

## **Herald 791**

### Chapter 791 Alexander's Children

Although greatly enjoyable, Alexander did not choose to spend his time with only his wives of course.

He also paid much attention to his children.

The three month infants Afsan and Ophenia were too young to understand anything, so the most Alexander could do was swaddled them in his lap and take them on walks around the large estate gardens, many times accompanied by their mother, letting them enjoy the fresh air.

But much more than that, Alexander enjoyed spending his time with his two year old daughter Alexandria and one year old son, Philip, many times joining them to play with the various toys they had.

There his daughter with much enthusiasm introduced her father to all seven of her beautiful porcelain dolls she had clothed, letting him know of their names were as well as where they all belonged in her huge doll house.

That doll house was something Alexander had custom made for his princess before going on this campaign, and it was something truly unique.

Modeled after modern day toy houses, the toy was almost a meter high and even more wide, and since it was made of wood and metal, it weighed nearly thirty kilograms.

It was so big in fact there was a separate room just for Alexandria to play with it.

The toy had lots of panels and doors to allow access to the various rooms, all of which were very beautifully furnished with exquisitely carved wooden furniture, many exquisite porcelain decorations, shiny metallic utensils such as all kinds of pots and pans, ivory combs, and small hairpins, velvet curtains, and mattress and lastly shiny glass mirrors and windows.

Painted vibrant colors of red, blue, pink, and even the ridiculously expensive purple, although the toy did not have any gold silver, or precious stones in it, perhaps that would have cost less than the extravagance Alexander spent on it.

The whole thing had taken Alexander sitting down with a team of various artisans like carpenters, smelters, tailors, and potters for almost a month to just design.

And then another two months to produce and assemble it, crafting it out of the finest wood, leaving him with a ridiculous ten thousand ropal hole in his pocket by the end.

To give the context of how much money this was, Cambyses- who officially held the position of the head of the city guards earned that much yearly.

And a peasant would be able to live five years with his family off this money.

But Alexander was plenty rich enough to spoil his little princess.

And the squeal of joy the little girl had given when Alexander had first shown her the piece made the expense worth every penny.

But in much contrast to this, his son who was supposed to inherit all his accomplishments, did not get anything similar.

Sure he got various toys and nice clothes, but nothing as spoilt as this.

And Alexander was of no mind to give him anything such either.

Something which Cambyses, being the loving mother she was, chose to privately protest.

And this was Alexander's reply, "Alexandria is my little princess. Of course, I will spoil her."

"But Philip is my successor. He must always endure hardship and experience want. He must never be able to allowed to feel safe, secure, and complacent. Or he might one day find his throat slit."

To Alexander, there would be few things as painful as having an unworthy successor.

And there was no way he was not going to let that happen on his watch.

Hence the stern mindset.

"What are you saying about your son? 'Slit his throat'! By Gaia, he is literally a few months old! He talks to the floor."

While at Alexander's intention of such a harsh upbringing, Cambyses was shocked with incredulity, especially at that particular phrase.

No one wanted to hear that about their children, even in a far fetched hypothetical scenario.

So Cambyses felt Alexander was being too demanding to the infant child who did not even understand words.

Then following that the couple had a small round of bickering that resulted in the two not talking to each other for two days.

And it was a fight that occasionally flared up even now and then, with regular 'small border skirmishes' over how to raise their children.

And like all quarrels, it involved loud screams, sharp words, and even tears, with differing quantities.

It was with these thoughts playing in his mind that Alexander joined his son in his play, though the small boy was at first a bit afraid of who this strange man was.

Philip had not seen Alexander for the last six months and being so young, he quite naturally forgot him.

It was only after Alexander played a few sessions with the wooden horses and chariots that he finally warmed up to Alexander.

The father and son even went on small horse rides around the back gardens much to the latter's amusement.

This was his first time riding one.

And the one last surprise for the two kids was the new playing companion they got when they came to Thesalie, Fabiyana!

Being Alexander's mistress in name, it was not unnatural for her to reside in the mansion with him.

And after spending a few days in the camp getting to know the girl, Alexander felt she would make a good older sister for his two children.

Because although Fabiyana was ten years old in body, she seemingly had the mental maturity of a six or seven years.

Now, she was not challenged or anything.

It was just that her development was a bit slow.

So taking advantage of that, and thinking interacting with other children would help the girl grow, he simply asked Lapitus to send Fabiyana over every morning and would return to her parents after supper.

Or if the girl was too tired, Alexander would arrange her sleep to sleep in the same bed as Alexandria.

And over the following weeks, the two girls quickly bonded, with Fabiyana falling in love in that doll house.

In a few instances, Alexander even saw Fabiyana teaching Alexandria about the various etiquettes the dolls they were playing with were supposedly expected to follow, all of which of course came from Tibian noble customs.

The two sometimes even roped Philip in to join them, and facing these two much bigger opponents, the little boy could only relent, and play all the boring parts the two girls did not want to.

In fact, the two older sisters would continue to bully the younger Philip for years, with many of their antics rising as they aged, ultimately culminating in making the boy play dress up as they practiced their makeup skills on him, decorating him with various lipstick, powders, mascara, and even jewelry.

The memories of these 'humiliating' plays would stay with Philip even as he became a fully fledged adult, becoming both extremely treasured remembrances, but also bittersweet humiliating black marks.

It would also be one among many antics that his older sister Alexandria would make him go through which would ultimately cause him to develop both a deep familiar love but also an instinctual fear of her.

But those honeyed memories were yet to be formed.

For now, Alexander was in the process of making sure his children could survive long enough in safety and luxury to enjoy their lives as such.

"Welcome messenger from the court of Parthenigh. I assume you come bearing the confirmation of Perseus's full, unconditional surrender?"

As Alexander was informed of the arrival of an envoy of Perseus, he greeted him in his mansion as such, the arrogance and imperiousness in him naked and open.

The lineup he gathered to meet this noble was greatly impressive too, as Alexander was joined by every single one of high ranking military officers and nobles, numbering close to ten, all immaculately garbed in their full battle kit.

The entire scenario was made to give the impression that Alexander was ready to march to the battlefields right this instant.

"It is an honor to finally meet face to face, Esteemed Pasha of Zanzan. First of all, let me thank you for taking good care of my son. He has sung great praises of your hospitality when he was under your care."

Facing Alexander naked, even somewhat rude greeting, the envoy from afar was instead very gentle, so much so that it even left Alexander a bit tongue tied.

He was not used to having sharp barbs being repaid with kindness.

"Oh? What is your son's name? Help me recall." So he replied such.

After all, there were quite a few nobles Alexander had captured back during Perseus's attack on the manor.

"My son's name is Theony. He was the one wearing His Majesty's armor. And I'm his father. Lord Theony," The man with the immaculate moustache introduced himself as such, bowing lightly.

'So it's a bigshot,' And recalling his son was enough to be exchanged for Laykash, who was at that time Perseus's most precious war prisoner, Alexander understood this man was a heavyweight.

But that did mean Alexander softened his tone any bit.

Instead, he only waited for the man to say his piece, looking at him expectantly, but not saying anything, intending to put psychological pressure on him,

Chapter 792 Alexander's Peace Proposal

The tactic Alexander discussed with his retainers regarding how to receive the envoy was one of displaying strength and inflexibility

It was to give him the idea that Alexander was going to march towards the capital and take it any moment now.

So as Alexander placidly gazed at Lord Theony to continue, all the others followed the twenty or so eyes thus seemingly exerting great pressure on the man.

Though such petty techniques had little effect on the man.

He was a veteran politician, and this was not the first Tibias had fought a war, nor was this the man's first foray into the wolf's den.

"Esteemed Pasha, let me first begin by saying how much we at the court are impressed by your skill of the military command."

"Truly you are once in a thousand year born conqueror. A great hero."

It seemed that before getting to his main point, Lord Theony was working to nicely butter Alexander up, as he continued,

"And it is a fact I can personally attest to."

"You may not know it but I came to the city with reinforcements for Lord Ponticus just two months ago. I stayed right here, in one of the rooms on the second floor." He said pointing his right index finger up,

"And in that night battle, it was I who led that frontal army."

"So I personally saw with my own two eyes the way you foiled Lord Ponticus's flanking attack and then arranged your troops to neutralize my elephants."

"It was truly sublime."

"Although I lost, I feel proud to have lost to an impossible general like you, hahaha." Lord Theony sounded very frank in his opening speech.

And at the recount, Alexander?did not know exactly how to feel.

Should he be flattered?

Should he rudely sneer and urge him to get to the point?

Or should he politely accept and return similar cordial words?

And after thinking for a bit, he chose the last option, thinking you could not really go wrong with good manners.

"Lord Theony is being too humble. It was Lord Ponticus's attack that was truly sublime. That attack from the rear woods at pitch black darkness would have caught ninety nine out a hundred armies off guard."

