

Herald 621

Chapter 621 Conception (R-18)

Alexander and Cambyeses spent the better half of the night engaged in making love.

Nearing the end of which Cambyeses seemed to have given up all resistance, her body turning soft as putty as she simply let the storm known as Alexander do whatever he pleased.

And the man was especially fierce during the act, both because of the longing created after being reunited for so long, and more so because of the scare he had when he saw the silhouette of the burnt-down manor.

Alexander did not ever want to think he had lost Cambyeses again and so seemed to want to mark her with his essence again and again.

And it was also because of that scare that when Cambyeses uttered the word pregnancy, he had acted with such alacrity, wanting to sire a child with her as soon as possible.

Previously he had held off on that even though the two had been married for about a year because Alexander was fearful of all the risks that posed.

In this time period the danger pregnancy posed to both the mother and baby need not be said, and dying from complications such as bleeding during delivery was as common as day.

There was a 1% to 2% chance of dying per birth, which for context, in modern times, even less developed countries had the figure at around 0.1%, while it was almost negligible in advanced countries

So Alexander had originally wanted to wait till Cambyeses was in her early to mid-twenties and her body had enough time to fully mature a bit more before he made her conceive.

But recent events had shown him that even though he had attained a level of authority and power few could ever dream of, he and his family were still beset with dangers from all sides.

So who knew what the future held?

Who knew if Cambyses would live till her twenties?

Or even if he could live till his twenties?

In this era of death and disease, every day was a godsend, and finally understanding this Alexander decided to perform the mating ritual the very day he returned.

And as luck would have it, even without discussing it beforehand, Cambyses also seemed to be on board.

Hence Alexander tried his hardest to get Cambyses to conceive, making her take all the positions that made getting pregnant easier.

That was why he had started with the most famous of them, the mating press, releasing twice consecutively in that position, while also making sure to keep his organ firmly stuck to the door of her womb as he did, so that the semen could be deposited directly into the fertile baby room.

And then to increase his chances even more, he kept Cambyses in that mating position for some time, in order to let the sperm have some time to swim into the interior of the womb.

Following that Alexander changed the position to a missionary position, where he fiercely pinned Cambyses down with his weight and mercilessly swung his hips, pounding the sweet, tiny pussy to oblivion, with the sound of their mating producing a loud, lewd sound of wet flesh hitting each other which reverberated across the room if not the whole house.

And as Alexander attacked her, Cambyses could not even let out a whimper because he had stolen her pink lips, kissing her hotly as he stuck his flexible tongue into her mouth, entangling and stirring the soft, lilac organ.

While his hands were on the breasts, pinching and squeezing them, all working together to overwhelm Cambyses as the girl kept squirting continuously like a broken fountain.

After that came the doggy style, where Alexander put Cambyses on all fours and pounded her from behind, spanking her delicious pink butt a bright red, his hand print almost etching into the skin while Cambyses could only lower her head at the mind-bending pleasure and let out animalistic howls.

"Woooo... no more... ah, it's too much... please... my butt...by butt feel likes its on fire...wooo...hubby your little wife can't take it anymore... ..woo...stop...ahhh~" Cambyses sometimes desperately pleaded to go easy on her.

But given how strongly Cambyses's pussy was still sucking and squeezing him, and how she squirted each time Alexander struck her fluffy butt, he turned a deaf ear to it all, simply enjoying these chirping cries of pleasure as he thrustured into her.

"Haha, what are you saying Cam... *pah*... *pah*...? Naughty girls like you need to be regularly spanked, *pah*, *pah*,"

At one point Alexander also said this as he continued to strike butt, finding the feeling delectable, and then, as if in revenge for all the prior teasing, also stuck two of his free fingers into her rear hole, twirling it around, and making Cambyses produce unimaginably loud lustful howls.

"Ah~ not there....ohhhh...too much"

And it was during this time that Alexander had broken Cambyses for the night.

Because after that Cambyses turned mute and let Alexander do whatever he wanted, only passively moaning in a semi-delirious state, having lost all her energy due to all the previous pounding.

And this suited Alexander just fine.

Because though such a dead fish would usually be not at all enjoyable to have sex with, for the usually feisty Cambyses this was a new look, and Alexander certainly enjoyed this docile version.

So once Alexander was done enjoying that position and had tasted enough of Cambyses's delicious butt for one night, he lastly moved to a spooning position, where he laid behind her and lifted her legs, before going at it again.

"Ah~ too deep... ah~ I'm flying... so numb..." And Cambyses could only helplessly moan as such between short pants, now simply flopping around as Alexander moved her like a puppet.

And this suited Alexander just fine, as he continued to make love to his wife to heart's content until he had totally emptied his balls and his little brother could only shoot blanks.

And as Alexander finally released his captive, his lover was indeed in a sorry state.

The poor girl had lost all strength in her body and with Alexander's support no longer present she only lay limply on the bed, in a spread-eagled fashion, as if she was a puppet whose strings had been cut off, her chestnut hair draping messily over her back, while only the slow, rhythmic of her body moving up and down confirmed she was still alive and breathing.

All over her body were red finger marks, courtesy of Alexander roughly twisting various parts of her flesh in order to enjoy himself, the two most egregious examples being her breasts and butts.

And speaking of butts, her beautiful white ass had been turned almost pepper red and seemed to be nearly glowing from all the hits, while her pink puckered hole spasmed delicately.

Gazing at it, Alexander regretted a bit for not having the time or stamina to enjoy that unique canal.

But that regret only lasted for an ephemeral moment, because right below it was situated Alexander's masterpiece for the night, and it was not too shabby if he said so himself.

Cambyses's pussy was sore and swollen bright red, due to Alexander's rough treatment no doubt, and continuously kept leaking his white milk as it was not able to store anymore in her womb, thus tricking down her soft organ and staining the bedsheets underneath her with large, circular dollops.

It was a very erotic sight for Alexander, and seeing this he felt his little brother stir a bit again.

It appeared that though he was down he was not out.

And this caused him to break out a mischievous grin.

"That's no good Cam. If you leak my baby batter, how are you gonna get pregnant, hmmm?" Alexander then wolfishly smiled, before taking his thick meat and cooing behind Cambyses's ears,

"Here, let me plug that all up!" as he then jammed the whole thing in one go, hugging her tightly from behind as he did, thus creating a seal down there to prevent any more of his cream from being wasted.

"Mmmmm," And while Cambyses certainly felt the hot scolding rod enter her again for the umpteen time, she was too weak to even voice it out, and could only moan in pleasure or protest.

And it was like that the couple finally slipped into slumber, totally nude, with Alexander hugging his wife tightly to the point it seemed he wanted to become one with her, while his cock was placed snugly inside her tight, cream-filled snatch.

The only bit of modesty the two decided to keep was to put a heavy blanket over them, and even that was not because they were ashamed of their nakedness but because of the cold outside.

While the next morning Alexander woke up late, at around 10 am, and it was only because a messenger came to deliver him a special news.

As for Cambyses, she was still out cold, being barely able to move even her finger, and when she woke up only around midday for lunch, her body, especially her lower half was so sore that she could not even get up, and decided to spend the whole day in bed sleeping.

With Mean by her side applying salve on her pussy, and even her butt, which stung quite a bit even after a good night's sleep.

But unfortunately for both Mean and Cambyses, this would become a regular occurrence, as Alexander would spend the whole next month with only Cambyses to try and get her pregnant, thus regularly devastating her.

Chapter 622 Prisoner Exchange (Part-1)

"Sheesh! Alex is such a bully, mistress! How could he be so rough!" Mean could be heard complaining as she administered the healing balm down there on an exhausted Cambyses, who was currently sipping hot chicken soup on bed.

Last night might have been a bit too enjoyable for her and Cambyses felt her body ache when even simply lifting her arms.

"Where is he?" The married girl snuggly wrapped in blankets appeared to not even notice the fact that Mean's fingers were around her privates as she was more interested in knowing her husband's whereabouts.

When Cambyses had woke up, the man was not next to her.

"...he went out, don't know where." Mean nonchalantly replied with a shrug, retelling, "Around noon a messenger suddenly came and told something to Alex. Then he hurriedly got dressed and left with Hemicus. Didn't even have breakfast."

"....a messagenr...huh?" Cambyses first languidly muttered, her mind still cloudy, as she seemed to recall having heard some kind of knocking on the door, though she was not sure if what she was remembering was something that actually happened or if it was something that had happened in her dreams and she was mixing the two.

"What did he say?" She then asked, both curious and as her groggy mind cleared, even a bit alarmed.

Her brows were slightly scrunched up as her mind could not help but wonder at all the kinds of potentially bad news the messenger might have come to deliver, one which would force Alexander to act.

'Did something bad happen? Did Tibias launch another attack? Was someone killed?'

These worries could not help but fasten the foreboding feeling in her heart.

"Stop worrying mistress. Whatever it is, let Alex handle it." But just as Cambyses was about to go down that spiral Mean quickly chirped this out, reassuring, "He is here now. It's no longer your job."

"*Pheewwhh*, Yes you are right." And with this reminder, Cambyses let out a relieved sigh, because she finally remembered that with Alexander's return, she was effectively sacked from the job.

And Cambyses could not be happier.

