

## 10 Conflicts

1312, the 10th month, 14th day:

Janus arrived from the east with news. It was a verbal report. "Sire, the battle is ours, the cost was minimal. Prince Tertius will arrive tomorrow and the entire army is three days march."

"Were you witness to the fighting Janus?"

"I was witness to the events, we did not fight but the snow. When the prince arrived on the 12th it was already snowing. I arrived on the 13th, in time to see the prince and a small party returning from a meeting with the Florentine commanders. The snow was already deep to my knee. The border guardians on both sides were dismissed for the winter as is our mutual custom and your previous order. Immediately after the Florentines and the two customs officials retried our Ingegneres, under the direction of Archimedes, diverted the small water fall that runs behind the Gate House to spill over the ground running into our neighbor's land. At first light our watchers signaled we should come forward. It was very funny and also quite tragic at the same time. A comic- tragedy if such exists.

We could see, by walking a short distance into that country, the Florentine army struggling to move up the snow and ice covered road. That foolish priest was urging them forward but they made little and very slow progress. Men in armor combined with winter clothing could make only hesitant steps, all the while the water continued to flow making more and more ice. The tragic part were the horses, many fell and were injured in the process, the road was littered with them; many had to be killed on the spot. By mid day a goodly number of our solders had gathered at the border but none of their fighters could advance sufficiently to even make an attempt to attack. While in range, the archers on both sides held fire. One of their officers made his way to the priest and several men ceased him, dragging him down the hill. The officer started to send his men back. He came close enough, with some difficulties I must say, that we could hear each other. He saluted us saying we were the most worthy advisory he had ever faced and he hoped that both our leaders could get this resolved without further bloodshed. The captain responded in kind. The officer asked if the young junior lieutenant would like the privilege of dispatching that evil priest, he was most welcome.

The Captain said he was not present but the priest is now the living dead anyway, since all know him for what he is. The officer than said this was the best battle he had ever seen since both sides were defeated by a superior force and could now withdraw with honor. Our captain agreed and expressed his regret that so many fine animals were sacrificed or nothing. The officer then smiled and replied, "as one professional selder to another, thank you." Our Captain hoped to meet the officer in person, to share some ale. They bowed to each other again and he departed, as did we."

Most of the cavalry began arriving late in the day. They will mostly replace the units now guarding the castle. Those units would be sent to reinforce the coastal defenses. The high tide would allow their larger ships in close to shore and in some places even to the quays, of the now abandoned fishing villages.

1312, the 10th month, 15th day:

Drakon awakened us at first light. In fact it was perhaps even before first light as we needed to light lamps to find our clothing. He had come for his new brother Kleitos, promising to keep him safe, his hands were desperately needed in the preparation for battle.

Iason and I quickly dressed and rushed to the stables. Our horses were already being saddled by Kleitos and Drakon. Other Palace Boys had secured our light armor and weapons. Once dressed we received food in the court yard with the other Knights and solders. Kleitos and Drakon packed food, drink and rain repellent cloaks in our saddle bags. Over our armor we wore warm military riding cloaks with piked hoods, which mostly covered our faces. Our guardians were dressed like us. The knights formed little groups and rode out when ready. We hung back for our fathers.

Kleitos and Drakon scurried back into the castle when the grooms brought out the King's and Consort's horses. While we tried to look inconspicuous, standing off to one side, a Knight recognized me and came over to us. He pulled our hoods back and with a very stern expression began admonishing us about the difference between men's and boy's work. Saying to our guardians to not only keep us safe but out of the way. Another knight seeing this approached and began admonishing the first to be more understanding of the young princes. He went so far as to praise us for our courage, if perhaps founded in ignorance. "Would you or I have done different at their age?"

The two Knights debated the foolishness of our venture deciding that, as Pyrros pointed out, the princes' protection was their responsibility. For our part we promised to keep out of way and should any significant danger present, remove ourselves from it. Just as father and uncle came through the door the great bell began to toll. We knew a signal had come that battle was not far off. Uncle Iason indicated which Knights would ride with him and Father with him. Now we were in a quandary, do we ride with parent or mentor. Uncle chose for me. "Prince Arden goes with his mentor and Prince Iason with his." We scramble to our horses and followed the leader. "Come Arden," the king called motioning with his arm. I moved up in the pack next to him. "How did you know Iason and I were in the crowd of Knights and Squires," I asked.

"How did you know Karyakos and I were planning to ride out this morning?" Then leaning over and speaking more softly. "We did not tell you of our plans so you would not ask to come along."

"I understand, that way you would not need to forbid it."