"It was only foiled because some of my nearby scouts spotted the light from their torches."

Alexander?here chose to embellish the truth a bit.

Instead of saying it was pure, dumb luck that Remus had spotted Lord Ponticus, Alexander?made it sound like he had already deployed scouts nearby.

And that it would have been only a matter of time before Lord Ponticus was spotted, far ahead of the man's scheduled reveal.

And this is what the history books would write, in order to flaunt Alexander?as an ever prescient, infallible general.



But as Alexander said this, it made him truly wonder just how twisted the history he had been taught in his previous life truly might have been.

He was not even talking about large, bold changes, but about just the many tiny 'adjustments' done at the spur of the moment by the chroniclers.

Although Alexander very well knew history was written by the victor, with a few nuances, but even still, knowing something and actively manipulating it was totally different.

It both felt wrong but sinfully attractive, like using a cheat code in a game.

So Alexander experienced a small epiphany then, only managing to extricate himself a bit later, where he finished by saying,

"And even your elephant charge was very well timed. It was simply that your king had already shown that trick before. So my trained soldiers knew how to counter it." Alexander referred to how Menes had lost in almost an identical way to how Lord Theony had.

Alexander's way of answer managed to do both things right, it both praised the Tibias for their great defense but also simultaneously worked to show off that he was in fact ultimately better, thus establishing his prestige.

"Hehe, indeed, indeed," And how could the shrewd politician not understand this?

But he was more than happy to stoke Alexander's ego.

The man had earned so.

Then with the pleasantries out of the way, Lord Theony finally got to delivering the messages he had made the huge more than six hundred kilometers journey for.

"\*Ahem\*," Clearly his throat, he took out a paper letter, the material very much surprising Alexander ,?as Lord Theony then read,

"In recognition of Pasha Alexander - Ruler of Zanzan's remarkable military prowess,?'We'- The ruler of the Western?Riverlands, the Protector of the Woodlands and the Overseer of all things on land, in water and sky- Perseus of Parthenigh, relinquish the control of the city of Thesalie as well as its nearby lands to you, Pasha Alexander - the First of His name, Ruler of Zanzan."

"Furthermore, we are willing to pay half the cost of the raised army, as well as recognizing any loot taken from the city as constitutionally belonging to the victorious Pasha."

"For this, all we seek is to sign a ten year truce between our lands."

"May peace prevail."

It was a very short letter, one which took Lord Theony less than two minutes to finish.

And even that was with all the theatrics and flair he added to the read to put emphasis on certain points, thus padding out the time.

"Heh! Peace? You drunk on horseshit or something?" And the moment Lord Theony finished, he was greeted with his disdainful, rude scoff.

It was uttered by Alexander 's newest addition- Jamider (Earl) Yuusiq and this man was perhaps one of the most hawkish people when it came to Tibias.

And following him, many others too joined the castigation, rebuking the envoy for even daring to come up with his sorry excuse of a deal.

"What a what of our time." One noble spat.

"The only thing we got out of it was more earwax to clean our ears later." Another one mocked, even poking his right pinky into his ear to mimic what he said.

"Such a waste of good paper, To think you people would be so wasteful even when you are in so dire economic strains." The last noble scorned, making it sound like Tibias was not ever going to financially recover from this one improper use of a small sheet of paper.

While the target of all this ridicule, with did inch even an inch.

Like the vituperation being thrown at him was empty air.

He stood proudly, spine erect, his well oil moustach glistening under the ambient sunlight, his eyes clear and limpid.

While his counterpart, Alexander?waited for the various lords to have their fun, and once the room finally calmed down a bit, he gave his response, the official one.

Alexander?began,

"Lord Theony, I pity you, for you have to follow such a delusional king."

"Lord Theony, I feel sorry for you, for you had to travel so far to bring such a meritless message, filled with the ravings of a madman."

Yes, Alexander?did call Perseus a madman straight to his envoy's face.

And it was not just Alexander?saying this.

For next to him sat a scribe, who was writing all this down.

Thus the things Alexander?was saying would be the formal, official response.

And it was typically considered improper to have such rude words in a formal discussion, no matter the kind of things discussed.

This was because when people started cursing, they tended to let their emotions get involved and when people started talking through their rage, negotiations and talks were always the first thing to fly out the window,

It was also because of that that Perseus was so cordial, though perhaps it was more so because he was currently weak and defenseless.

But Alexander?decided to eschew any such formalities.

Because although he did not directly show it, he was just as angry hearing the terms being offered as the nobles sitting by him.

So he continued, now turning to address Perseus,

"Oh, Ruler of Tibias Perseus, how long do you think you can hold onto that title?"

"How long do you think you can sit on that throne?"

" For a huge, undefeated army marches. It marches straight towards your capital even as I write this."

"It is filled with men full of zeal after taking the fortress of fortress."

"And they sing this as they come one step closer to you -?'We have taken the Bastion.'

'We will take the capital'

'Who do we have to fear?'

'Not Perseus, not Parthenigh, not the spirits of his Predecessors, hohoho'

"And what do you have to try and survive against this unstoppable juggernaut?"

"A nation devoid of men."

"A treasury as empty as a bird's nest."

"A royal court tearing itself apart with petty bickering."

"Surrender!"

"You have no other way."

"Relinquish all claims to the throne and swear it to me- Ruler of Zanzan, Conqueror of Thesalie, and soon to be Master of Tibias."

"Spare us the needless loss of lives and I swear to the gods that I will all spare you and your family."

"I am even willing to marry one of your daughters, one of my choosing."

"And I will name your son, The Crown Prince as Overseer of the city Thesalie for the next five years."

Chapter 793 Lord Theony's Choice

Alexander's response to Perseus was very aggressive and the language very unyielding.

Internally, he was also very proud of that marching song he had come up with on the spot.

And hearing such a stance, Lord Theony surprisingly did not try to haggle, like Alexander would have expected any good envoy seeking peace would.

Instead, he only placidly posed this, "Will Lord Alexander not reconsider? Peace is better than war. Let us save lives."

"Unless you can defeat my army in battle, I see no reason to sue for peace. If Tibias wants to remain Tibias, it must win and earn its place."

Alexander's statement was very straightforward and revealed the cruel truth of the times.

If you were not strong enough, your only fate was to be eaten by greater powers.

In fact, given Tibias's relative size compared to Adhania, the fact that it could exist as an independent entity for so many years could already be said to have been a miracle.

"I see. That is unfortunate."

But at Alexander's grim words, Lord Theony was not too fazed.

He even did not seem too downcast, much to Alexander's amazement.

It appeared to him that the man had accepted his fate.

While in reality, Lord Theony was very glad about how the negotiations had turned out.

His heart was dancing with joy, for he got exactly what he wished.

In fact, it was quite hard to keep a straight face as he accomplished his agenda.

And the reason for this glee was because after that farce he was made to endure at the court, one from where he was humiliatingly kicked out, Lord Theony saw no reason to remain loyal to Perseus.

What would further loyalty bring him?

Except for further blame and finger-pointing for having lost Thesalie, an act where he played second fiddle to Ponticus.

Thus, as Perseus was a sinking ship, it only made sense to jump.

Hence when he asked Perseus to let him go negotiate with Alexander, it was not to try and stop him, but to implicitly urge him to continue.

And for that Lord Theony had actually forged the letter Perseus had given him.

In the original version, Perseus had been far more generous, for untrue of Alexander's accusation, Perseus was certainly not delusion, and could very clearly read the signs.

So in addition to signing a long twenty year truce, the king had offered Alexander around one fifth of his country, a lump sum indemnity equal to the cost of raising Alexander's army for the campaign, and even the promise of significant yearly tithes and tributes.

If Lord Theony had shown Alexander that version, perhaps Alexander would not accepted even that, but the language in his reply would not have been so harsh either.

A chance for a diplomatic solution might have still remained.

But upon receiving the king's instruction, Lord Theony had simply written a grossly fake letter.

This act was of course very dangerous and could be said to belong to the highest level of treason.

If it was to be discovered, such as by comparing it with a previous, known one, the discrepancy in writing would be easily noticed.

And Lord Theony and his family might very well end up in the gallows.

But the nobleman was willing to take the risk.

He felt it was worth the gamble for he reasoned that Alexander might not have a personal letter from Perseus.

And then he made the contents of the fake letter be so outrageous and unappealing that it was very likely Alexander would not even deign to look at it twice.

So combining this with Alexander's naturally superior position in the negotiations, Lord Theony was confident that the young man would throw out any option of talks for the time.

And as a testament to the politician's shrewd mind and impressive insight, that was exactly what happened.

Hearing the letter, Alexander judged Perseus to be a man who was willing to defend his land to the last man.

So he naturally felt sitting down to talk with this kind of man would be an exercise in futility on both sides.