The responsibility of guarding the city was a heavy burden to carry and given the pressure she had been under for the past months, the relief that came with knowing she would no longer have to worry about every single detail and could simply sit back and relax was very liberating.

And so Cambyses broke a light smile, slouching her body even more against the bed rest and saying, "Let Alex handle it. Whatever happens, it will be his fault," before beginning to enjoy her warm soup.

Made with various winter vegetables and bits of cut meat it tasted delicious.

While the man in question was in a council meeting with the military leaders, entertaining a very special guest who had come bearing gifts.

"Greetings Lord Pasha of Zanzan, it is a pleasure to meet you. I'm Mithriditus." The lean, weak-looking old man greeted Alexander with a light smile, saying in a pleasant tone,

"I had heard rumors of you not being present in the city but it seems they clearly were wrong. I'm glad."

"Though I regret not being able to meet under better circumstances,"

Mithriditus's two-part greeting conveyed both friendliness but also a level of cordial distance.

Mithriditus was of course certain that Alexander was not present inside the city in the prior days, and was intereally very surprised to see him sitting right in front of in the flesh.

But given his vast court experience, he was able to quickly hide this slightest surprise with ease.

Though he might as well not have gone through all the trouble as Alexander worked to reply.

"No. I was indeed not present in the city. And only returned from Adhan yesterday."

He revealed the truth to try and establish more credibility for him, and then smirked,

"You mentioned meeting under difficult circumstances. Indeed, it is difficult to think of a worse setting to meet under which did not involve invading one's city, killing thousands, and even burning one's house down. Truly difficult!"

Alexander was not one to be shy with his sarcasm, as he used the amount of losses he incurred to put pressure on Mithriditus.

Though his eyes conveyed a different message, which were sharp and focused, but not burning with rage.

Meaning he might have sounded harsh, but his heart was not really set alight, and the grudge between them was not set in stone.

After all, everything important to him was more or so still alive.

Hence his desire to attack Tibias was more political and economical rather than for personal vengeance.

Also this visit was really predictable, given the 12,000 to 15,000 captives they had taken which Tibias would surely want back.

Only Alexander was not expecting them to be here so soon.

So Alexander instead focused his attention on the man they sent to carry out the negotiation, or more especially the armor he wore, which was extravagant by any standard, easily showing off the wearer's exalted status.

'It seems they sent one of the big fish.' Alexander confidently mused, feeling Tibias was serious in their negotiation attempt.

"Haha, indeed, indeed. It is war after all." Hearing Alexander's barbed reply, the veteran politician simply chuckled without batting an eye, as the acrid words pinged off his fragile-looking wrinkled skin, showing the true depth of the layers of 'skin' he had cultivated over his lifetime.

"Anyway, I am glad to see my lord had a safe journey."

"And to congratulate you on your return, as well as to show our sincerity and develop mutual trust I came bearing presents." The man wagged, then turning to grin at Alexander, posed, "I hope my lord liked it?"

"...." Alexander paused a bit at this because he was still unsure what the ploy was behind the act.

People were usually so generous with their gifts when they came to visit.

Especially when it was hostile powers they were visiting.

"I am indeed thankful for Laykash's return, He is a great warrior and highly respected among the soldiers."

But being unable to make a reasonable guess as to why they would do so, Alexander decided to give this official reply.

"Good, good. I'm glad. His Majesty specially ordered him to be specifically cared for." And hearing so Mithriditus produced a blank smile, showing a few of his bad teeth while subtly reminding Alexander of Perseus's favor.

To which Alexander internally snorted.

"So who do you want in exchange?" While externally Alexander posed this.

He, or anyone else for that matter bought the whole 'sincerity and mutual trust' thing and knew Mithriditus had come here with an aim.

"Haha, my lord is truly wise," And Mithriditus himself was also glad Alexander was quick on the uptake.

And then without standing in ceremony, he said his piece, "I'm looking for a man called Theony. I believe he should be in your captivity. He was wearing His Majesty's armor on the battlefield. Would my lord know?"

"Oh him! Yes, he was killed during the battle. His armor was too eye-catching and one of the overzealous soldiers killed him for glory. Sorry!"

Hearing Mithriditus's inquiry, Alexander very nonchalantly lied, placing his fist on his chin and crossing his legs in a bored manner.

It was like he did not at all care about it.

"Oh!" And this produced a very visible effect, with the very first one being this involuntary mutter of Mithriditus which he suddenly let slip.

Alexander had lied precisely because of this because he wanted to see how Mithriditus could react.

After all, Laykash was already in their hands and he wanted to see what Mithriditus's plan would be if he declined his request.

While for Mithriditus, he felt his heart sink as his worst nightmare had come true.

"That...really! Are you sure my lord? Perhaps you are mistaken. May I could have a look at the captives?" Mithriditus's voice audibly shook as he made the request.

"Are you questioning our lord?" And immediately from the side Menes audibly growled.

While Alexander turned to lightly smile,

"We can show you the armor. That should confirm it right?"

"....." Mithriditus did not know what to say.

Now, it was of course not like Mithriditus had never considered this.

Of course, he had.

But he was almost forced here by the crown prince because Perseus had grown impatient waiting for Laykash.

And so Philips had come to him pleading for him to quickly take Laykash and go to Zanzan.

"Lord Mithriditus you must go now. Or we might lose Theony for forever," The sickly prince seemed to have a bright flush on his face, though it was more due to excited worry than a sign of healthiness.

And when first asked, Mithriditus was naturally reluctant, trying to reason,

"Your Highness, that is too dangerous! We have no idea if they have Theony. Or even if they are willing to exchange him."

"And biggest of all, if I go with the prisoner, they could just take him from us!"

Mithriditus could list another hundred reasons why this was a bad plan, and he believed the smart Philips could too.

"I already have a plan for that. You just need to go and get Theony back," But Philips seemed undeterred, and then proceeded to reveal his plan, at the end of which he looked at Mithriditus with eager, burning eyes.

And when Mithriditus was reluctant even after that, Philips the crown prince simply brought his trump card, and the old noble was forced to accept.

Chapter 623 Prisoner Exchange (Part-2)

"That...that is unfortunate my lord," Hearing Alexander's claim of Theony's demise, Mithriditus could not stop himself from slowly shaking his head.

He liked the young man.

So in Mithriditus's mind, it was indeed regretful that he had died to a nameless soldiers in the heat of the battle.

Especially when it was likely because of the armor he wore.

'*Sigh*' So Mithriditus released a breath of remorse internally, thinking how disappointed the crown prince would be knowing this, while he also lampooned at the thought of being punished by Perseus once he got to know about it.

And he had no doubt the word of his act would indeed reach the king.

After all, he had come here wearing his very flashy armor, which he wore to show off his status and prevent anyone from killing or harming him.

If he had worn an ordinary, inconspicuous one, he was afraid the guards might not have even opened the city gates.

Which also meant the Tibian guards defending the camp had also seen Mithriditus leaving the site.

Furthermore, he was probably the only one other than Philips to have the authority to get Laykash out of the camp without requiring Perseus's express permission.

So those very guards who recognized Mithriditus leaving the camp would have also noticed a Zanzan prisoner accompanying him.

Perseus would have to intentionally get hit in his head by a donkey repeatedly to not understand what had happened.

But Mithriditus had already cast the die.

The crown prince had tempted him with both sticks and carrots, and Mithriditus had chosen to gamble on it.

And he lost.

So the only path that remained for him was to try and take Laykash back with him and hope Perseus did not lick his and the crown prince's skin too bad.

As for how he intended to get Laykash from Alexander's clutches, well, he could only hope Philips's plan would work.

Or both of them would be lucky if they could escape by giving up only a few layers of skin.

So to try and prevent that unpleasant ending, Mithriditus turned to gaze pointedly at Alexander and said,

"That is indeed regrettable my lord."

"Theony was valued noble of our country."

"But if he is really dead as you said, then I'm afraid it is not possible to exchange the prisoner." "Please let me return with the prisoner and come back with a new offer."

'Give you back Laykash?' Alexander found even the mere suggestion of this incredulous.

Surely the old man could not be so stupid, right?

Alexander had always held a soft spot for that man because it was indirectly because of him that he could sit here, for if the man had not killed Kafka, Adhan would not have fallen and the subsequent chain of events would not have occurred, meaning Alexander might still be the leader of a small mercenary.

And so, even though he never explicitly stated it, he was always grateful to Laykash, and tried to look out for the man in subtle ways.

So he simply replied, "You can go. But Laykash stays with us. Thank you for bringing him to us. We acknowledge your sincerity and appreciate this friendly gesture."

Alexander of course did not forget to throw the same words Mithriditus had said back to him, and then made it clear he would never let Laykash return to the lion's mouth after he got him back.

Who in their right mind would?

"....." And hearing so Mithriditus appeared to be stunned into silence, as if he had never expected such a thing

"Is my lord not even willing to let some of our captives go in exchange?" He seemed to pronounce then in a shaken, seemingly wounded voice.

To which Alexander produced a victorious sneer of derision,

"You people stole tens of millions of ropals from me. And now you are asking me to play fair! Hah! Fat chance! Laykash stays, and if you do not leave soon, you will too," He then ended with a threat.

"That's right! I'm sure the people would love to see the man who killed thousands of our people be hanged!"

And accompanying Alexander, Melodias too chimed out, expressing their solidarity.