"True, we could not invite you to danger but if you two were clever enough to make your own arrangements that too must be honored. Now hear this Prince, if I must give the order for you to retire you and your guardians will do just that and as fast as Zephyros can carry you."

"Yes Sire, I understand. Why did you choose me and not Iason," I asked?

"Because if a father chooses his son he would be unable to send him away, even if that is the most prudent thing to do or act in the best interest of the state if the need to protect him came about. Such is a father's love but a mentor's love, as strong, is more reasoned."

later as we rode to the southern headland, to watch the impending navel battle and landings; my mentor suggested I spend some time studying the works of Xenophon the historian. He laughed and added, the works of Xenophon of Ephesus are also worth reading but not studying. I have already read a short treatises by him called, On Horsemanship. It is very good. I am sure Kleitos must also have read it since it is one of the few books in Koalhurst.

When we reached the headlands our little party stopped and dismounted. The little party was greater then the observation garrison stationed there. King Iason and I, our four guards, five Knights, 5 squires, 12 horse guards, two Generals and 4 of their aids. On the headland we could also see Prince Karyakos and his party of like size. Out to sea we could see three central things. First, a mighty storm was gathering to the north and the wind from that direction was cool and very strong. Second, our fleet moving south, driven before the storm and closing on the Florentine fleet, the third item, at great speed. The Florentine fleet was much larger then ours, which counted 12 large war vessels and 6 smaller. The Florentines had at least 20 large war ships and 15 smaller vessels. They were attempting to close on our shore but were moving much slower. I was told that results from their necessity to

tack and row against a strong wind.

"One lesson you will learn today Arden, has to do with a greed for power and how it distorts men's rational thinking. Many brave and honorable men will be killed and for what purpose?"

I understand why our people, including us are motivated. We are defending our homes, families, our culture. I could not understand what was motivating the Florentines. Everyone tells me we are not rich; our land is good, but not better than other places; our people work no harder or are no better looking. This place is not in some strategic location. It just makes no sense to me.

Uncle Jason wrapped his arms around me. "Today Arden you will see things no boy of 12 should ever see. Unlike in the east there will be no retreat, no yielding to a higher power." There were tears in his eyes. "Some day you and Iason will share absolute authority over life and death. The price of that authority is very high son. Always remember, responsibility is commensurate with authority and the weight of that burden requires the shoulders of Atlas. Feel these shoulders Arden. They are those of a man, not a Titan."

I am not sure I understood this lesson completely. I suspect my mentor knew that and also knew even the teacher is still learning.

I found it very hard to watch and wait. I could see messages being sent and received from sea and across the land. The Ingegneres were calculating and measuring. They reported the distance of the Florentines from the shore, the strength of the wind, the distance of our fleet from the enemy, the time to engagement. Suddenly the Florentine fleet broke into three parts. It took a short time for them to completely separate. One part south, one north and the third and largest force straight on.

These ships were all long and rather narrow with Mediterranean sails. All of them also had large oars to assist in propulsion. As our ships closed the Florentines became aware of them but by this time the three parts were separated by enough distance to make each committed to its objectives. Most of the smaller Florentine ships were in the two groups heading for landing on the coast, the largest were headed into our main harbor.

Suddenly along the coast and on both headlands huge red, and blue flags were raised on tall poles. Mentor told me they were navigational aids for our ships. The main Florentine force had now strung itself out into a long line. Since our harbor entrance was so narrow they must come through one at a time. The idea was the rising tide would carry them swiftly past the entrance.

I had only some general idea what measures Archimedes had designed for this but I was sure he had many. What I had not noticed before was a huge iron chain stretched between the nearly vertical rock cliffs on either side. It was positioned about one ship length from the rock like gates. The chain now lay just below the water. I could also see the tide was rushing in through the gate and as the first ship approached it seemed to be caught in the current. Suddenly the ship stopped moving forward, its stern end came out of the water pitching many soldiers and sailors into the churning sea.

The second ship was now caught up by the current and the helmsman and oars men tried frantically not to ram the now stricken and sinking one ahead. They were partly successful but their large forward ram smashed into the rock cliff. By this time the third, fourth and fifth ships struck their sails and began turning away to avoid further collisions. It was obvious the second ship was taking water but was not sinking yet and it managed to move out of the way. The General ordered the catapults into action and soon a rain of large rocks was smashing into both ships. These rocks were so large I could not quite get my arms around them and it took ten men to move them into position. Of the ten rocks thrown, 8 were hits. Three on the first ship which was now sunk and four on the second which was now sinking. I could see men in the water, soldiers in armor can not swim well. Many were drowning. The shore in this area is not hospitable and very rocky, some men were making it. The third and fourth ships approached but were trying not to get too close for fear of the catapults and the current.