Alexander might be knowledgeable, but Lord Theony had decades of invaluable, irreplicable experience, one which enabled him to navigate the minds of people like a master psychologist.

This event also worked to highlight just how important it was to send trusted people to negotiations.

Because in this era, the primitive means of communication made it so that those people were effectively the ruler's mouthpiece.



Their words directly influenced whether there would be peace or war

So after doing all this, what kind of power did Lord Theony seek to gain from this you ask?

Well, it depended on how much he would coax up to his new 'would-be boss'.

Even if Alexander did manage to conquer Tibias, he would need the support of many of the large Tibian noble families to keep it.

No one rules alone after all.

And Lord Theony wanted to present himself as the premier choice to Alexander.

But the man did not reveal his inclination to defect so easily to Alexander.

Not only could such a reveal in his open room jeopardize his current life if the words got out, but it would also make his switch seem cheap and not valuable.

Instead, he sought to maximize the benefit for his family.

So after using a bit more flowery language addressing Alexander, he revealed his desire in a roundabout way,

"Great Pasha, I have bought some gifts for you. They have been provided by me personally. I hope you will like them."

"I also would like you to invite the esteemed one to my fief. Please do not feel troubled to come at any time. We will receive you with open arms."

Following this the man bowed and the meeting quickly came to an end just like that.

And then before the day was over, the man was already on a boat and sailing downstream, towards his fief.

Alexander was of course surprised by the ease with which the envoy retreated, even feeling rueful that he could not see the man grovel a bit more.

But more than that, Alxx was intrigued by his overly generous show of hospitality, feeling this did not suit the relationship they currently had with each other.

So he felt that perhaps the gifts he was given could be able to shed some light.

Hence at Lord Theony's behest, he quickly inspected the,

The quantity he was given was surprisingly large, a few carts full.

And it took a small team the whole day to unpack and record all the contents.

These included the usual things- wines, cheese, dresses, jewelry, bolts of fabric such as linen and wool, strong and beautiful slaves of both sexes to name a few, all of which were meticulously recorded by a dedicated team employed by Alexander.

He had hired them for a task that could only be manufactured by the uber-wealthy, maintaining accurate records of who sent what gift, when, on what occasion, and of what value.

It was done so that when Alexander gave a return gift, it was of a similar standard.

Before being a noble, this luxury would have not only been unimaginable to Alexander but also viewed as an absolute waste of money and manpower.

But when he actually became one, he began to see there was truly a need for it

Because when nobles gifted you something, they at least expected something of equal in return.

And if you were unable to or worse forgot, it caused too great a loss of face.

Even deep enmity could develop if the error was egregious enough.

This practice also highlighted one of the ways nobles even with so much wealth could go bankrupt.

Because the value of the gifts exchanged could only go up, never down.

Meaning if a family was doing very well, they would exchange expensive gifts.

But if they fell on hard times, they would be unable to reduce these exorbitant costs.

Alexander came to such realization as he read the complete report of all the gifts Lord Theony bought, and he was very surprised by how generous he was.

But what really caught his eye were the stacks of papyrus and parchments meticulously wrapped in expensive clothes and delivered to him.

These contained no ordinary records but were Tibias's most closely guarded secrets.

Maps of various places were equally as detailed as some of the ones in Lord Ponticus's collection. Many intelligence reports, describing much of Tibias's domestic and foreign affairs, the latter of which was quite absent in Lord Ponticus's trove,

List of various spies operating in the country and other foreign nations.

Important trading routes and hubs, as well as a description of the many complicated relations various noble households, had.

Yes.

Instead of just saying he wanted to join Alexander's faction, Lord Theony had directly provided Alexander with proof of his sincerity.

And it was a very heavy proof at that, for it was something that caused Alexander to become even a bit overwhelmed at first.

For a while he even contemplated, 'Is this all a trap?', thinking it was a bait meant to lure him into attacking a predictable place where an ambush was waiting for him.

Chapter 794 Winter Months End The Third Year

Regarding the doubts Alexander had about the intel Lord Theony provided to him, they were quickly erased.

It made no sense because predicting what Alexander would do with it was so hard.

And even if they could, much of the information here was so precious, that the reward would not outweigh the loss.

As for suspecting the veracity of all the information, well fortunately, Alexander had a secondary source to verify many of them- Lord Ponticus's collection.

And for the ones he could find a match, both sides showed the same picture.

So Alexander had reasonable confidence to believe the unverified ones were also true.

And it was from them that Alexander learned some things more precious than nuggets of pure gold.

Such as the fact that the original attack in his city had been orchestrated by the Kaiser Family, a powerful ducal house of Sybarsis, who had paid PR a large lump sum of money as well as supply of various military equipment such as the elephant and catapult, in revenge for Alexander supplying the Margraves with processed iron.

Or that the passage up the Cisran Hills was revealed to PR by a Zanzan defector, though that information was unable to give a definite name, only the condition upon which that traitor had chosen to act-control of the city.

And lastly, Lord Theony revealed the very latest updated version of Tibias's treasury and manpower, as well as the cracks in the court.

It was far, far greater than what was recorded in Lord Ponticus's collection, the situation having deteriorated to such a grave extent in just a month or two.

It was also in those pages that Lord Theony described why he was doing this, how he had been betrayed by the court, and how he became disillusioned with the people running the country.

And this reminded Alexander of the small parchment Lord Theony had attached to the very front of the treasure trove- "I hope my lord will find my contribution of service, no matter how small."

'Heh!' The very explicit way Lord Theony was trying to ingratiate with him was very gratifying to Alexander, and his mood turned excellent as he became aware of the enemy's weak state.

But before celebrating too early, he sent a messenger bird to Lady Miranda, the matriarch of the Margrave Family letting her know of her enemy's moves, though perhaps the revelation was a few years late.

But nevertheless, he felt it was worth warning his ally about, as alongside the bird, he sent a messenger too, laden with gifts as well as a letter containing many details that the small scroll carried by a bird was unable to contain.

As for the revelation of there being dissenters among his rank, ones who wish to harm, well it was really not news to Alexander.

Given that Alexander conquered many of them, of course, there would be dissatisfied voices.

But the scant information provided to him left him little to do other than summoning Camius and Laibak to urge them to keep an eye out.

Also as a side note, he had asked Camius about that Tibian business partner's well being, and it seemed as though his house was looted and his wife 'suffered', they managed to ultimately survive, with few losses of familiar life.

The man was still capable of doing business.

Lord Theony's part in the story ended for the time being with this.

And following so, Alexander was forced to turn his main attention to other more pressing matters.

Firstly, there were the frequent messages Menes was sending him, which detailed the ever increasing cold alongside the good news of new cities falling day after day.

However bolstered by the rapid, unimpeded progress, as well as knowing of PR's weakness, Alexander

hoped to cut off Perseus before he got the chance to raise another army.

So to combat the cold, he thought back on the winter jackets that were piled up in his military warehouses.

Heliptos, the one in charge of the overall logistics even promised him they had enough warm clothes for the entire army.

But when he attempted to cloth his men, the true problem bloomed.

Alexander's logistic chain was too fragile to quickly and properly equip his men so far away.

If Alexander wanted to send his men clothes, he would have to compromise on the food.

And making a huge group of armed to the teeth men go hungry during a winter as cold as this was a very bad idea.

Perhaps even worse than making them go cold.

Then to further add to his troubles, the snowstorms came, unending and unyielding in their might, making all large scale movement basically impossible.

Life itself came to a figurative stop.

'\*Sigh\*', so close and yet so far,'

Thus Alexander's hope for a third consecutive mild winter was denied, and with that his hope to have Tibias before the new year.

Hence Menes was told to garrison himself in well stocked, fortified cities, while facing the bleak, overcast skies, as well as frequent hailstorms Alexander had little option but to huddle up obediently in his mansion, in the few rooms that had internal heating.

And since all his kids were in rooms very close to each other, even Alexander's fun time with his wives was drastically cut.

Alexander was not big a pervert.

Only when the snow occasionally subsided was Alexander allowed to walk around the painted white landscape around his house, feeling the fresh cold air and enjoying the frankly breathtaking scenery, as well as sometimes even playing snow fighting with the two, sometimes three kids.

As for all the other times, all he could do was entertain himself with the various board games he invented, but even that got boring at last.

So feeling bored out of mind, Alexander at last decided to catch up on the miscellaneous, tedious administrative activities that had backlogged in his six months of absence from Zanzan.

He asked the men to send many of the documents over to Thesalie, a task made significantly easier given the road between the two cities was among the best in the world for its time.

It was also during this campaign that the nobles and military officers leaned through every inch of their body just how nice it was to have a good road.

For despite the enormous quantities of supplies the huge crowd of 80,000 to 100,000 people consumed during the campaign, there was never a single instance of shortage or even a crisis of one.

Alongside those tedious paperwork, many of the procedures being invented by Alexander himself, he then turned his attention to the new lands he personally took.