The council members just had their lord's house burnt down so very much wanted revenge.

And this was their way of extracting some, even if it was only a tiny bit.

But that sense of impending victory lasted only for a fleeting moment, as Mithriditus shed his wounded face like a chameleon changes color, and treating all the threats like thin air, remarked with a sly smirk,

"Then perhaps it would be prudent for Lord Alexander to ask if the prisoner shares the same thoughts as you. If he really wants to stay here?"

"Who knows? Maybe he has grown fond of Tibias and wishes to come with me, hehe?"

Mithriditus gave that hollow chuckle again.

"....." And it was time for Alexander to be mute with surprise.

From the other party's tone, this did not seem like a question and sounded more like an inevitability.

'What did they do to Laykash?' Alexander hence wondered but was unable to think of any. I think you should take a look at

He had met with Laykash personally before he started the meeting, hugging the man with familiarity upon first meeting him, and then proceeded to make some talks for a while posing such questions as,

"How are you?"

"How are your injuries?"

"Is anything broken?"

"Did they treat you well?"

"How was the food?"

"Were you cold?"

And Laykash answered everything favorably, giving a hollow chuckle and saying, "Hehe, I'm alright, my lord."

"Got food and did not freeze, so can't complain."

It was clear from Laykash's body language and his weak, haggard look that the experience certainly had not been pleasant.

But the man was still alive and that was what mattered to him.

The food there had been minimal, just enough to stave starvation but not hunger, and the cold though not unbearable but certainly uncomfortable.

Of course this was to be kind of expected given Laykash was a prisoner of war and not a guest.

But because he felt embarrassed about describing his abject living conditions as well as the shame of getting captured, Laykash seemed hesitant to elucidate further.

Sensing which Alexander also did not dig too much into his answer too much, instead he was only much relieved to see Laykash not missing anything or had anything broken.

Prisoner camps were usually brutal, especially during the winter, and additionally Tibias did not need to even intentionally make things hard for Laykash.

It had to be remembered that Laykash was captured and it was very much possible he might have suffered injuries.

And if he had and if Tibias had simply left Laykash as is, without any medical attention, his condition could have deteriorated enough to ultimately result in a fatality.

And Alexander was relieved to see that did not happen.

So with a few understanding nods he let Laykash continue with his recount,

"They also did not rough us too much. Only asked us a few things about the city, like, where you were, who were our generals, who was in charge of the city, the amount of food we had, my position in the army...things like."

"I didn't say anything too revealing, my lord. Only the general stuff." Laykash was quick to add in a bit of panic thinking Alexander will blame him.

While the lord was quick to reassure him, "It's okay. It's okay, I do not blame you. You did what you had to live. You did well."

"Mmmm" And this reassurance worked wonders to calm his troubled heart, as he added,

"They also asked us things like the crossbow and the mail armor. They seemed very interested in those."

"But I did not reveal anything, saying I was only a soldier and not a blacksmith."

"But I did reveal it was you who invented them."

As Laykash said this his voice turned up a few octaves, and his sunken eyes seemed to pop out of their sockets in fear, hastily saying,

"I had no choice my lord! They made me!"

"It's okay, it's okay. I do not mind." And Alexander was again quick to reassure.

It did not take a genius to predict that once Tibias got their hands on the new weapon and armor, they would interrogate the prisoners to know more about them, and them saying it was Alexander really did not matter much.

What were they going to do knowing it?

Go to war?

They already had.

Send assassins?

As a high-ranking noble in Ptolomy's faction, the list of people who wanted to do that could fill a small book.

So if Tibias really wanted to do that, Alexander would advise them to get in line.

It was like this Alexander had spent some time getting to know about Laykash's well-being and experiences of the past months, by the end of which he was fairly certain the soldier was healthy and okay, able to walk and talk freely, the only caveat being he was a little bit weak.

But that was nothing enough rest and meals could not fix.

And as Alexander thought this, he was ultimately forced to come back to the reason why Mithriditus was so confident in saying that Laykash would return with him.

He could see no way of that happening.

"What did you do to him!" And while Alexander was musing on Mithriditus's implicit threat, Grahtos was unable to hold back his emotions, and loudly exclaimed what they were all thinking.

"Hehe, let the prisoner explain," While Mithriditus ominously chuckled.

Chapter 624 Prisoner Exchange (Part-3)

Grahtos, being the overall cavalry commander where Laykash served, as well as knowing the man as a fellow Thesian from his hometown of course had a particularly strong sense of brotherly comradery for him.

Thus at Mithriditus's ominous words, he could not help but lose control of his emotions.

While Alexander being of a much more rational mind, only turned to one of the guards and asked,

"Please ask Laykash to come here. Let's see what he has to say."

Though internally he was still unable to think of a reason why Laykash would want to return.

At least if this had been a magical world Alexander might have guessed something uncreative as a binding contract or a slave seal.

But there was no magic in this world.

Or at least there was no proof it which he had come across with his own eyes, though superstitious belief about a dozen of such stuff was dime a dozen.

And so drawing blanks, he ultimately decided to wait and see.

And a while later the once strong, strapping man entered the tent with slow, steady steps, his cheeks now shrunken into his face and eyes hollow, body thin and flaky due to malnutrition as he seemed weak and haggard.

"Laykash, I'm sorry to disturb your rest, but it seems Tibias wanted to exchange you for someone. But that person is likely dead and they want you to return with them. What do you say?"

Alexander very succinctly explained the reason for his call.

"Ah!" And hearing so Laykash let out an involuntary exclamation where his disappointment was palpable.

"I do know about that. In fact, I was allowed to come here on the condition that I could only be realized if they successfully managed to get a certain person."

"And if they could not, I had to return with them. I was made to swear to the gods on those terms before coming here." Laykash revealed.

Yes, that was Philips's grand plan.

He had approached the cell Laykash was being held in and explained the gist of the situation, though he hid the king's intention to brutally torture him to death soon, thinking that might dissuade him from coming back.

And as Mithriditus heard how Philips spun the story to Laykash, one of a pure prisoner exchange, and the solemn oaths he made Laykash take, both to the gods and to his soul, the old man was quite assured of the plan's efficacy.

In this time period, people believed preserving one's soul was just as important as preserving one's body, and given the heavy oaths Laykash was made to take, Mithriditus had to admit it was quite a good way to ensure the prisoner would indeed come back with him if things failed.

Of course, the old man had even then tried to back out of such a dangerous task, saying,

"Your Highness, umm...this old man's body is ummm,"

But Philips then very casually threatened, "If you do not try to get Theony back, I will tell my father that you intentionally hid the prisoner from him."

"And if you do get back Theony, I will look out for you and your family."

This carrot and stick from his future king put Mithriditus in a tough spot, as he weighed the danger of being on bad terms with his 'to be liege' against the potential benefits.

And at last, greed won.

Which caused him for the moment to seem like he had rolled a bad die.

While his counterpart Alexander hearing Laykash's excuse was stunned.

'That's it? A verbal promise? Nothing else? Like family hostage? Or even the lives of his men?' He could not believe himself.

Of course, Alexander had considered that Laykash might have been made to swear to the gods.

But to him it seemed so flimsy that he had immediately trashed the idea, not taking it even a bit seriously.

So now reading Laykash's body language that seemed to say he intended to fulfill his promise, Alexander did not know what to say.

"....."

Hence there was a slight pause in the room.

And it was only after a while when Alexander had managed to get his thoughts together that he began, "....Laykash that promise, you were forced to do so under duress, right? Surely that makes it invalid. There is no need for you to follow it." Alexander reasoned.

In fact, after hearing Laykash's excuse and determining from his body language that he really intended to go along with it, Alexander fought the urge to loudly yell,

'Laykash, man this is ancient times! We burn, loot, rape and plunder lands with no thought.'

'We slaughter entire cities- men, women, children, Sometimes we even chop their pets.'

'If you can do all that, you can break a promise.'

To Alexander, it appeared utterly bizarre how a man could do all that without blinking an eye but think breaking a promise was too much.

But this was the difference in mindset between Alexander and the people of this time, who took anything related to the gods extremely seriously. I think you should take a look at

So even when Alexander provided Laykash with a way out, the latter refused to take it, answering with rueful shakes of his head, "No my lord, I'm afraid I cannot. I swore to the gods upon my soul and I must follow it. Or have myself eternally darned."

The Laykash seemed adamant.

"Hehe," And hearing so Mithriditus could not stop himself from giving that same disgusting chuckle, relieved that at least this gamble had paid off.

"....." And Alexander reflexively pursed his lips.

There was really no way to reason Laykash out of this Alexander felt.

But even then, unwilling to let Mithriditus win, he tried one last time, deciding to use theology against theology, and saying,

"If you are worried about your soul, I can specifically pray to the goddess for you. The combined force of God Ramuh and Goddess Gaia is sure to be stronger than the gods of Tibias..."

"Please do not utter such blasphemous words, my lord!" Before Alexander could finish his sentence, Mithriditus loudly interjected, the anger in his voice very obvious.

It seemed that the old man was quite touchy when it came to the matter of the divine.

"I would ask you not to bring the powers of the unseen in this discussion. Your man has sworn an oath and he must fulfill it."

"There will be, there can be no two way about it."

This was the first time since the negotiations started that Alexander had seen the old man so determined.

