posture among the people in front of him, for they thought the Tibian army might not be doing too well/

'Or why come with such favorable terms?' They felt the bait was too sweet and tempting.

Hence Menes said this.

"I remember that your left flank collapsed when there was the rumor of your king dying."

"Is he dead? Is Leosydas in charge of the army now?"

"Tell the truth!"

The giant black general was very pointed and gruff in his tone as asked this question, pretty sure that the king was really dead.

But still it was not a hundred percent certainly as though he had seen an ornate helmet with a head being paraded by the soldiers in front, he did not get a good look at the face and could not determine that had been really Perseus.

Not that that would have helped anyway as Menes had no idea what Perseus looked like anyway.

As for the helmet, that he was very sure did belong to Perseus, but a small part of him still reasoned that if Amenheraft could switch armor with Kefka if Alexander could do it with Hemicus, it was certainly possible for Perseus to do it with someone else.

And there was the compelling evidence of Perseus's army not dissolving when he quote unquote died.

Because usually when a king died, his army routed.

And given that clearly had not happened, Menes could never be sure.

So he tried using his speech and body language to try and intimidate the man into saying the truth and hopefully a yes.

But naturally, the answer he got was no.

Because Perseus was indeed not dead.

He was very much alive and kicking.

So instead, like a cat whose tail had been steeped on, that Tibian man almost jumped up in anger at the accusation, shouting, "What! You dare say about His Majesty?" before pointing at the peace deal and saying,

"Who do you think wrote this peace deal? Whose personal seal is this? Who ordered me here!"

You dare call us frauds!"

The man flashed the bright red seal near the end of the papyrus and waived it around as he made his defense.

Perseus was generally quite beloved by his soldiers, and so when the enemy made such a remark, the man was unable to control his temper.

But though his outburst was very genuine, it did not really convince Alexander's retainers.

Because the man had not actually answered their question.

As for showing the royal seal as proof, well if the king died, anyone could use it.

Not to mention Cambyses and the others did not even know if it was real or not given they had never seen it before.

So they only thought the offer was only a sham by the weakened Tibian army whose king might be dead or at least injured to trick them into giving up the city without a fight.

Hence the council, who had already decided to not surrender, saw even more reason not to.

Who knew that the innocent actions of the peace delegate who just wanted to keep Leosydas's injury a secret would lead to this?

But it did.

"We are interested in exchanging our prisoners. Name your price and we will pay." So Cambyses made this out-of-context statement, which also implicitly declined the peace offer.

And the delegate certainly understood that, for he flushed a bit before trying one last time.

The reason being that he knew that if could get this deal done, it would be a great achievement, and the king would surely reward him handsomely.

Hence, turning his head away from Cambyses to the other men in the room, he loudly said,

"My lords it would be prudent for you to think over the offer." I think you should take a look at

"Zanzan has fought a good fight."

"You have shown your courage and valor in battle."

"You have won our respect."

"But you have also ultimately lost. There is no shame in that."

"Admit defeat! "

"This is your best chance to achieve peace and avoid bloodshed."

"I urge you to look at the faces of your people, men, women, and children who will have to die for your actions and reconsider."

The peace delegate said this in a very warm, sincere tone, addressing to particularly the men in the room, hoping to appeal to them instead of a girl.

In fact when he first saw that a girl was leading the meeting, the man had an urge to point and laugh out loud at the men for allowing this.

Because it was common knowledge that women could never lead.

Hence he hoped that the men would come to a more sensible decision,

But naturally, he was met with a wall of silence.

The decision had been made.

In fact it had been made the day after Menes returned.

And so after a while Cambyses ended the meet with this sarcastic retort.

"When leaving the city, have a look at our walls."

"And then when you meet your king tell him that we urge him to look faces of his men, and the faces of their subsequent widowed wives and orphaned children so that he might reconsider his choices."

Cambyses had returned the man's offer to his face almost word for word.

Which caused the man, seeing negotiations had broken down, to shed his gentle, cordial face and hysterically shout, "You think you can fight us! You think you puny walls can stop our army!"

"We ahve 50,000 men outisde your gate!"

"The fury of our men and their merciless steel will tear down your wall with a single smash."

"And then where will you go?"

"Where will you hide?"

"What good will your walls do?" the man lambasted, before threatening,

"We will set fire to your city."

"Slaughter all your men! Rape your women! And sell your children to the cruelest slavers!"