If one properly recalled, it agreed before the start of the campaign that since Alexander would be bearing the cost of all the war expenses, all the lands around Thesalie belonged to him, while the nobles would be only allowed to take the booty and loot.

Hence he spent some of his time consolidating his hold over these lands, making the previous administrators of the various towns and villages swear loyalty to him, or if they were unwilling or dead, placing his own men there.

In this way, Alexander's personal land expanded by nearly 500 sq km, totaling to more than 1,000 sq km, comparable to Los Angeles city.

Though all the meetings were quite tedious, as Alexander had to meet many nobodies and listen to names of the weird villages they represented, alongside rivers and or forests he had no idea where those existed.



These settlements were generally so small that they were not significant to be even on any official map, and the people in charge of these were so unlearned that neither could they properly point them out.

They referred to many of these remote villages as being on that hill, next to that village.

And all this was with the fact that the suburbs of Thesalie were relatively barren.

Even then it took Alexander quite a bit of digging around to properly identify them, and once done, he had to make note of their particular circumstance, so that he could make accurate plans for their development.

Or if Alexander felt that was too much of a hassle, or the village was too barren and remote to develop economically, he would ask that village chief to provide him with a certain amount of men who would work in the city in his industries for a fixed wage and send some of it back for their families back there.

This type of internal immigration after the conquest of new lands was quite common, as people from the war ravaged, or even just poorer regions from those parts would migrate to the richer, more populous centers of their new overlords, looking for more fertile opportunities.

Hence Alexander's instructions were actually received with much enthusiasm by these small leaders.

And the last thing that Alexander worked on during the winter was spending his time evaluating, promoting, and rewarding many of his exceptional military officers.

To enable this, Menes and his officers were not allowed to idle away in their quarters, but had to prepare detailed reports of men under them who deserved further advancement up the career ladder.

And once these reports were delivered by special riders, Alexander, and other high ranking officers reviewed them, before deciding on how to reward those men, be it gold, slaves, or promotions.

And the very last memorable thing Alexander did during the winter was meet with the Tibian nobles, to discuss their fate.

Chapter 795 Lady Inayah Comes With Gifts (Part-1)

Alexander's meeting with the nobles was mired with delay after delay.

This was due to a whole host of things- confusion among the noblemen's family members regarding how to respond to Alexander, the gathering of enough funds, the arrival of the busy fall season, getting their summons to the city late, and in general, the chaos caused by Alexander's invasion.

So although Alexander had set the deadline for their meeting arrival to be before September, most were unable to honor that.

And Alexander found being unable to do anything about it either.

He was after all not going to kill all those nobles just because they were late, especially when it was due to good reason.

So he could do little more than patiently wait.

And as he did so, in the meantime Lady Inayah and Pasha Farzah's son Kayvan docked at Zanzan, only to find much to their bemusement that Alexander and his entire family were absent.

Worse, since Alexander had taken Thesalie, most of the nobles, even the civilian ones had gone to Thesalie to meet with and explore the city.

Meaning there were no one high ranking nobles to receive these important delegates who had come from so far.

This was a major diplomatic foible, and while Lady Inayah simply laughed it off, finding Alexander's honest mistake cute, Kayvan was a bit more peeved, grumbling that as someone who had been pasha for three years already, the man should know better.

It was ultimately Batholomew, the acting man in charge of the city guards as well as the general defense of the city who came to greet the two esteemed nobles, and quickly arranged a guest bungalow for them, while also informing Alexander.

Then after two days, their transport for Thesalie was ready and after making an additional 90 km journey west, they finally got to meet the conqueror.

There, Lady Inayah and Lord Kayvan were of course received with a grand reception with Alexander also profusely apologizing to them for the imbroglio.

While the guests nodded understandingly.

Both of them knew Alexander well enough to know that this was simply a genuine oversight and there was nothing more to it- no hidden meaning behind the act.

And so following this, they delivered their congratulations for Alexander's success in taking this mighty city, with both of them speaking in very formal terms as they read the long letters the king and Pasha Farzah had sent Alexander.

Then they showed him their gifts.

Among them were all the usual paraphernalia- bolts of various fabrics, fine wines, bundles of legummum, beautiful jewelry, etc.

But the thing that most stood out to Alexander were the slaves they had brought, both the utility ones

as well as the beautiful ones meant to be used to seek pleasure.

Among the utility ones, Alexander spotted several middle aged wet nurses, clearly meant to feed his children.

They were bought by Lady Inayah, for although she did not know of Alexander's latest two children, she did hear about the birth of his son, his successor.

And had brought five such women just in case.

Which was actually a very timely addition, for both Cambyses and Mean actually had some trouble producing enough milk by themselves.

So currently they had to rely on the present wet nurses to make up the deficit, which was frankly a bit tough on those ladies.

So the five more wet nurses were more than welcome.

While in the case of Kayvan, he gifted Alexander one single Thesian slave, taken from a famous city-state.

And Alexander, instead of being offended by the measly number was actually a bit taken back at the preciousness of it.

"This is too much," He had even blurted out, knowing it had to be a very expensive purchase.

This judgment did not come from the way the man was dressed or his status, but because of the fact that he was learned- able to not only read and write, which was already extremely precious but also speak and think like an intellectual.

The man was like a teacher, even a philosopher.

And the reason for this gift was because it was Adhanian custom that the boys of a noble household and especially its successor be taught everything by a slave, preferably of Thesian descent, who would follow the boy everywhere from his childhood to adulthood.

This man would of course be very learned and always carry with him a cane, that he would typically use very liberally to teach and correct any mistake the small boy would make, usually striking him on the fleshy thighs and flanks.

And yes, it was one of those rare cases where a slave was allowed to beat his master, or more precisely- his 'to be master'.

It was hoped that this way, in the span of all the years he would spend with the boy, the man would tirelessly work to impart all his wisdom to the boy on every facet of life that they would come across in their day to day,

Hence by keeping the boy under the constant supervision of a learned man, the Adhanians tried to make sure their sons, or at least their successors would not grow up to be a wastrel.

And frankly, Alexander thought it was a fantastic tradition.

As a nobleman with many things to do and many places to visit, it was of course impossible for any of them to keep a 24/7 eye on one's son like that slave man could.

Never mind the fact they would not have just one child.

So this was a fantastic solution to a big problem.

It was also because of this practice that the nobility of Adhania was typically competent, minus the few black sheep.

And if they did go astray, it happened mostly after they became adults, which was at the age of sixteen.

It was also at that point that many of them tended to set their 'teacher' free, though not before having developed some kind of instinctual fear of him.

Of course, a few wastes also did the opposite and executed them the moment they became adult in revenge for all the beatings, with Ptolomy being the most prominent example, but such a thing was very frowned upon.

In general, these people were very well respected within the family they lived, were treated more like a learned guest and even a close family member rather than a slave and an object, with many times even the house's patron seeking advice from him.

But all these advantages did come with one drawback- he was very pricy to buy.

Some poorer nobles even had a separate fund where they saved their money for years to be able to afford one.

In that way, it was very similar to how a modern family would save for college.

And as for the reason why these slaves were almost exclusively from the various city states of Thesos, well Alexander did not know exactly.

Perhaps many felt it was better to have a foreign slave who had no connection to these lands and thus would not be able to subtly influence their successor, or not bear a hidden grudge for some calamity the nobility might have inflicted upon him.

Perhaps, it was a ploy to show the young child that all Thesians, no matter who, were inferior to native Adhanians and thus deserved to be enslaved.

All of these sounded plausible, but at the same time, Alexander doubted anybody went that deep into this simple custom.

Maybe it was simply just a tradition.

It is said that during the period Adhania was first established, the best learned men existed in Thesos.

So it only made sense to get them to teach one's children.

And as time went on it simply became the norm.

Alexander did ask the man about his past, his circumstances, and how he ended up caught as a slave.

And the man who called himself Pythos, or as Lady Inayah named him Pit, recounted that he was actually a well known judge in Thyrentum.

But though very capable in his work, the man had one major flaw- he was a gambling addict.

Whatever he would earn, he would take every penny of it of the nearest gambling house to roll it away by the spin of the dice, and though he was not especially unlucky, even managing to earn quite a sum for himself, he never learned the meaning of 'quitting while ahead'.

So in the end he lost everything.

After all- The house always wins.

And thus he went bankrupt, owing large sums of money to many infamous loan sharks.

Here Pythos even very frankly informed Alexander how he sometimes used his authority to let those sharks skirt around the law, in exchange for bribes and low interest loans.

It seemed that at nearing the twilight of his years, the old man saw no point in hiding his misdeeds.

But even those privileges had its limits.

At last the loan sharks got fed of him always fleecing money out of them and they banded together to bring a case against him.

Which surprisingly they won.