"....." While Alexander was more interested in Laykash's reaction, choosing to ignore the other, for what Mithriditus said really did not matter.

And as for the opinion of the man which did matter, he was silent, showing tacit support for Mithriditus.

'Welp!' And seeing so Alexander could only relent.

He was half frustrated at Laykash for not playing ball since if he did, he could have extracted a lot of information from Theony, especially now that he was certain that boy was a high-ranking noble.

But he was also half impressed at Laykash for sticking to his word.

At least Alexander did not think he himself would have been so forthright in his deals, especially when it meant going back to a cold, enemy prison.

Hence this went to show Laykash was a man of his word, and Alexander was of course very pleased to have such a trustworthy subordinate.

"I see." Hence seeing Laykash's unflinching answer Alexander leaned back on his chair, and then slowly turning to Melodias, instructed.

"Could you once again check the prison camp for this Theony? Make sure the guards there didn't make any mistake?"

"And if he is still alive could you bring him here?"

If Theony was really dead, Alexander would have certainly tried harder to make Laykash stay.

But since they had the man, Alexander decided to spare himself the needless pain.

He had tried quite hard to swindle Mithriditus but it did not work.

'Right away my lord," And hearing the task and understanding the jig was up, Melodias was instantly up and quickly left the building.

While Mithriditus was first a bit confused about the sudden complete turn of events, even thinking back on what they said about Alexander, 'Didn't they say you didn't make mistakes?'

But he then quickly woke to the ruse they were trying to pull off.

'So that's how was it,' Having understood it, Mithriditus was internally ecstatic because he was now 99% sure Theony was actually alive and the other party knew it.

So his eyes subconsciously darted to the door to try and catch the earliest glimpse of Theony, while in the meantime Alexander wanted to know a few more tidbits about Tibias from the man.

So he said, "Lord Mithriditus, while we wait, why don't we talk a bit more? I believe there is a lot more to discuss between us other than just two prisoners."

And this put Mithriditus in a tough spot.

He had officially introduced himself as someone visiting under the orders of the king.

Whereas he was really a rouge, trying to attempt a clandestine prisoner exchange unbeknownst to Perseus.

So even if he and Alexander discussed other matters such as a peace treaty, further prisoner exchanges, war compensation, etc. all those would be quite hollow.

But just because Mithriditus was unable to make any decisions did not mean he could not talk right?

There was nothing wrong with just that.

"Yes, let's." And so Mithriditus enthusiastically replied, intent on dragging anything Alexander said out until he could Theony and make his escape with empty promises.

Chapter 625 End Of The First Zanzan X Tibian War

For a while, in between the time Melodias was out 'finding' Theony, Alexander sent out peace feelers to try and gauge Mithriditus's reaction.

He began, "Last time the envoy I met was someone called Leosydas. Would my lord know him?"

"..." And for a moment, Mithriditus was unsure how to answer.

Whether tell him he was dead or lie.

"Of course I know Lord Leosydas. We all do. But unfortunately, he was one of the many martyrs of this war."

Mithriditus decided to tell the truth because he felt there was little point in trying to hide the death of such a huge figure.

A huge, grand funeral for Leosydas would surely be held once they got back to Tibias, and the whole world would naturally know then.

So Mithriditus was frank about it, adding, "*Sigh*", Zanzan is not the only one who has taken losses in this war. We are all victims!"

He seemed genuinely hurt by Leosydas's loss and attempted to use this to show Zanzan was not the only one with grievance and thus tried and muddy the field.

A tactic that backfired spectacularly as Alexander not only did not sympathize with the loss but instead barked,

"Heh! Who told you to attack us in the first place?"

"It's good that that swindler is dead. Serves him right."

Alexander was very keen to make it clear who was the aggressor and who the defender was here.

While Mithriditus hearing Alexander bad-mouth Leosydas produced a frigid aura and clenched his fist.

Clearly, he was offended.

'It seems that man was well-respected' And noticing so, Alexander noted this.

And he was right.

Leosydas was always seen as a sort of a moderator who tried to balance the wants of the nobility and the royal family, and he generally managed to strike a good balance, keeping both sides happy.

Hence his popularity.

And so hearing his death be so crudely celebrated certainly stung Mithriditus.

"..I would advise you to be a bit more respectful to the dead," Mithriditus chewed the words out through his teeth.

"*Snort*" And Alexander only snorted back.

He had a lot more choice words to say about Leosydas, especially about how he stole tens of millions of ropals from him, but given they were still in the midst of negotiating, Alexander decided to hold back his barbed replies until the terms were concluded.

"We met another negotiator who came to us when the lord was not present. Fat and slimy looking! Where is he?"

While Menicus, true to his mercenary origin was very crude in his description as he posed this.

".....it was His Majesty's decision," And Mithriditus gave a very cardboard cut-out answer, giving the impression that Perseus was dissatisfied with the former's performance and hence sent him.

"I see." Alexander was curt in his reply as he really did not care whether the negotiator was fat or thin, as he then got to the meat of the issue.

"We would like to propose a man-to-man exchange of prisoners. One Zanzan for one Tibian."

"That...." And though this was a perfectly fair deal, Mithriditus seemed to hesitate, because remember he really did not have the authority to make any promises.

So he tried to drag the talks out by saying things like, "How can that be! The ones you captured are mere peasants! While many of the soldiers in our captivity are all veterans!"

Mithriditus had only heard Alexander was a mercenary and made everything up from there.

And even when Alexander tried to clarify this complete hogwash of a claim, Mithriditus remained staunch, displaying an unflinching attitude.

And the same attitude went with trying to sign any kind of peace treaty, where even Alexander's offer of white peace was rejected by Mithriditus who claimed that both of them had lost one battle each and were tied.

So he claimed that there would have to be another decisive battle before any peace deals could be reached.

"I'm really here for Theony. He is His Majesty's adjutant and my liege is quite fond of him," Mithriditus at one point said out loud, which made Alexander joke to himself,

'Why? Does he help warm his bed?'

And though he was wrong in that, he was not too far off.

But whoever Theony slept with was not really Alexander's concern.

Instead, he was more occupied feeling a bit regretful about letting such a prized fish go.

'If only I would have gotten a few more days' Alexander wished for a bit more time to try and pry things out of Theony.

And though the thought of letting Laykash leave and exchange him after a few days was tempting, seeing the man's current condition, weak and thin, Alexander could not find it in his heart to do so. I think you should take a look at

He owed a lot to Laykash.

And so Alexander continued the talks, trying to come to terms regarding various situations as well as glean extra bits of information from Mithriditus about his country until finally, Mithriditus returned, between the time which the two sides were unable to come to terms with anything, courtesy of Mithriditus of course.

But this bubbling dissatisfaction was suppressed as soon as Melodais entered, accompanied by the man in question, for Theony had arrived in the flesh.

"It seems my lord was right. The guards were indeed wrong about the prisoner," As Meloidas entered with Theony, he tried to make it sound like this was all the guards' fault for making Alexander say the man was dead.

"Mmm, be sure to punish them later," And to save face Alexander replied as such, though he was just saying this, he had no intention of actually following through.

"Uncle!" But this casual theatre was suddenly shattered by Theony's excited cheer, as his eyes turned into gleeful joy seeing the familiar figure.

Mithriditus was not actually his related uncle, but something that Theony had come to address him as such in private due to their frequent interactions and huge age gap.

And now, meeting him in enemy territory, the young man got excited enough to address him as

such reflexively.

He had been fairly certain that he would be exchanged sometime in the future but did not think it would be so soon.

It had been only two days since his capture.

So seeing the king had sent someone as high-ranking as Mithriditus to fetch naturally made Theony ecstatic.

And as Theony was over the moon seeing his uncle, Mithriditus took the time to check him out too.

Theony was dressed in the same armor he had seen his last wearing, the king's luxurious armor, which Melodias had chosen to make him wear, and did not look too beaten up.

There was a bit of ink under the eye, possibly due to sleeplessness, and he sounded a little weak. But given he could walk and talk, Mithriditus was happy

So having gotten what he came here for, Mithriditus immediately got up to hug the young man, exchanging some very short pleasantries with him, before turning to Alexander to say,

"The exchange is complete. Please allow us to return."

Mithriditus could not wait to go back.

"*Wave*"

And Alexander very unceremoniously discharged them with a casual flick of his wrist, in a matter that was very disrespectful.

But Alexander did not care.

He did so because he was very unsatisfied at being unable to come to any sort of conclusion to his war as although the enemy was battered to a virtual pulp, having lost half of its original force, it still seemed ready to fight, refusing to yield.

While in his city sentiments of frustration about the war were growing.

Alexander did not wish to fight with Perseus anymore because his people did not wish to fight with Perseus anymore.

In fact, it was also because of this he was yet to pick up on that attack on the enemy's camp which Cambyes had initiated.

We wished for Perseus to leave without having to spill even more blood.

That and also he was afraid if things got too dire for Tibias, in their desperation they might do something crazy such as killing the 2,500 to 3,000 prisoners they have.

So he tried to use the diplomatic route to get them back, and having failed he was in a foul mood.

However his mood improved significantly over the next few days since Mithriditus was back to give basically everything Alexander wanted.

It seemed that with Theony returning and the trio's urging (Philips, Mithriditus, and Theony) Perseus finally cooled down and began to see things objectively.