A Catapult's range is also a function of weight being thrown. Once in range the catapults exploded again this time throwing something I could not identify. Much smaller things, as the projectiles hit the ships they were engulfed in flames even the ones that hit the water burned. "Greek Fire" I was told. I could hear the screaming of the men being burned on the two ships which were completely engulfed in flames. It looked like the fleet was about to turn and flee when our ships struck from the north. All 12 ships came upon the line at a speed faster than Zephyros could possibly gallop. They were moving so fast that their rams crashed into the Florentines with such force they kept on going and just rammed over them. A few Florentines managed to get turned and were not rammed. I counted 8 more ships sunk immediately and two engaged in combat. Suddenly the thunder or what I thought was thunder rang out. These were the new cannons, two mounted on each of our ships. And more Greek fire from smaller ship mounted catapults put the other 4 on fire or running for their lives.

King Iason ordered a signal to the inner harbor and I could see every fishing boat in the place making for the open sea. They were commissioned to pick up and save as many sailors and marines as possible. I could also see our smaller ships circling around and coming back to pick up as many men from the water as possible. The larger ships split into two groups each chasing the enemy to the north and south.

We could see down the south shore but not the north. The enemy was now landing at several places along the south coast. These were all abandoned fishing villages. We rode in that direction for a closer look. At the place we came to a small stream tumbled down the steep rock walls, forming a narrow slippery and difficult valley, from the highland to the little village. A narrow walkway allowing passage, in single file, provided foot or donkey access.

Three ships had landed here pulling up on the rocky shore, as no quay of adequate size existed. The tide would soon be going out and these ships would be stranded unless they could get unloaded quickly. The General had positioned archers along the crest of the bluff and they were continuously shooting arrows at the disembarking soldiers. Making them go slow and carefully. When about half of the soldiers had landed the archers switched to fire arrows, setting the ships afire. Unlike the earlier fires these burned more slowly allowing most of the crews and soldiers to escape and even put them out.

The soldiers began making their way up the narrow valley. No one attacked them. As they reached the top they were met by several hundred archers and foot soldiers backed by cavalry. One by one they surrendered throwing their weapons on a pile. Things did not go so smoothly everywhere along the coast, in one place our navy engaged the Florentine ships on the water, sinking two with one exception to the south. In another the access valley was less narrow but just as steep. Those men put up a good fight and we lost a number of our own fighters before they were forced to surrender.

In the north at one place, the ships were sunk or burned but the soldiers refused to take the chance of the narrow valley, instead occupying the houses in the village. Karyakos ordered they be left alone, suggesting after a few days with no food their attitude would change.

I could see the storm was now almost upon us. There would be much rain and cool weather. Prince Tertius came riding up to us. He had that look on his face one only gets from victory. It was obvious to me that having this many prisoners would present some difficulties. He asked that the senior Florentine commanders be brought forward. This was all happening while the injured soldiers and sailors were still being brought up the valley.

Tertius met with the commanders proposing that they cooperate with him to ensure the best welfare of their subordinates. He suggested a public display of surrender by hand over their swords. They would then march about half a league to a tent camp, food and water. They were incredulous at first. "My brothers have instructed us that all prisoners of war are to be treated as guests and with all the respect brave men of honor are entitled. We ask you give your word that hostilities and combativeness will be put aside while you are here; we give our word that you will be fed, sheltered and treated with respect as men of honor. You should retain command of your people. I also suggest we move with some haste as this storm will soon be upon us all."

I noticed that a small group of about 15 boys, some not older than myself, were huddled together on the edge of the prisoners having been among the last to have come up the valley. I went over to investigate; they were all a bit cautious of me. I spoke Latin not Greek to them, they began to answer my questions. I learned they were chamber boys, officer's aids and as one boy admitted, mostly sex slaves. I asked if they were all slaves or in some other way bound to the men they served. Slaves one boy said looking at the ground. Volos could see the look on my face and without saying another word assisted me in removing my cloak and my outer armor to reveal my Royal Colors. He and Pyrrus did the same. I got the attention of a knight. He and his squire came over to us.

"Sir Knight please escort these boys and myself to an audience with King Iason." On hearing that the boys were on their knees before me. "Fear not, I intend you no harm. In this kingdom slavery is not permitted. You are too young to be soldiers, so you must be my guests and will be treated as such." I pointed to one telling him to mount my horse and look over the group to see if there are any other boys not in this group. He hesitated so I gestured with my thumb. He climbed up and stood high finding three more.