As he said so, his enraged face then turned into a mocking taunt, for he turned to the males sitting there and said with a disparaging sneer,

"I say, men! What men!"

"All I see are some pansies pretending to be men!"

"Taking orders from a girl! Why don't you start wearing gowns? That will be more appropriate."

"Hmmp! I always knew there were no real men in Adhania."

"But seeing his truly believing!"

"Cockless eunuchs!"

The man loudly and vulgarly swore before turning his heel and arrogantly stomping off, but not before abruptly stopping near the door and then turned his head back to add one last thing jeer,

"Oh about the prisoner exchange."

"Heh! Why bother?"

"They will end up in our hands you anyway!"

Saying this, the man finally exited the building and hoping on his horse, quickly made his way out of the city, feeling salty that he was not able to accomplish his king's orders.

But nevertheless, he rode quickly, eager to inform his king of the result.

And he was let out of the city without any incident, even after his outburst.

And as the man rode back, he could not help but playback what had happened in his head, and then remembering Cambyses's last taunt, he could not help but subconsciously look back to take a good look at the city's walls.

And though he hated to admit it, the structure he saw forced him to recognize they were very impressive indeed.

Strong, thick, and stable, the walls seemed to exude a sense of strength and safety for all those inside it.

'Did Zanzan always have such impressive walls? They might be even more impressive than the walls of Thesalie' The man could help but gasp a bit in awe, but that feeling only lasted a while.

For he knew the secret weapon they had bought with them, and after seeing its power in demonstrations, the man felt not even the doors of heaven would be able to stand against it.

Chapter 560 Cambyses's Struggle (Part-3)

With the delegate informing Perseus of the rejected peace offerings, he clicked his tongue a bit at the missed opportunity and was a bit annoyed at having to do it the hard way.

But nevertheless ordered his army to soon move, and commence taking the city.

And so on the morning of the 8th of November, the full might of Tibias crashed started to against the walls of Zanzan, and the siege of Zanzan finally began.

On that day, as the enemy approached the city walls, kicking up a storm of dust in the cold dry weather, from atop the ramparts, Cambyses personally gazed down to observe the sea of enemy ready to challenge her.

The young married woman was dressed in her old crimson red armor, her chestnut hair tied up in a ponytail, while a thick, black woolen overcoat draped over her to combat the biting cold that was starting to slowly creep into this world.

And as she stoically gazed at the enemy, this was the sight that greeted her.

Perseus's army was laid out in full battle formation, with the center being composed of rows and rows of phalanx infantry, all dressed in their usual crimson red armor and brandishing their iconic huge spears.

Thier both sides were flanked by the Tibian cavalry, all dressed in colorful, ornamental armor.

But the thing that drew Cambyses's and almost everyone else on her side's attention, the most magnificent spectacle, had to be the jewels of Perseus's army- the 20 war elephants.

Placed in front of the entire army in even spacing, seeming they were about to imminently lead the charge against the walls and it was a terrifying sight.

Perseus had of course intentionally arranged his army as such, to display it as a show of force.

For that he even purposely placed his trump card, his war elephants, dressed in colorful armor at the very front, an animal that most people had never even heard of, much less seen.

All to try and scare the ignorant wall defenders, making it appear to some that once these animals started charging, perhaps even their stone walls will be unable to withstand their fury.

At least that was what Cambyses felt like when she laid her eyes on those huge, one-story tall beasts for the very first time, as she, along with many of the defenders, gazed in awe at the beast's trunk, the stubby, strong legs and most eye-catching of all, their pearly white tusks, which were decorated with serrated metal blades.

'I wonder how many poor souls lost their lives to them?' Cambyses, like many others, could not help but dread being skewered by those fearful weapons.

Though if one was to answer truthfully to Cambyses's inquiry, it would likely be zero.

A man was far more likely to die being trampled under those huge legs, or hit like a baseball with the trunk than die being a tusk run through him.

But nevertheless, just the existence of these tasks played to make the elephant appear many times more menacing.

And as Cambyses saw the full force of the enemy she would have to stave off, though she was confident in being able to hold, the sight still made her heart beat fast with anxiety.

In any conflict there was always the chance of losing, and the many 'what if' scenarios her head conjured up seeing this many enemy soldiers made her knees feel weak.

"My lady, please do not get so close. The enemy has archers." As Cambyses was drowning in her confusion, her adjutant and bodyguard Bartholomew suddenly made this warning, for he saw Cambyses stand near the very edge of the walls to get a better look, and this worried him about her safety.