Mithriditus also revealed to the king the peace terms he had discussed, and recognizing his position, Perseus at last sued for peace.

So the treaty was:

A white peace lasting for one year.

Neither side being required to pay any war reparations.

No merchant from either country would be persecuted.

And lastly, and perhaps most importantly, an equal number of prisoners were to be exchanged.

Here, Tibias exchanged all of its captives, while Zanzan allowed Mithriditus to choose which of the roughly 3,000 men he would like to free.

And though Tibias had tried to argue for the remaining 12,000 too, even offering to buy them using the money the Kaiser money had given them or from the pool they had swindled from Alexander, Alexander was adamant about keeping them.

"We need them to rebuild our city. Any ransom can wait till the peace treaty expires." He had said.

And it was with these conditions, the brief but deadly war had finally come to an end.

Chapter 626 Rebuild Efforts

The time taken to draw up a peace treaty was relatively quick, the two sides having completed it within one day.

And even as it was being signed and the prisoners exchanged, Alexander could already see from atop his walls how the walls of the Tibian camp were being dismantled and soldiers being arranged in marching formation.

It seemed that Perseus was ready to march the second the deal was completed and he got his men.

'It is too bad we cannot finish them off,' And seeing so Alexander could not help but lampoon a bit at this lost opportunity.

No one was under any kind of illusion that the peace treaty they signed was a flimsy, tenuous one and that the attacks would resume the second it expired.

So if Alexander had the ability, he would have certainly tried to cut off the snake's head then and there.

And perhaps Perseus had sensed this, thus prudently deciding to make his retreat while he still could.

Mithriditus and Philips had spent some time trying to make him see their current weakness.

"*Sigh*" And as the warrior king oversaw the packing of his camp, and then turned his head to look back at the city he had come so close to capturing, he released a mournful sigh, his face looking visibly aged, his weak body no longer radiating that same aura of charisma and gallantry.

He had lost so much in this campaign, so many high-level officers, many friends, and even his best friend.

But perhaps what stung even more was the fact how close they had come.

In fact, paradoxically, perhaps Perseus would have been able to better swallow this bitter pill of defeat if he had not gotten so close to claiming the city.

To have gotten so close to something he wanted more than anything in his life and then fail at the last moment burned Perseus's heart that much more, much more than if he had just simply failed the siege.

But it was what it was, there was no pill for regret.

Lady luck had swung both ways in this conflict, for him and also for Zanzan.

For him, lady luck first helped him win the battle when his elephants managed to spook the enemy cavalry, thus enabling him to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

And then the goddess of luck had again helped him by providing him with a new route up the hills to attack the city, gave him a clear night even in the middle of winter to aid in their travels, and lastly presented him with Leosydas's miraculous flanking maneuver that ultimately enabled him to capture the manor.

While for Zanzan, the same goddess of fortune had enabled Laykash to almost kill Leosydas which caused Perseus's left flank to disintegrate, allowing Zanzan to cause massive damage to the king by killing a lot of his veteran commanders and nobles.

And during Perseus's sneak attack, she had alerted them of Perseus's approach by setting the iron foundry on fire, the manor was then somewhat set on fire, and lastly, she enabled them to carry out a miraculous flanking maneuver of their own which Perseus failed to foresee due to the then circumstances.

Hence, going by the count of favors, the lady of destiny had not really discriminated against either.

But Perseus had simply failed to utilize them as effectively as Cambyses.

Deep down Perseus of course recognized this, but currently, he was not in the mind of self-reflection.

Instead he was much more worried about how he would explain his campaign to the nobles and who to replace Leosydas with.

And it was with such headaches that Perseus made his way, his and the men's hearts heavy with the defeat.

"*Sigh*, it's finally over," And as they slowly left, seeing the enemy finally recede over the horizon, being followed by a small contingent of Zanan cavalry who were there to make sure Tibias really left their lands, Cambyses, standing next to Alexander atop the wall at last let out a sigh of immense relief, feeling a surge of surrealness at having survived this encounter.

There were many times in the last few months that Cambyses did not think she would make it.

"Mmmmm," And hearing his wife speak, Alexander also let out a low nodding hum, showing his support for her, though he then immediately rained on her parade "But they will be back! We need to prepare."

"....." Cambyses was not entertained by this. which she showed by pursing her lips.

Of course, she knew they would be back, that it was just an interlude, that both sides had things that were left unfinished.

But couldn't she be allowed to enjoy this hard-won peace for at least even a little bit?

Was there really a need to remind her of the huge amount of work that lay in trying to rebuild the city immediately? I think you should take a look at

She had just finished completing one such task!

So with pressed lips and a dry tone Cambyses shot back, "Who's we? I'm not doing any more work. I worked enough in the last few months. Now it's your turn!" as she then turned around and exited the walls, the winds there were not feeling pleasant to the body.

It seemed that the girl was planning on taking a break from her work.

And Cambyses really did, dumping all the work onto Alexander, who found the next few months very hectic.

The very first thing he had to deal with was the casualty report and damage estimates.

The damages they incurred were as expected, the foundry, the brick plant, the manor, and the workshops all were heavily affected.

The foundry and the brick plant would need to be almost built from scratch, while the workshops would need major repairs, with many sheds requiring reconstruction and the wooden walls mending.

As for the casualties, well the combined dead, captured, and wounded of the two battles amounted to around 20,000 men and women, out of which he had managed to get 3,000 back and take an additional 12,000 prisoners.

And as Alexander read this report, he could not help but thank his lucky stars that he had somehow managed to keep his losses to only a net of 5,000.

Because if the entire 20,000 had really disappeared from the labor force, he would have been crippled for years, with many of his industries being forced to shut down or at least slow down.

And it was also because of this that Alexander was adamant about not trading the men for a ransom, even when Mithridatus offered larger and larger prices.

After all, Alexander did not lack money as much as he lacked men.

"Lord Alexander, it is the natural custom of war to exchange prisoners for money! How could you!" And hearing so Mithriditus had decried the attempt, to which Alexander had only sneered,

"Heh! I already paid tens of millions of ropals for them. So of course I can!"

And then swiftly added,

"We need those men to rebuild our city. You can wait till they have done so and then buy them back. Or exchange them with slaves of equal value."

Alexander made it clear he wanted men for men.

With this proposition, plus given the fact that Mithriditus had rescued every one of value with the 3,000 he was allowed to exchange, the nobleman did not see any reason to haggle with Alexander with great ferocity.

The rest of the captives were mainly peasants, and so he only half-heartedly proposed to rescue them a year later, though the man was skeptical about how many of them would be able to live through their captivity.

After all, prisoners of war used as forced labor had famously high casualty rates.

And he was right to worry about that, as Alexander planned to use these men in places like the mines, which famously had a low survival chance given the environment, or in various infrastructure projects, such as roads, aqueducts, and buildings.

Which though not as brutal as the mines also had their fair share of accidents, such as injuries from using tools, falling from scaffoldings, out-of-control animals, and the challenges of working in the scalding hot summers or in the bleak, freezing winters.

Hence perhaps the lucky few who got to work the field tolling away would be the really lucky ones, able to preserve their lives even if they had to subject themselves to back-breaking labor.

Alexander would have several meetings with his council members regarding the allocation of these men, choosing to send most of them to help rebuild the foundry, while others were required to build a wall along the western side whose plans Alexander had already drawn up.

Alexander planned to plug that hole in his defense as soon as possible.

With the care package for the city determined, Alexander then moved to placate the citizenry.

First and foremost he lifted the food rationing that had been instituted and started to subsidize various foods such as wheat, salt, beans, seasonal vegetables olive oil, etc., until summer to take the burden of many households who had run through their saving during the siege when they could not work or trade.

Furthermore, Alexander initiated a stimulus package of 50 million for the people, which came to about six months of pay for each family, as well as giving 10,000 ropals to all families who had lost anyone in the attack.

This show of generosity helped Alexander win much of the wavering hearts and in this way, a new chapter dawned for Zaznan.

Chapter 627 Reconstruction And Development (Part-1)

As winter rolled into summer and the first harvests began to come in, Alexander was in his office with the council members, reading and listening to the latest reports.

The man had shed the heavy leather jackets and fur coats for a light, simple blue tunic, and linen pants while the usual roaring fireplace was nowhere to be seen, and the usually closed windows were thrown wide open to let in the cool summer breeze in.

But even all this ventilation seemed to be not enough to fight the blistering heat of mid-may, as evidenced by a few beads of sweat that could be seen tickling down Alexander's cheeks,

Perhaps it was because of this there was a cool, ice-cold faluda placed in front of him, to help him take the heat off.

And as Alexander occasionally sipped the milky, creamy, drink sweetened with sugar and topped with fruits, the other council members were busy informing him of the progress of the ongoing restorations, the extent of completion of the infrastructure projects that were planned, and lastly how the spring planting went.

"The Tibians did not cause too much damage to the fields, my lord. So much of the planted crops are unharmed."

"The harvests are well. We have gotten a similar amount of crops as last year."

Menicus was the first one to start, giving Alexander the good news with a smile.

"Mmmm, good. Our granaries were running low." And hearing so Alexander was relieved.

Though the report was expected as he had seen the volume of produce reaped, the official confirmation still pleased him.