And so he was sold as a slave as the sharks tried to recoup their losses, but more importantly, make an example out of.

Chapter 796 Lady Inayah Comes With Gifts (Part-2)

Alexander felt quite a bit enlightened by Pythos's colorful story.

It went to show how even a greatly learned person could possess major flaws in their character.

Pythos himself revealed that his gambling habit had caused the relationship between all his family members to become strained at best, as most were not even on talking terms with him.

He had not seen many of his children in close to a decade, forget the grandkids.

And towards this abandonment, the man surprisingly had little hate, only blaming himself for this outcome.

According to him, this was his due payment, since in his earlier years, when he was even more addicted, he had grossly neglected his wife and children.

The little ones would sleep without dinner almost regularly, while his own wife had died back then of a relatively minor disease due to a lack of medicine because he spent all his money in those gambling dens.

"But fortunately all my children grew up better than their father. They are in far better places than I ever was."

Unconcerned about his own state, Pythos instead seemed very gratified by his children's success, though Alexander did notice the old man's face dim ever so slightly as he finished.

Surely he was wishing he could have been there to share that joy with them.

But the case the loan sharks had made against him was really too potent.

Not only did they bring proof of the enormous sums he owed to each of them, but they also came with almost every detailed record of his dereliction of duty, showing everyone just how many times this judge had broken and also helped others break the law.



And it was the corruption case that really got him.

Otherwise, given the general amount of backdoor dealings prevalent at the time, trying to convict a senior judge of loan fraud would have been really reaching for the moon.

Many of the city states inherently disliked loan sharks.

But with the enormous smoking gun in their hands, the loan sharks finally managed to get their revenge.

Pythos's long term bad habit had finally caught up to him.

So ultimately he was sold into slavery and given his status, was taken to Adhania, where he could fetch the highest price.

And his first port stop was Agnirat, the biggest port city in northern Adhanian, its ruler - Lady Inayah.

At first she bought the man, and then upon Pasha Farzah's request, handed it over to Kayvan, who then gifted him to Alexander.

Now, as precious he was, Alexander would not have Pythos as his son's teacher, but place him in a mid level clerical job in Zanzan, a position which was both inconspicuous but equally vital

The reason he would officially give was that Philip was too small to need a tutor right now..

While the actual reason was that Alexander did not want as flawed a man as him near his son.

Although the man sounded regretful over his actions now, who knew just how sincere he was, or if he would relapse again?

Alexander would not take that chance.

These were the useful, utilitarian slaves.

Next came the far more interesting pleasure slaves.

In that category, Lady Inayah gifted Alexander two beautiful, black buxom sisters, dressed in white and blue checkers one piece that seemed to be floating in the wind, their gorgeous curly hair fashionably styled.

According to Lady Inayah's description of the two, they were former nobles who 'had fallen on hard times', which Alexander saw as a euphemistic way of saying that their household was wiped up and then sold to slavery, undoubtedly by Ptolomy or who knew perhaps Lady Inayah herself, given the girls' unique complexion matched hers.

As for the reason, well it was pretty easy to guess given there was a civil war still going on.

As for why Alexander was so sure the girls' backstory was such without any further context, well, even though many noblemen and women did sell themselves into slavery due to other circumstances too, most prominently running themselves into bankruptcy, Lady Inayah said the answer herself when she had introduced them, didn't she?

She had introduced them to as 'former nobles'.

This was very telling.

Because even if a noble were to turn themselves into slave, they would still remain a noble and hold that title

Even if a lot of their perks were taken away, they still held that social status, even if in name only.

Besides, noble slaves were almost always bought for much more dignified tasks.

The women would be employed as maids or chamberwomen, governesses or tutors, ladies in waiting, and even wet nurses.

While the men would be taken as valets, butlers, stewards, scribes, and even as officers in the military.

Of course, these would be official works which they would attend to during the day.

Unofficially, during the night, it was expected they would also accede to any favors asked of them by their master or mistress, be it bed related or otherwise.

And yes, both men and women were expected to serve.

With their only saving grace were nobles who sold themselves to slavery like this- due to bankruptcy, usually did so to other nobles, for it was only natural that other nobles would be their creditors.

That at least saved them a bit of dignity.

After all, no noble was going to go a commoner to beg for money.

They had a much better method for them- simply taking it by force in the name of protection fees or also called taxes.

As for rich merchants and such, who did have the capital to tend to these spoilt nobles, well although technically the law allowed to enslave nobles if they were their biggest creditor, in reality, this never happened.

Because if a merchant did try to pull off such a move, he would find his local lord making things very hard for him indeed.

The nobility as a whole was of the mind that only they could bully other nobles since they were in the same social strata.

But how could people below them be allowed to do the same?

So the act was seen not as much as an injustice to that enslaved noble, but more of an attack on the societal structure, a hierarchical system where the top 1% benefitted from the most- the nobility.

Hence in those cases, either the bankrupt noble or the rich merchant would find a suitable noble to buy the owned and thus transfer the ownership over to him.

Of course, in the case of commoners, bankruptcy meant either chattel slavery or even death if the sum to be paid was high enough.

It was a custom Alexander was actually ambivalent to change in his own lands, because some of the frauds he had seen in his previous life like Enron, Thanatos, and FTX, truly were heinous.

Who knew if stricter laws would have deterred such ventures in the first place?

But anyway, besides that, the special privileges a noble enjoyed even as slaves meant that only those fallen from nobility were bought and sold as pleasure slaves.

And Alexander did find his guesses to be proven exactly right, as he enjoyed these two virgin sisters.

There were special rooms in the mansion meant to house a lord's mistresses or harem and it was there that the two girls got to taste their first men.

And what a specimen they got to begin their tasting with.

For under Alexander's brutal organ, the older sister proved to be quite a screamer, moaning her lungs out so loudly that even Alexander was a bit embarrassed

While the shyer younger sister was the complete opposite and would try and hold her voice as much as she could, only biting her lips and whimpering.

It would be only when her pleasure reached the apex that she would let one or let low moans, the soul stirring sounds sounding like heavenly music to Alexander, as he would then increase his thrusting speed more, causing that demure girl to softly beg for Alexander to slow down.

This of course would have the exact opposite effect, as that would only tickle Alexander's desire to bully her even more, causing the vicious but sensual cycle to perpetuate.

And as Alexander enjoyed the two, he marveled at how intimate Lady Inayah's knowledge was about his taste.

It went without saying that Alexander found these girls quite enjoyable, for not only were they pure, something he very much preferred, but since they had gone through their noble training, they were also not ignorant.

And though they were a bit rusty with their service at first, appearing scared and unsure what to touch and how much, after a week of intense mating, both quickly got the hang of all the things Alexander expected them to perform.

So for the next month or so, Alexander's massive rod worked to expand and explore the hidden depths of both their holes, and by the end of it, the two were so well trained that they start uncontrollably leaking even if just Alexander grabbed their butt.

But while Alexander very much liked Lady Inayah's present, Lord Kayvan's one proved to be far more difficult to digest.

For he gifted him a pair of underaged boys!

Chapter 797 The Two Types of Slaves

The two sisters were quite well trained in their skills, which was not surprising given they were initially bought by Lady Inayah, and this made things so much easier for Alexander when it came to various plays.

And he did try many things which he felt a bit shy to do with the other four.

Things which were too risqué such as exposure play, or plays that were a bit dangerous like various bondages.

But the girls adapted themselves to the new situation remarkably well, and under Alexander's constant 'nourishment', they began to glow with a certain aura, their curves starting to spill out?even more than before.

They were already very buxom even before, but now they reached a whole different level, oozing sexiness out of every pore.

But unfortunately for them, this constant attention from Alexander and their blossoming beauty drew the ire of all four of his wives, who felt angry that their husband was not sharing as much time as time with them.

Now, they did not bully or harass the innocent two.

But they did directly petition Alexander to quickly finish his fun with them and get rid of them.

And though Alexander could have easily resisted, he chose to respect the quad's wishes.

Alexander had also experienced all he wanted with the two.

And then an opportunity soon presented itself.

One day he was reading an impressive report about an officer from Menes.

The man had seemingly baited a force of 2,000 Tibians under a noble into a narrow ridge and destroyed them with his contingent of 500 in a fantastic ambush.

So in the spur of the moment, Alexander decided to reward the man with those two sisters.

But though that gift was easily accepted by Alexander, Kayvan's gift was a lot harder to swallow.

The two boys presented to Alexander appeared seven to eight years old, with auburn curly locks flowing up to their ears, their rosy cheeks still holding great lumps of baby fat, making them appear plump and full.

If they had been dressed in a suit and tie, Alexander would have found them very cute and proper.

But they were not dressed like that.

Instead, on the top they wore a very specialized shirt, one where the part covering the chest was cut out, and the top and bottom part of the shirt connected by thin straps.

And this was done to showcase their chest golden piercings, dangling off of which were conically cut blue sapphires.