Cambyses could not be allowed to die no matter what.

And hearing this voice, she finally snapped out of her own head.

'Now is not the time to have defeatist thoughts!' She lightly bit her tongue, feeling embarrassed at thinking such thoughts.

And then, having overcome the initial shock of the sight, began to steady herself, as in a display of bravery, even after hearing the concerned voice, still remained where she was, unmoved.

Instead, she only pointed down to a man dressed in luxurious armor and riding a decorative horse from the Tibian army, who was making towards the wall and very confidently said,

"They will not shoot yet. Look! Here comes their king...to say his big speech!"

And like clockwork, the events unfolded just as Cambyses predicted.

Perseus, approached the walls as close as he dared, before taking his luxurious helmet off, the same one that had been paraded by Zanzan soldiers but ultimately retrieved, and shouted towards the wall defenders as loudly as he could,

"Defenders of Zanzan, hear me now!"

"Here stands before you not an enemy who seeks to destroy and enslave you, but a king who understands the futility of further resistance."

"Your valor and determination in defending your home have been nothing short of admirable. You have fought bravely and gallantly. And I commend you to the highest degree possible for the courage you have shown."

" But I also urge you to consider the consequences of prolonging this conflict."

"The inevitable outcome of this siege is clear."

"Your walls may be strong, They may seem sturdy as the earth itself. But I assure you we have weapons blessed by the gods themselves."

"No matter how confident you are in your bulwark, surely you cannot think you can best the gods, can you?" "I think you should take a look at

"Look in front of you." Perseus at this point swung his arms to his back, pointing to his army standing in full battle formation,

"Look at these divine beasts! Look at my forces! They are vast like the ocean. The likes of which you cannot hope to match."

"I know that your food is depleting. That is why you have started rationing."

"I know that there your firewood supply is limited. And with us outside the city, you have no chance of getting more."

"So once these two run out, you will only have the option to either die of hunger or die of cold."

"While your leaders will abandon you! They will run away."

"They have lied to you! You have no hope!" Perseus shouted these two sentences particularly loudly, before continuing,

"Look around you. Look at the ten thousand widows shedding the tears."

"Barely a week has passed since they have lost their loved ones. Just because of the foolish decision of the city's higher ups."

"How many more lives will need to be lost till you open your eyes? How much devastation will your lands need to endure before understand that you are being fooled by them." Perseus to his credit made it sound like all the deaths were not caused by him, but because Zanzan had chosen to resist.

If Alexander was here, he might have actually bowed in honor of this man's shamelessness.

But Perseus was very thick-skinned, and so continued his speech with a perfectly straight face, loudly urging,

"I ask you to not be fooled by them any longer."

"People of Zanzan rise up! Grasp your fate with your own hands. Open the gates and let us in. Spare your loved ones"

"For I will extend my hand of peace, offering terms that ensure the welfare of your citizens"

"I understand that surrender might not be an easy decision for many of you. Especially given the bad blood between our two countries."

"But surrender does not mean defeat. It means recognizing when the cost of resistance outweighs the benefits."

"There is honor in knowing when to lay down arms for the greater good, for your wives, your children, your people."

"And I offer you a chance to end this senseless suffering, to spare your women, children, and elderly from further hardship."

"What say you honorable defenders?"

Perseus's speech was undoubtedly very powerful, evidence of the statesman's powerful oratory skill, and to say that it did not have any effect on the nearby defenders would be wrong.

But its effect was very debatable.

One was because Zanzan and Tibias really had too much bad blood.

So it was hard to convince anyone with just mere words. Even if that man was the king.

Two was because Zanzan had a very large number of defenders.

Menes and the others had worked hard to recruit and equip so many of them in such a short time.

So their presence worked to give morale support to themselves.

Like how having a friend in a haunted house made both feel safer.

Three was because without the existence of technologies like a microphone, it was hard to convey one's message across any meaningful distance.

So Perseus's speech only reached the very near echelons of the wall defenders, an insignificant proportion compared to the whole army.

So even if those who heard the speech wanted to rebel, they would be quickly put down by the much bigger force just behind them.

And four was because Cambyses was standing with them, matching ranks.

The existence of this head of the city guards, who was also the city lord's wife worked to boost the defenders' morale very much.

So, instead of a loud cheer followed by clashes with the 'loyalists,' as many defenders rebelled and fought each other, the response that Perseus got was only a muted silence.