"Yes, and because my lord had lent extra manpower, we managed to plant additional lands.

So next fall we can expect a bigger harvest," Menicus further added, making Alexander further content.

With the spring harvest and the promised shipments of grain from Pasha Farzah, Alexander was confident he would be able to easily tide over to the next fall.

As Menicus finished his report, the reports about the reconstruction efforts started to come in.

"The iron foundry and the brick-making kilns are almost ready to start again my lord," Harun and Krishok each first pronounced.

Given they had prior experience in constructing these buildings, the time taken to build them a second time was much lower.

"Mmmm, good," Alexander gently hummed, "And the workers? Have they been hired?" he asked.

It had to be remembered that almost all of the foundry workers were killed in the prior attack hence the new recruitment.

"Yes! The few experienced men left have been made their supervisors to guide them," Harun quickly added, while Alexander approved with a silent nod.

Alexander then moved on to asking about the progress of the other projects, such as the reconstruction of the workshops, which he temporarily put Cambyses in charge of, until he could find a new caretaker, while her position as the head of the city guards was for the moment given to Bartholomew, making him the acting police commissioner.

The reports from here were all positive, as the rebuilding efforts were swift and on track.

The destroyed shops were rebuilt, the destroyed equipment remade, and the production of the unique products restarted.

"The workers are already back and working. Although given that they have lost a lot of experienced men, it is said that it will take a bit of time for them to get back to speed." Cambyses reported.

The girl was wearing a half-sleeved green gown with gold embroidery, the attire being voluminous enough that it hid her bodily curves, including the baby bump she had developed.

Yes, it seemed Alexander's hard work of plowing the fields and constantly watering it at night all throughout January had paid off.

Cambyses was officially pregnant.

Although the news was kept a secret for now.

Cambyzes, being around 4 months pregnant was still able to work the non-labor intensive administrative jobs without a problem, and so was able to expertly deliver a detailed report of the ongoing renovations of the workshops.

With the only hitch Alexander faced about her report was how Gajokp had at last been unable to wake up, issuing the demise of the glassmaker.

This caused Alexander to sigh a bit in regret, both because of the loss of a great talent, and also because he would now have to choose a brand new head he could trust for the glass-making plant.

But Gajokp was dead and he could not do anything to bring him back.

So he issued the decree for the next best thing,

"Assure his wife and children that they will be given the plot of land they were promised. As well as a monthly stipend of 200 ropals."

Gajokp had been promised a plot of land if he worked for him for 10 years, but given he was dead, it was very natural to think the widow and the children would be thrown out as the man was unable to fulfill the contract.

Just giving them the monthly stipend was already generous enough in many's eyes, but seeing Alexander also give the promised land just like that moved many.

"My lord is generous," The council members cheered. I think you should take a look at

But this was not only Alexander's way of compensating the widow for dragging her husband all the way from Adhan and getting him killed.

It was also a type of propaganda technique,

And this intention was quickly revealed when Alexander turned to Cambyses to instruct, "Remember to tell all the workers that this is my way of compensating them."

"That I, Alexander always appreciate talent."

"And as long as they work loyally for me, they and their families will always be taken well care of."

With this said, he ordered the same thing for the family of the paper maker Azizak.

The current reporting regarding the reconstruction efforts came to an end as such, and Alexander at last began to inquire about the most important topic, the various infrastructure projects he had going on.

And the very first one among them was the western wall, the one he commissioned to be built literally days after Perseus left.

"We are still continuing to build it, my lord. But it will take some time. A few years probably." Hearing the inquiry, the person in charge, Uzak replied, and when he saw Alexander scowl at the answer as if to ask, 'Why will it take so long?', the stonemason quickly explained,

"The wall's dimensions are breathtaking my lord. Extending from the north wall, it goes all around the cement plant, the mines, and the foundry, covering several large hills and finally ends at the sandy beaches of the Mad Sea."

"Just building a wall of that size would be a mammoth undertaking, never mind in addition to it, there are also the thick forests we have to clear and the uneven grounds that we have to flatten."

"If we were using the old method, I would have said it will require several decades if not a lifetime to complete."

Uzak very animatedly waved his palms open, gesturing at the breadth of the project, before continuing,

"And even with the new, cement method we have, it is still a daunting task. Especially because we have a shortage of everything."

"Shortage of men to cut trees, dig the ground and build the walls, shortage of bricks and stones to make the wall with, and most importantly shortage of cement to bind them."

He very eloquently showed all the difficulties he was encountering, and finished by promising,

"I will be able to finish it much faster if I was given everything I needed. Then I could complete it by next summer!"

"..." And hearing so Alexander did not immediately answer.

But flattened his lips instead.

First of all, he was not impressed by the somewhat exaggeration of the wall's size.

'Who are you kidding? I know how big the wall is! You're saying it like I'm asking you to make the Great Wall of China,' Alexander internally rolled his eyes.

But he did not outright scold Uzak because the problems he claimed to be facing were indeed true.

They might not be as acute as he was making them out to be, but they did exist.

And it seemed that Uzak was simply over-reporting a bit of this to his superior, a tactic anyone and everyone used, with even Alexander being guilty in his previous life.

Plus Alexander's priority about the wall seemed to have declined over the few months.

Immediately after Perseus's attack, he was in a sort of panic mood and had hastily ordered the building of the wall to plug that weak point.

But as the danger had passed and he was calmed enough to rethink, he found that building the wall was not an absolute necessity.

The vulnerability that this gap posed that already been exploited and repelled, meaning there was no immediate threat to it.

Alexander had already been made aware of the hidden danger, and Perseus was unlikely to be able to exploit this flaw again.

In fact, Alexander was of half the mind to keep with side open as a kind of bait to tempt the enemy into taking this route.

Because then he could use his far more maneuverable legionaries to destroy the usually rigid phalanxes which was used by all.

But that was only a fleeting thought, as there was no guarantee the enemy would not learn from his and develop their own infantry formations.

In a battle between two legionary formations who knew the winner would be?

Alexander would have to be foolish to gamble with his city like that.

Chapter 628 Reconstruction And Development (Part-2)

Alexander was not too against delaying building his walls if it meant allocating more resources to more important projects

But though Alexander was not of the mind to expose Uzak, his colleagues seemed to be of a different mind.

"Heh! Who are you kidding Uzak? Shortage of men?"

"Bah! We all have a shortage of men!" Diaogosis shouted while Jazum chimed,

"That's right! And don't slander me! The cement plants have been working to the best of their abilities even through all the difficulties! You get more cement than you deserve."

It seemed there was some kind of internal rivalry between the various council members over the limited resources.

Because they believed the faster they could complete theirs, the more recognition they could get from Alexander.

And with Jazum opening the door of accusation, the others quickly joined in, all complaining how the others were hoarding resources, until Diaogosis cleverly added this,

"Bah!! If I had more men, I would have also finished building the port on time! But now! I will need one more year!"

"But do you hear me complaining?"

"....." Hearing which Alexander was speechless.

He originally thought that Diaogosis was taking his side to scold Uzak on his behalf, where in reality, the shrewd stonemason was using the latter's excuse to justify his own delays, while at the same time making him appear diligent.

'Nice!' Alexander could not help but begrudgingly admire.

And with Diaogosis's little trick revealed to the rest of the council members, they too used it to justify their own deals, using the same three reasons.

The aqueducts, apartment buildings, and sewage all seemed to have been delayed, with even Diaogosis's assistant, who was put in charge of building the roads across the province, connecting Alexander's fief to the other nobles reporting delays in the estimated time of conclusion.

And hearing all his chatter about the same thing, Alexander finally got a bit irritated and lightly snapped,

"Okay, okay, I get it. The war has disrupted your schedule. And you want more time."

"Fine! You will get it." He very casually declared with a wave of his hands.

He did not feel like haggling with them over this, especially when what they were saying was true.

The war had conscripted a lot of the workers, a lot of the workers had died, and lastly, during the siege, much of the construction was halted, both to husband resources and because many workers were put in the garrisons.

While the brick kilns were destroyed and the cement plant kept only nominally operational.

Due to all this, Alexander decided to give this concession, to which all the council members cheered with all kinds of praises describing his magnanimity.

While Alexander responded by commenting,

"In the coming years, we will need to handle bigger and bigger projects. Which will need more resources."

"So I want all council members to think of ways to increase production."

"More brick-making kilns need to be built."

"More hills suitable for establishing cement crushing plants should be discovered."

"And more people from outside should be made to immigrate to Zanzan to alleviate the worker shortages."

"Yes my lord," The council members gave a short reply.

And finishing this, Heliptos quickly jumped up to offer his suggestion,

"My lord, perhaps the other nobles could also be made to build the brick kilns. We will be building all those roads for them after all. It's only natural they should contribute."

HH was of the mind to make the nobles bear some of the labor-intensive brick-making process.

"Hmmm," And hearing so Alexander traced his chin at the feasibility, finding the idea quite attractive at first glance.

The roads did not specifically need bricks as they used stone and gravel as their base.

But bricks could easily be a substitute.

And it would help increase his production aiding in relieving the shortage.

But there were of of course problems with that as well.

First being that forcing his nobles to build the kilns, which many may not like, thinking Alexander was overstepping his boundaries.

It would also mean going into the muddy waters of who was going to finance it as nobles were famously stingy and could say they did not have the funds to spare.