While down below, their pants were too very custom made.

The shorts fitted very tightly only up to their upper thighs and let everything below be bare, except the ankle high socks and leather shoes.

But the true marvel here was the fact that the shorts had a very provocative cut on both the front and back, centered right down the middle, thus revealing everything that should have been meant to be hidden.

Kayvan had even decorated that 'specific front' part with a red and blue bow for the two boys respectively.

This type of slaves was nothing new to Alexander.

He had seen plenty- though not as 'specially' dressed as those two.

But seeing this gift, Alexander felt an intense urge to reject it, for it clashed with values too greatly.

But he also knew that would be social suicide.

It was too rude to reject a gift and it might even cause his alliance with Pasha Farzah to come into jeopardy.

Especially when the gift was so 'normal'.

The act of taking and enjoying young boys both in Thesos and Adhania was seen as something as common as drinking in the modern day.

It was followed by almost everyone rich enough who could afford it.

Even almost all of Alexander's friends and retainers did so too.

Menes frequently visited buildings providing this type of service, while Hemicus had a few back at his home.

And this was done in spite of both men being neither homosexual or even bisexual.

They had no intention of doing those acts with a grown man.

But somehow it was fair game if they were not grown.

Alexander did not get the reason.

But he had seen plenty of the act.



Not perhaps as much in recent times, but there were plenty of times during his mercenary days when he had walked in on such sessions happening inside an inconspicuous tent or behind a bush among a slave and his master.

Many had even cordially offered a taste.

Something he tactfully declined every time.

During the days he was with the slave traders, he was even put up for sale as such a type of slave.

And had to endure two full weeks of lecherous gazes and utter humiliation as men and even women prodded him.

His only saving grace was that none of them wanted to try him first.

Alexander was ultimately taken down after he proved too unpopular- scrawny and a dirty orphan, with no training, no one wanted to buy him, much to his relief, though that experience did leave a shadow in his heart.

Something that had resurfaced when Nestoras had bought him, but fortunately, the man was at the time infatuated with his wives and mistress and then had that infection.

Thus Alexander's behind remained untouched.

And having escaped that humiliation, Alexander even swore- if he ever found evidence of god, he would pray to Him every day for this lucky escape.

Whatever powers put him in his world and gave him such a shitty starting position, he at least gave him one boon.

That was also why there were no boys in his gift to Ptolomy, even though the slave trader Cassim informed him that he had close to 50 very beautiful ones.

Now Alexander did not hate the people committing this.

Although the act seemed vile to him, it would be wrong of him to superimpose his world views on the people living in his time period.

Their behavior was a product of their time and it would be extremely arrogant of Alexander to judge them just based on that.

If Alexander had been born in this time period, he undoubtedly would have joined them.

And so with those thoughts, Alexander ultimately accepted the two gifts, thanking Kayvan for them.

And then after revealing to Kayvan his discomfort in a polite way, as a gesture of courtesy, he asked for his permission to transfer the two to someone.

Kayvan had no problem with this and so after a bit of deliberation, Alexander actually chose Remus as the recipient.

The nineteen year old was in the city on leave from the main army and Alexander knew of his particular tastes, for Remus and his adjutant Piseus's relationship was nothing secret.

So Alexander felt the two boys would suit them fine.

As to why Alexander simply did not set the two boys free, well even if he did, who was going to take care of them?

Certainly not Alexander.

As for employing these boys as guards or servants, well that would simply have been a waste of resources because remember these boys were chosen as gifts due to their handsome features.

So to Alexander, it simply made more sense to treat them as such.

The arrival of Lady Inayah and Kayvan did help Alexander with some of his administrative affairs, and further added weight behind when he sat down with the nobles.

Though by then it was as late as January.

Yes- the meeting that was supposed to be held in September got pushed back to January.

And even when Alexander did manage to sit down with these men, negotiations proved extremely tiresome.

And the main reason was, as put by one noble-

"Lord Alexander, we acknowledge that you have militarily defeated us. But that is not enough."

"Without any sort of treaty with His Majesty, we cannot swear any allegiances to you."

"Our oaths still belong to King Perseus."

"Please ask His Majesty to relinquish claim over those lands."

This rhetoric did indeed have some merit.

Just because someone's army marches from point A to point D, that does not automatically mean he controls point B and point C in between.

Many times the army would simply bypass these cities, placing only a token garrison to ward off rebellion.

And it was usually only after a treaty was signed that the various claims each had over land were solidified.

But of course, that reasoning stood on the fact that there was someone to sign a treaty.

Hence hearing so Alexander frowned, sneering, "So what happens if Perseus is dead and there is no one to surrender?"

"Or what if he is unable to push me out of his country the war turns into a stalemate."

"By your words, he can just refuse to hand over the land I control and will I simply have to allow the treacherous foxes to feed off the land I control, ungratefully leeching off me."

"Is that what you are saying?"

Alexander used some very choice words to describe the nobles, making many pull faces red with embarrassment or anger.

"Of course not,"

But at Alexander's scolding remark, another voice quickly chimed, this time very frankly saying, "But we do hope my lord will give us a bit more time"

"Lord Pasha, your army is still advancing and he would like to wait and see what His Majesty's response will be."

"If King Perseus cannot win or the war turns to a stalemate, we noble are ready to come to a suitable agreement with you."

"But if he wins.... " That nobleman only trailed off with a smile, his innuendo clear.

## Chapter 798 The Nobles Decision and Menes's Preperation

The man that had just spoken to Alexander was named Hysper and was among the biggest land owners among the gathered noblemen, controlling nearly 1,000 sq km of personal land- almost equal to Alexander's.

But one would have a hard time discerning the man was so influential just from his name because Tibias did not have a noble tiering system like Adhania.

Instead, all nobility were painted with the same brush- as Nobles.

Of course, in reality, the richer and more powerful noble houses who controlled vast swathes of land wielded a disproportionate amount of power in court, kind of like how a country's finance minister is far more influential than say the sports minister, even though they were both members of the parliament and technically hold the same level of post.

But this arrangement made things very hard for any outsider, for it was impossible to discern how important the person talking to you was.

Sometimes even weak nobles able to raise barely a hundred men talked to Alexander like he could call rain and wind at the wave of his hand.

Alexander would many times be astonished at the level of delusion.

Alexander recognized the Hysper for he had studied the backgrounds of many of the nobles here and thus knew his words could be seen as representative of the whole.

"....." And looking around the room, he indeed felt that was indeed the prevailing mood around.

Most of the nobles wanted to wait and see the result of Alexander's next move.

This to the man himself appeared very foolish, as in his opinion, the faster these nobles submitted to him, the better the deal they were gonna get.

But it seemed the nobles still held out hope.

They did not say it aloud outright, but by their body language, Alexander could read that they still held great expectations for their king, who was viewed as a great commander,

Many believed that he could yet turn things around.

Regarding this, Alexander scoffed but he did not immediately destroy the delusion.

He could have changed many minds if he wanted to right now, by just showing the various papers Lord Ponticus had about the country's affairs and the dire straits it was in, making them understand a miraculous comeback was simply impossible.

Sure it was still possible for Perseus to be able to win or two battles against him, but unless Alexander let some shitty AI take control of him and commit brain dead mistakes one after another, even in the worst case scenario, he would be able to turn the war into a stalemate, locking in his gains and then in the subsequent years eventually grind the Tibian king down.

For the latter simply lacked the necessary men needed to fuel his reconquest.

But though aware of this inevitability, Alexander did not reveal so.

Because once he won some subsequent victories, it would be far easier and cheaper to make these nobles flip then.

So at Hypser's request, Alexander simply replied, "Then I will try to come to some sort of agreement with Perseus. In the meantime, if any one of wants to strike a deal with me, my arm is always open. You will not leave disappointed."

After this, in the following days, Alexander did get a few men who came to him to ask for a deal.

But all of them were quite low along the tiering influence ladder and exclusively shared the characteristic of having lands very near Thesalie.

Meaning unlike the rest of the nobles, they were not so optimistic that the king would be able to penetrate so deep so as to come to rescue them, not when they were so small to begin with.

Regarding these flips, Alexander outwardly was very welcoming and offered quite some favorable terms, even lowering the ransom amount of their captives while internally, he mumbled at the tacit resistance the nobility as a whole displayed towards him.

He had hoped for a far better response but the other sides showed remarkable unity.

It seemed that though they did not show it, most nobles inherently disliked Alexander- for he represented Adhania, their most hated enemy.

Regarding this Alexander would do nothing right now, but wait out and grind these prejudices down, be it using force or benefits.

But for now, he turned his focus to much more important matters, particularly reports Menes was starting to send.

By now it had become February and winter had been promptly replaced by the much temperate spring, driving away the cruel ice queen and replacing with weather with a much milder ambiance.