Then there would be the discussion of manpower as most people under a noble were already employed, the majority tending the fields while the others were needed in other vocations.

This was especially true for shordars (barons) and talukders (viscounts) who were quite small and would most likely be unable to sustain large-scale production of the kilns.

And lastly there was answering the question of whether Alexander would buy the bricks from them using money or it would be some kind of obligation from them for the wider infrastructure effort.

But just because there were hurdles did not mean it could not be done. I think you should take a look at

Perhaps the nobles would need some greasing, but Alexander was confident in making them do it.

"That's a good idea. I will talk to them," So he promised.

And then the same suggestion was made for the cement plant, but which Alexander categorically rejected citing the strategic importance of cement, though, at the back of his mind, he did think back on the idea he already had, to sell the clinkers mixed with gypsum to the nobles for them to grind at their own wind or watermills.

That could certainly be done, as increasing the number of cement kilns would be much easier than finding suitable places for building waterwheels.

But for the time being, he lacked the manpower to even increase that.

So for the foreseeable future, it seemed that cement production would continue to be his main bottleneck.

And as for increasing manpower, well, though it sounded relatively straightforward, just taking people from other places and dumping them here, well Cambyse had some less-than-savory news to share.

"Ummm....there might be a problem with getting more people. Especially if they are not from Adhania," she chimed.

And as Alexander turned to face her with a raised eyebrow, she explained, "I know I should have reported it soon but I had not gotten the chance."

"Thing is both I and Batholomew have for some time been dealing with various small-scale disagreements between the native Adhanians and the Thesians."

"And Batholomew says both the frequency and scale have gotten a lot worse after the siege ended."

"We need to do something."

"Disagreements?" Hearing this Alexander's interest was piqued.

People bumping shoulders with each other during the day, especially in this congested city was inevitable.

So he was not really surprised by there being disagreements.

Disagreements, disputes, and quarrels were all part and parcel of living in the city and even life.

And usually, they were encountered, dealt it, and then swiftly forgotten.

But Cambyses did not sound like she was talking about ordinary disagreements and innocent rows between simple passersby.

Given how she worded it, it seemed much more systematic.

And as Alexander asked her to clarify, the girl nodded and said,

"Mmm, disagreements. Or discriminations I should say,"

"The examples are quite varied, but all of them can show the various discriminations many Thesians faced."

"For instance, some Adhanian shops seem to refuse to sell to Thesians. A few even famously have signs saying no Thesian is welcome."

"Some restaurants also refuse to let Thesians eat or force them to eat outside."

"While some shops sell everything at a markup when they see a Thesian purchasing it."

"And even the most tolerant shops seem to favor an Adhanian to a Thesian."

"For instance, there was one report from Bartholomew saying that a Thesian had complained to a passing patrol that even though he was the first to choose a vase, just as he was about to buy it, another Adhnaina came to buy it and the shopkeep sold it to him."

"There are many more such examples I could list, such as groups of Adhanian cornering lone Thesians in alleys and beating them up, throwing rubbish at them,...but you get the gist."

"There is a blatant bias, some might even say animosity between the two."

"And this type of thing had already caused quite a few brawls in the market, but fortunately the guards were there to snuff them before things could get out of control."

"But if it is not addressed soon, and if even more foreigners were to enter...." Cambyses produced an ominous outcome.

And as Cambyses said this, several angry scowls soon were detected across the table, which was very natural given many of the council members, especially the military ones were all Thesian.

They could not believe their fellow people were being treated like that, right under their noses.

While Alexander hearing so did not immediately react but began to think.

And once he had ruminated on it more sometime, he addressed,

"The discrimination between the two ethnicities is not anything surprising. This is something we had already expected."

"Adhanians have always considered themselves to be better than Thesians...ahh not all of them"
Alexander quickly added the second part looking at the Adhanian council members, who blushed a bit, feeling embarrassed by what people of their own ethnicity were doing, and so quickly said,

"No, no, my lord. We should punish these people severely! Thesians and Adhanians are brothers!"

"Mmm," Alexander was pleased to hear this, and after a nod continued,

"That is why I wish to find out why Adhanians are targeting the Thesians. How they are doing it? And how we can stop it."

" And after knowing this we can come up with laws that fight this!"

Chapter 629 Combating Racism

The inherent racism Adhanian people had towards outsiders was almost ingrained into their bones.

They were almost conditioned from birth to see themselves as the center of the civilized world.

thinking their culture as the most glorious of all.

Of course, they were not the lone candidate to be affected by this kind of thinking, as Thesians were too, who saw their practice of democracy and being ruled by the will of the people as the best kind of governance, thus thinking they were the most advanced civilization.

And as one moved to other countries, many of them had their own interpretation of the word 'best country in the world' meaning ethnic divide and racism were almost part and parcel of life.

Slurs and slang describing people different from them in looks, color, and beliefs were abound, and due to the common nature of it all, Alexander was cautious of issuing sweeping legislation that punished people for this overnight.

Something that some of the council members seemed fluxed and even frustrated about.

"My lord, why should we wait? Our people are being oppressed! They need to be rescued right now." The usual energetic Grahtos was the one to express his anger on behalf of his fellow men, urging Alexander to take swift and decisive action.

And going by how all the other Thesian council members nodded their heads, it was apparent they were all in agreement.

"Let us not be hasty. Exercise patience, everyone." But Alexander did not seem to share their enthusiasm.

And as his calm voice echoed across the room, the others turned to him seemingly asking for an explanation.

So he gave them one.

"In the eyes of most Adhanians, there is not anything wrong with their actions. It is simply their way of living."

"So if I were to make these laws out of the blue in a single day, many would not be able to understand this and see me as a tyrant."

"Remember, many view me as an outsider, as a Thesian first, a lord later."

"So instituting these reforms suddenly today or tomorrow will cause many to think that I am only favoring my own people and discriminating against them."

"This will surely alienate a large majority of Adhanians, and might even cause the enmity to deepen," Alexander revealed this reasoning, and then discussed,

"So, instead of jumping to conclusions and making sudden draconian laws, I want to be prudent over this."

"Let us learn the extent of the hostilities, about the different ways the Adhanians are doing this, why they are doing so, and lastly if the Thesians are simply innocent victims or if they too have any hidden skeletons in the closet."

"There might be more to the story than meets the eye. We should try and look for that."

"And only once we know this, can we effectively stop this ill practice."

"Both by raising awareness at a social level. and by instituting laws that punish anyone caught."

Alexander proposed, finishing with this philosophical quote,

"Remember my lords, one should not pass sweeping laws from just sitting behind the desk and listening to one report."

And as Alexander finished, a poignant few seconds of silence echoed across the table.

They had not thought about it so deeply and so could not help but praise Alexander's foresight on it.

Though in the case of Alexander, it was really a case of him learning from history, especially the period of segregation in American history which had lasting consequences that one could argue last to this day.

Racial biases were not so easy to remove, and Alexander wanted to plan thoughtfully so that he could remove them within a short time, possibly a few generations.

Yes, to dispel such ingrained nature, Alexander thought a few generations would be quick.

Because one just needed to take a look at modern history, with all its education programs and awareness-raising activities that still was unable to erase racism entirely after all this time, only succeeding in making it mostly very low-key.

So what hope did Alexander have in this backward world?

He could only bank on time, combined with his own efforts to slowly wash away this toxic muk.

"So how should we do this?" With Alexander having mentioned learning more about the discriminations, Cambyses posed the next obvious question, how to go about it.

And Alexander had already thought of a preliminary plan and revealed his intended course of action.

"First, we should make the people realize this is wrong."

"I will ask the temple to give sermons on this. That will work to raise people's consciousness about the matter."

"If both Theocles and Azura Azira, representing the Temple of Gaia and Temple of Ramuh are to say such an act is a sin and people must refrain from it, I'm confident many believers will change."

"We will also send criers into the markets."

"They will work to tell the people of the upcoming laws and that all shops should stop discrimination between anyone or they are to soon face fines or even prison."

"That will give the shopkeepers some time to change their practices."

"Those are the social ways."

Here Alexander paused a bit, gathering his thoughts a bit and then continuing. I think you should take a look at

"As for the legal matters, I will give the police force three months to investigate all the kinds of biases and discriminations the Thesians have faced."

"They are to record all of it and then submit a report."

"I will review it and then pass laws on each infraction depending on the severity of it."

As Alexander proposed this, he then turned to Cambyses, saying, "I will leave the investigation to Batholomew. Be sure to let him know."

Being his immediate boss, Alexander felt it would be more appropriate if the order came directly from Cambyses.

"Ummm...but how should the guards ask the questions? And where will they find them? The market?"

But Cambyses seemed to be a bit confused about the general specifics of how the guards should collect this information, as she asked Alexander for further details.

And this made Alexander suddenly remember that the people of this time had no concept of surveys.

That thought had subconsciously skipped his mind.

And why would they?

99% of the people could even barely write their names.

So how would they be able to fill out a survey?

And this put Alexander in a dilemma.

There was no point in trying to educate Cambyses on what a survey was anyway because all the city guards who would be carrying out this survey were of course illiterate too.

So expectingly them to write out a full report was asking them to do something way above their pay grade.

So for a while, Alexander tapped his cheeks with his index finger, trying to think of a simplified process.

He could order the guards to go door to door and ask the residents if they had faced any such problems.

But Alexander suspected seeing a contingent of heavily armored guards knocking on your doors would do wonders in making one shut up, saying everything was fine and wishing they would go away as soon as possible.

After all, people of this time had an inherent fear of law enforcement, and with good reasons given they would just be a much more dangerous version of a thug, one with legal immunity from the ruling noble.

Never mind there was also a very real chance of these policemen exhorting the people they were sent to help out of a few coins saying it was in the name of their services.

Corruption was always an ever-present danger in such organizations.

Because of all this Alexander trashed that idea.

And a few more afterward, such as asking Thesians to come to the police station to recount their experiences, or going around the streets asking random people about their experiences.

All these did not seem convenient.

"Does anyone wish to chip in?" And lastly, struggling to easily find a solution, Alexander turned to others.

And Hemicus was the first to quickly chime in,

"We could ask the Thesian shopkeepers for help! Since they have shops there and are present from dawn to dusk, surely they must have seen a lot."

"The patrol will easily be able to get information out of them."

Alexander for once was a bit speechless at the man's quick wit.

While Melodias additionally said,

"I could also ask my men. They and their wives must surely have some stories to share."

"Mmmm. And we can also increase patrol around the markets and tell them to keep an eye out for these kinds of things. Then they can catch the shops in the act and record it." Menes lastly added.

All of which very much impressed Alexander.

He for a moment and boxed all his thinking to only the city guards and the Thesians, and forgot about all other approaches.

So seeing his council members step up greatly pleased him.

"Well, you heard them Cam. Do it like they said." Alexander thus turned to Cambyses with a smile, then added, "Melodias, I will leave it to you to gather the information regarding your men. Be sure to give it to Cambyses before August."

"Yes, my lord," Melodias quickly replied with a straight face, though internally he groaned at the increased load.

'Why couldn't I have kept my mouth shut,' He seemed to cry.

But Alexander did not notice this, nor did he care.

While Cambyses only breezily hummed at Alexander's order, her heart happy at being able to pass this very tedious and labor-intensive process to her colleagues and subordinates.

Chapter 630 Future Military Plans

With that discussion done, Alexander finally felt the long meeting due to conclude.

And so he moved on to the last-minute pleasantries.

"So how has your fiefdoms been doing?" Alexander casually asked about the council member's own lands, and they all replied in the same vein.

Good, but it could be better.

"My lord, much of my fields are empty because I do not have enough men to work them. Everyone wants to move here because the pay is good and it is the city,"

This was all their biggest complaint.

To which Alexander only chuckled and said, "Yes, well, you know the situation about the city yourself. We need more men everywhere."

"That's why I said...find more men."

And this got a silent rueful sigh from the men.

If it was only so easy.

All nobles were generally protective of this money-producing resource and made immigration as hard as possible for them, from binding them with contracts to closing borders to even employing guards to hunt any potential escapee down.

So the only real way to get mass immigrants was through wars and capturing new lands.

"My lord, should we then attack Tibias? Or perhaps the hostile nobles? The states across the sea may be!"

And it was because of this one crazy bastard named Grahtos started throwing such ideas.

Ideas which at first sounded reasonable, but by the end of which made Alexander almost choke on his own spittle.

'Attack across the sea! Man this guy has balls!' Alexander could not decide whether to scold him or praise his courage.

It had to be remembered that the Zanzan army had trouble supplying itself just 90 km from its home over land.

So to suggest supplying them hundreds of kilometers across the Mad Sea was beyond ridiculous.

Never mind what would happen if the campaign lasted till winter and the water turned dangerous.

If that were to occur, there was a very real possibility of the entire army starving to death.

So for Grahtos to suggest it, Alexander had trouble deciding whether to slap his head for his idiocy or to praise his unbridled optimism.

And it was not only Alexander who had this feeling of incredulity, the other council members too shared his feeling, and looked at Grahtos like he was half mad.

"We have just signed a treaty with a Tibias. So breaking it is out of the question. Don't even think about it,"

At last, Alexander broke out of his shocked stupor and sternly reminded this to everyone, extinguishing any rogue thoughts someone might have about wanting to pick a fight with that country without his permission.

And as Alexander said, the usually taciturn Menes quickly interjected to support him with his report.

"Yes, that's right. Our soldiers are already very exhausted."

"We have had five small and large scale battles within the last two years. And many of them now want nothing more than to rest."

"Some of the officers even came to me to complain, saying that when they came to Zanzan, they thought they would have some peace."

"But it's been nothing but war every few months."

"Many are still mourning at how they lost so many of their brothers."

"And this sentiment has even spread of the former mercenaries., who thought they would get a better life if they came to Zanzan."

"And now about 1,500 of the original 5,000 are dead."

"I counted that myself. That's about a third." Menes here paused to let the number sink in, and this reminder made many of the council saddened as included in that long list of mortuaries, were the names of many of their acquaintance and friends.

The losses they had suffered in just two years were truly horrific, with the three great ones being when the mercenaries acted as the 2nd legion to hold against Faruq in the center, where they lost more than one hundred men while in formation, the deaths they suffered under Perceus which amount to a nearly catastrophic thousand (1,000) and lastly the casualties they took when Perseus captured the manor, slaughtering many of the defenders who were the personal bodyguards of many of the council members, who were also once part of their mercenary groups.

So it was understandable these experienced men after having come so far and survived for so long were not eager to put themselves again in danger.

And it was because of this that after the poignant silence finally passed, Menes at last proposed, "So I believe it will be better for us to skip any campaigns for this year."

"Or the army might...."

He then trailed off, not wanting to say the word 'rebel' out loud.

But everyone was intelligent enough to fill in that blank.

"Menes is right. There will be no war this year. Neither will the next year. Any plans for the attack will be after that" And as Menes laid out his reasons, Alexander was quick to add another year, which surprised the council members a bit. I think you should take a look at

So he explained,

"We are in no shape to fight any campaigns. The people have been through hell, through droughts, wars, and plague. They need rest."

"Or we are gonna have a rebellion at our hands."

"Also the economy needs time to grow."

Alexander then turned to look at the council members and reminded them,

"We had only a few months of siege just now and that was enough to delay all our projects for so long."

"So imagine what would happen if we were to start another long campaign, It will delay us even more!"

"We cannot afford that." Alexander firmly declared.

And this made many of the civilian council members nod enthusiastically as they did not want to have to keep giving Alexander more excuses.

And lastly, Alexander finished by saying,

"And lastly we need to expand our diplomatic reaches. Zanzna cannot survive being surrounded by enemies, so we should try to make deals with our neighbors and not wars."

"And we are not gonna do that by breaking agreements. The treaty with the Tibias will be respected, as will the treaty with the Zanzan nobles." Alexander again repeated to emphasize his point.

As Alexander laid out his future plans, the other council members went silent for a while as they tried to digest what he said, and after a while, they agreed, with Menicus as the representative of the council members expressing,

"Okay, my lord we understand. We are indeed now quite weak. Especially from our loss with Tibias."

"We could use the two years."

"The people and economy can recover and the army can train our forces. We will even have the time to build those new siege equipment Tibias used."

Yes, seeing, or upon hearing about the torsion catapults in action, Alexander had ordered his military engineers to try and make them.

It would have been best if he could have gotten a sample from Tibias, and he had even offered Mithridatus a hundred prisoners for one intact piece, but the old man seemed adamant in his refusal.

"Haha, I'm afraid if we give that to you, we will lose much more than 100 hundred in the future," And the old man was not really shy as to the reason why.

And he was right in that as Alexander very much planned to use them to smash the walls of Tibias using them.

But given Alexander was unable to get an actual piece, he could only ask the engineers to try and remember how the Tibias used those weapons, how the men operated them, and reverse engineer the product from that.

Of course, Alexander had also given them some of his own insight, such as a few drawings of catapults and even the Roman scorpion, which threw giant darts at the enemy, all of which he saw in movies or read in articles.

And with the drawing and the practical demonstration combined, Alexander's men were confident in being able to come up with something decent within a year or two.

"Mmmm, that's right. Menicus makes a good point." With the old man's reminders, Alexander also remembered that designing and building all those new weapons would also need some time, so the time would really be well spent.

And because of Menes's report, he also thought of some reforms on the spot.

So he further added,

"The two years will also help us further train new troops. Replenish the men we lost in the prior battle,"

"As well as practice the legionary tactics. It's not so easy to muster."

All these future plans made the military members calm down, who previously wanted to go on campaigns to earn glory and booty but now understood their forces had many holes that needed to be fixed.

And so they silently nodded in agreement.

While Alexander, having said this, decided to propose something radical after hearing Menes's report.

So he began in a melancholic tone,

"Also, about the veteran mercenaries."

"I'm ashamed to admit this, but if Menes had not told me, the number of casualties they had suffered might have still alluded me! That would have been a true oversight!"

"And these losses are truly a tragedy, especially given I had promised all of them peace and prosperity,"

"It wounds my heart!"

Alexander here regretfully shook his head, and then steeling his voice to a hard, determined declaration, said,

"So I have decided to move all veterans from frontline duty! Only the officers, starting from the sergeants (in charge of 100 men) will remain in the army and...."

Alexander was suddenly cut off at that point.