The ground quickly started to thaw and the river Diannu had by one became clean of any ice, allowing Alexander to restart his supply runs, while up above, clear skies with the gentle grace of the sun appeared almost every day of the week.

The weather was glorious.

Which also meant the time to restart their campaign had come.

Thus replacing the generalship of Melodias with Menes to give the latter a chance at glory, Alexander ordered a general advance towards the enemy capital, and within a week, a messenger came to Alexander bearing the news of an imminent battle with Perseus.

Mithridatus ever the resourceful man he was, managed to scrape together in the past five to six months not an insignificant amount of force given the dire limitations, and Perseus had set out to meet Menes out in the field with them, for one last shot at saving his kingdom.

As for the reason why he simply did not stay behind the walls of his capital Parthenon and just turtle, well one only needed to look at what happened to the fortress city of Thessaly to know how well that strategy worked out.

Hence around mid February, Menes's forward scouts started to deliver scant reports of enemy sightings nearby, and over the week or so, upon multiple sightings, their presence was truly confirmed.

Though the true numbers of the enemy forces yet alluded Menes.

And that was because of the terrain they were currently in.

Wanting to take advantage of his legions' mobility and put the enemy phalangites at a disadvantage, Menes had ordered the army to take a detour along a series of nearby mountain ridges called The Sissilpond Ridge.

This way he hoped to avoid fighting on the flat banks of the Diannu where the enemy would be in his element.

But this also resulted in making his scouting efforts very hard.

The enemy appeared to be scattered enough among the various wooded patches and a thick dense fog hung around there almost till midday every day.

This made it so that although the keen eyed scouting units were indeed able to confirm the identity of the shadow in the fog as being Thessalian units, they were unable to get a solid count of their numbers.



This frustrated the general quite, as he repeatedly sent multiple units, even scolding many of his officers,

"What do you mean you do not know how many enemies are there? How am I supposed to come up with a battle plan without knowing how many men I'm facing?"

"Is it a scouting force?"

"Or has the enemy's main force come up to meet us?"

Facing this fuming general, the officers had little answer, with some mumbling to themselves, 'If you had stuck to the river banks, none of this would have been a problem.

It appeared that Menes's decision did cause some controversy among the ranks.

Of course, all such dissent was kept to themselves, as a high ranking officer quickly sought to calm Menes down,

"General, although we do not know the enemy's numbers, they should also not know ours. We have detected a lot more units around our camp, trying to poke and prod. They must be as anxious as such."

The man tried to show that both were on an even playing field.

And this worked, as Menes quietened down and curly nodded.

It seemed both sides would have to wait till the very imminent start of the battle, where they would form together to form proper battle lines to really know the numbers they were facing.

This to Menes stung a bit.

And then to add to this slight hitch, the ridge also came with some other disadvantages- particularly denying Menes the full use of his heavy cavalry.

The uneven ground would make mass cavalry charges too dangerous, as the horses might trip and fall.

But all these inconveniences were trumped by Menes's experience of fighting on phalanxes on even grounds.

He had suffered too much on straight head to head confrontations with that formations to want another fight there.

Besides, although the problems he was facing sounded great on paper, Menes knew it was in a pretty good position.

Being informed by Alexander, he learned that Perseus barely had enough men in the whole country to perhaps gather at best 20,000 men.

Whereas he had commanded 29,000 men in the field, with a further garrison of 3,000 men along various cities.

As for the loss of cavalry, well being a true Thesian, Menes, unlike Alexander or the rare Grahtos, wholeheartedly followed the school of thought that- Battles were won by heavy infantry with the calvary being only an auxiliary component.

#### Chapter 799 Scouting of Sissilpond Ridge (Part-1)

The general military doctrine of Thesos was that it was mass infantry upon mass infantry that decided the fate of any battle, while cavalry only played second fiddle, working to harass the opponent, protect the infantry's flanks, and chase down the fleeing enemy once the fight was over, thus inflicting massive casualties to these out of formation units and then rendering them unable to fight any subsequent battles.

But this line of thought was in much contrast to Alexander's own doctrine for he really believed in the opposite.

He believed that an infantry's only job was to pin down the enemy, while the heavy cavalry did all the heavy work, swinging around and charging, preferably at the enemy's exposed flanks, thus destroying them.

Now who was right in this you ask?

Well, it really depended on how you looked at it.

For both men's mindsets were a product of their time.

For Menes or rather Thesians, their doctrine came due to the geography and political state of Thesos- a patchwork city-states constantly in war with each other.

Due to their small size and generally the rough topography of the place, training infantry was far more convenient both economically and geographically.

Whereas cavalry, as mentioned earlier took a lot of money, time, and skill to master, as well as needing a robust supply network to keep them properly supplied, something that did not exist given the rough terrain and the decentralized nature of the place.

No single city-state was going to spend money out of its own pocket to build roads connecting to points all around Thesos.

At best it would do so with its close allies and major trading hubs.

But perhaps the biggest point against cavalry was that to utilize cavalry properly you needed sheer numbers- there needed to be a lot of them to be effective.

If you were going to bring cavalry to a battlefield just having one or two hundred horses was not going to cut it.

Then they would just be relegated to skirmishing and harassment, which was what horses were typically used as there.

But for horses to have a stand alone effect on the field, you needed to give at least a thousand.

And this last point was perhaps the biggest stickler for most of the city-states.

They were just too expensive given the limited technology of the time, as simply getting, training, and maintaining such a large number of horses would be enough to bankrupt many of them several times over.

Hence, making do with what they had, the warfare there focused on training their infantry, and over generations of this constant fighting and refinement, Thesos ended up with perhaps the world's best infantry at the time.

Ones who also learned to counter cavalry by simply pointing very long sticks at them.

And since the rough terrains meant Thesian generals could not simply swing around these fixed bristles of spears, proper tactics for using cavalry never developed there.

Knowing all, and given Tibias was the original starting point of Thesos and that they too followed that school of thought, Menes's move to the rough terrain of the ridge made very much sense.

Not only the enemy's greatest strength- his infantry would be neutralized, but also his own disadvantage- the cavalry was not too big a factor given it would not have been much use either way.

But if Alexander was here, he certainly would have chosen the exact opposite.

He would have made his legionary face the enemy head-on and then used the open flat banks to freely swing around the enemy's wing in a deep enveloping maneuver reminiscent of Alexander The Great's hammer and anvil tactic.

Or simply smashed through in a head-on charge reminiscent of medieval knights.

As to why he was so confident in that latter strategy, and not worry that his horses were going to get skewered by infantry holding long pikes?

Well, it was because as the reports read- Perseus was facing a massive manpower shortage and hence it was reasonable to assume his army would most likely made of scraped-together levies.

These untrained peasants would not hold their ground against a good cavalry charge, just like the European peasants could not.

But Alexander was not here, in charge of the army.

He was back in Thesalie, taking care of the political aspect of the conquest, for there were too many things for him to do there, the most pressing of which was keeping all the gathered nobles in check.

There were many who had been there for months and repeatedly started to ask for Alexander's permission to go back, citing reasons which were as numerous as they were varied.

'My son is sick.'

'We are running short on funds to stay in this city.'

'The lands need to be looked after.'

'My favorite horse's is dying.'

And at the end they all promised this- 'We will come back again the moment you call, Lord Pasha.'

But Alexander knew it would not be so easy.

It had taken him five months to get these men together and he was not going to wait another five months for them to reassemble.

So he denied anyone from leaving, but it also inadvertently meant he was denied from leaving the city.

Which was a real shame since Alexander wanted to personally be the one to take Tibias's capital.

So with his feet tied, Alexander decided to let his general Menes lead this time.

'It will be a good experience for them,' He even consoled himself, thinking it was time he learned to lead armies on their own.

After all, all great empire setters had competent generals under them, with perhaps the most famous being Genshin Khan's four dogs, which were General Jebe, Kublai (different than Kublai Khan), Jelme, and Subotai.

And Alexander wanted to emulate that for as competent as he was, he could be only in one place at a time and conduct only one battle.

Alexander did not want to be like Napoleon who was a one-man show.

Because as talented as the man he was not flawless as anyone who studied him would comment.

Many even posed that if the man had commanders as skilled as him, he might have won in Waterloo despite the odds stacked against him.

Alexander wanted to be able to able to conduct multiple campaigns simultaneously and for that, he needed great generals.

Thus through being mired by a host of inconveniences, Alexander decided to let Menes farm some experience this time.

As for the consequence of Menes losing, well where there was opportunity, there were bound to be also risks.

But Alexander consoled himself with the thought that even if the man lost in the worst-case scenario, Alexander at least would get to keep Thesalie.

And as long as he had that, the gate to Tibias would always remain open.

It was with that thought that Alexander sent his regards to the man, as the rematch between Perseus and Menes was soon to start.

"General! Our scouts have sent word. The enemy has camped right on the other side of the ridge.

By their estimate, there should be 40,000 men!"

This was the report an officer brought Menes around dusk.

"40,000!" And this was the shocked answer he got.

'According to Alexander, there should not be more than 20,000!' Hearing the assumed number Menes muttered so in disbelief while at the same time feeling pleased that he had taken this detour.

An outnumbered phalanx formation on the flat plains would have been too dangerous.

But still, although momentary shocked and then elated, the number felt a bit too big to Menes.

His long experience kept gnawing at him.

Because from the reports he read, all multiple times said that Perseus had no way to gather more than 20,000 men.

"How did you scouts count the number?" Hence the general turned to curiously ask.

"By counting the number of tents as well as the amount of lit torches there," The officer quickly replied though he was unsure by he was being asked such a simple question.

This was the standard procedure.

You counted the number of tents in one row and then simply multiplied that number by the amount of rows.

And if you could not see those tents on the other side of the camp, like if it was night, well then counted the small light next to it.

Because every tent had two burning braziers by its entrance to provide light for its inhabitants as well as drive away dangerous insects.

Something that had the unintended consequence of being able to be spotted from far, far away by a man, say standing on a nearby hill.

And hearing this, prompted Menes to then pose, "So it is possible the enemy has set up fake tents and lit more torches than needed? To make us think there are more of them."

"Ah!" This possibility caused the officers to let out a small gasp of surprise.

It was not like this had never happened before in history, but he had not simply considered that.

Why would he?



That was not something you would normally consider.

But now that his general pointed it out, the officer was forced to ponder it and then nodding his head, answered, "Yes. It is possible."

Chapter 800 Scouting of Sissilpond Ridge (Part-2)

"The enemy might be trying to intimidate us into seeking a truce or even retreating by showing us this over-inflated number."

Regarding Perseus's presumed strategy, this was what that officer hypothesized.

And this thought was shared by Menes too, who commented with a nod,

"Mmm, it's not a bad plan given their circumstance. If I was in their shoes I might have done the same."

"Too bad he met me." He snickered.

The scout officer hearing Menes's pleased tone thought the man was simply praising him, but in reality, the tall man was referring to how he knew of Perseus's true condition.

Those intelligence reports proved vital, being the sole reason he was able to accurately guess the tactic.

After all, otherwise, no one going to see a camp supposedly holding 40,000 men and come to the conclusion that half of them were fake.

That was impossible.

Menes even thought that the opposing general's true mistake here was making his army appear unnaturally large- 40,000 was a bit pushing it.

But had it been only 30,000, Menes might have bought it even with the intel leaks, thinking there was simply a discrepancy in the scouting numbers and that the intelligence reports simply underestimated Perseus's reserves.

Since Menes had found reasons to suspect that Perseus was distinguishing himself like a pufferfish, he decided to it out, ordering,

"Send ten cavalry squadrons and 1,000 infantry and crossbowmen first thing in the morning to keep an eye on the camp. I want to know the true numbers as quickly as possible."

"Dawn? But sir the fog?" At Menes's instruction, the officer opined such with a bit of shock to his tone, trying to remind his boss that there was no point sending men up the steep ridge at that time since it would be too foggy to see anything.

Although the fog around the higher parts tended to dissipate by early to late morning, that was still two to three hours after dawn.

"Yes dawn!" To the inquiry Menes snapped, not liking being questioned at every little thing, "If the men cannot see anything, then they will stay there till they can."

Menes was impatient to know his enemy's number as soon as possible, for although it was very reasonable to think Perseus was faking his number, it was still a conjecture.

If the enemy really had somehow managed to get 40,000 men, then Menes would need to reevaluate his tactic.

Perhaps he would even retreat and ask Alexander for reinforcements.

After all the man was keeping around 8,000 men with him in Thesalie in case anyone tried to do something stupid, be it inside the city, or in its vicinity- like an overzealous noble attacking Zanzan.

But until Menes could know the enemy's number for certain, he would be unable to devise a potent strategy.

"Be grateful I'm not sending your sorry ass right now to go sit up there in the cold. You are dismissed."

So with this Menes made his order absolute and the officer, understanding so,

"Yes sir!" got in attention and giving a salute he exited the tent.

The following morning the ordered force of 1,100- composed of 100 cavalry, 900 infantry, and 100 crossbowmen quickly found themselves scaling the Sissilpond ridge.

They had set off the moment it had become clear enough to see, perhaps around 1 hour after dawn and though the group advanced, it was painfully slow.

'I knew this would happen' And the reason was plenty obvious as that officer who was named Antonid grumbled, squinting his eye to try and make the very ground in front of him.

The man was personally leading the two battalions worth of men under Menes's order and the fog was so thick that even his hands sometimes disappeared, his time spent mostly calming his jittering horse down, as the beast really did not like walking basically blind.

"There! Captain there! There is a group of men there." While Antonid was feeling peeved with Menes's order, as well as the fact he had to get up so early when he would have preferred to have stayed a bit longer, suddenly a bunch of cries emanated from the rows of men before him.

And as the man raised his head to look at what many of the men were pointing to, he did indeed spot several large masses of shadow scuttling in the fog right near the top of the hill.

"Attack!" And immediately Antonid screamed such an order.

He did this almost instinctively, like his brain was telling him that since the enemy was there, he must go and kill them.

"Take the hill! Capture the top!" While his adjutant thought it was because his captain wanted to ambush the enemy and catch them unaware.

The enemy already had an advantage in height so it seemed imperative to the man that they attacked immediately to negate that.

And since the order had been given, even though Menes had asked them to only survey the surroundings, the men all energetically charged up.

The infantry led at the front, the crossbowmen followed in tow at the back while the cavalry protected their wings, intending to strike the iron while it was hot.

The men thought, 'Since we have found their enemy, what reason is there to wait? Let's go and kill them when they have not spotted us. The more we kill now, the less we will have to kill later.'

But that general rainbow aura of optimism lasted right up until the moment they made contact with the enemy.

"What? How! So many!"

This was the exact thought that flashed in every Zanzan man, along with intense regret over with over enthusiasm.

Because although Perseus was in simpatico with Menes over sending scout parties to observe the enemy, he had sent a far larger force.

Antonid could not immediately tell the exact numbers through the fog, but it had to be at least three times his force if not four.

And the reason why Antonid never considered this possibility of biting more than he could chew was because, well- Basically he forgot, simple as that.

When he first saw the shadow, they did not look too large, and going red eyed by the mere scent of the enemy, he had not considered anything else, bullishly charging up the hill to hit the enemy where it hurt.

Besides, subconsciously he had thought that the enemy would be smaller than them.

After all, that was the feeling he got from talking to Menes yesterday night.

But that moment of hastiness was coming to bite in the ass now, as intense regret washed over him realizing his mistake.

But the man was not completely incorrigible, as understanding his mistake, he did not try to fix it himself.

Neither did he lose heart and run like a coward.

Instead, understanding he alone could never hope to win the fight, he instantly sent three riders charging down the hill, tasking them to immediately go find Menes and beg him for reinforcements.

While he and his men planned to hold on for dear life.

"Attack! The enemy is disorganized. Attack! Throw your pillas. Archers! Shoot!" Antonid's only saving grace here was the fact the enemy had still not seen them and were relatively spread out.

Meaning Antonid could rush forward and get in between the gaps, thus catching them off guard and flanking them.

And this mostly worked, as the nimble legionaries armed with their short swords were able to make quick sharp steps to cover the short distance without breaking their own formation before they began to engage the enemy in very close quarter combat.

So close in fact that it put the huge spear wielding phalangites at a disadvantage.

Many caught out of formation found their bulky weapon unwieldy and were ill matched against the fast sword jabs being thrown at them.

Hence Zanzan managed to score quite a few successful hits in its first round, causing many to perish.

"What?" What is happening?"

"How? How is the enemy here?"

"Quick! Get in line!"

"Run! There are too man... \*ugghh\*!"

"Arrows! Sheil... \*agghh\*!"

To say Antonid had caught the enemy with their pants down would not be an understatement.

And the reason for their unpreparedness was surprising because of something that at any other time would have been an advantage.

The Tibians held the high ground which in any other case would have been a good thing.

But this time, the situation became reversed.

Because of the morning fog.

By its very nature, the fog tended to first dissipate from the top and then the bottom, meaning although Antonid could vaguely make out the Tibian's silhouette as they became clearer, the Tibians could not see through the much denser layer below.

Also the Tibians at the top were looking around for the exact position of Menes's camp, so their eyes were trained at around the foot of the hill.

Whereas Antonid's men's destination was the top.

So in a reversal of the situation of any other time, the lower side spotted the upper side first.

And then they engaged, creating great casualties but more so, greater panic with their stabs, thrusts, arrow volleys and javelin throws.

In hindsight, Antonid's move to attack appeared to have been the correct one.