Sir *Lysimachos* and his squire escorted us to the King, who was still talking to the senior commanders of the vanquished. When he saw our colors being displayed and us leading a group of what was 18 boys and a Knight, he smiled. I'm sure he knew what I was about but said nothing. I knelt down and said, "Sire, these boys are all slaves or bound servants. Since Slavery and binding to servitude is illegal in your kingdom, I request you place them under the protection of Parga's Princes and give Sir *Lysimachos* leave to escort them to the castle."

Uncle Iason did not say anything for a long pause. I was about to plead when his smile broke. He could not contain it. "If that is your request let it be so. I can not reassign Sir *Lysimachos* but if you ask your Uncle, he may do so."

I asked Prince Tertius. "Am I not a Prince and commander of the southern army?"

"Yes." Then they are already under my protection are they not?" He laughed and so did everyone else even the boys who were getting translation of the Greek from Pyrrus. "Sir *Lysimachos* is needed here but I will ride with you, will that do Prince Arden?" At that I leaped into his arms and kissed him. That got a cheer from all who could see, even the prisoners.

The commander of the invading army or this part of it, removed his belt and sword, knelt down and presented it to me. "It is an honor and a privilege to surrender to you Prince Arden. On behalf of my men we swear to abide by the laws and rules of this kingdom for as long as we are privileged to stay here."

I did not know what to say so Uncle Iason whispered. "Hold the sword high above your head. Accept his surrender, thank him and ask us all to go in peace." I did to a great cheer.

We quickly mounted up, each of us taking a boy on our horse, even the King, who scooped up the smallest child and rode back to the castle, but not before the rain came. Iason and Karyakos arrived shortly after us but they only had 10 boys.

In the stables the boys all assisted in caring for the animals. Kleitos came along with about six Palace Boys. I was absolutely amazed at how quickly he got the guest boys organized in distributing food and water. We were later told about another 50 or so boys that would be arriving over the next day or two as all the prisoners got sorted out.

It was only much later that I realized their must have been many boys on those ships that perished when they were sunk. Iason told me we must be thankful for those we were able to help. He also pointed out that our special relationship with our fathers gives us a special role as child advocates. We have great influence and at the highest possible level. I realize he is correct, that realization brings another. Knowing you have power and influence means you need take great care to use it wisely. We are still boys ourselves.

We used our authority again and multiplied our responsibilities as well. Now we have a host of new and I am sure loyal followers, we must make sure we do right by them, whatever that is. Neither of us know.

I spotted one of the Triangles and holding my fingers and thumb in that shape flashed him a signal. He came close to Iason and myself. "These boys are under the protection of us Princes and must be treated as guests. We all need to bathe and they all need clean, dry clothing, can you assist?"

"It will be my pleasure in any way I can."

"If we hurry," Iason interjected, "we can get to the baths before the knights. Bring as many Palace Boys as you can, with extra clothing and join us there."

"You should tell the cooks about the new mouths to feed as well," Kleitos said as he passed by. Just then Iason spotted the small boy brought in by Uncle Iason, sitting on the King's stallion, crying his little eyes out. I could also see the mighty King pleading with the boy, but in Greek, probably forgetting the lad did not speak our language. (TN: Latin, by 1300 was well dead as a spoken language but often close to Italian and French dialects of the day.)

Iason followed by myself ran to them. "Father", he said in Greek which is close enough to Latin as to be understood. "Why does he cry, did you frighten him," Iason said in Latin which is not the language of his mother tongue but close to what is spoken south of Naples. The boy shook his head no and reached out to the King. King Iason took the lad to his breast and held him tight to his person.

"He told me his name is Joulous."

"Joulous," Iason said, "tell us why you cry so?"

Between the sobs he answered, "Cannot find, my twin brother, Justus."

"We will find him little one, we will find him." The king pulled the boy tight to his chest again and stroked his wet hair. Then he dropped to one knee putting all of our faces at the same level. "Princes, Joulous is under your protection but he is too young to live with the other boys. I would take him to live with your siblings and Princess Elpis, with your permission of course." This got the lad's attention. The king asking another boy, prince or no for permission."

Joulous please go with our father, you will be safe with our family, I told him.

Iason we must get to know all of these boys and swiftly. When we got to the baths I counted even more Palace Boys than guests. Old Alexandros was giving directions; as we entered he counted each guest assigning them that number and one of the Palace Boys stepped forward obviously pre assigned to that number. Each Palace Boy introduced himself and learned the name of his assigned guest. When all of us were naked and ready for our bath Iason and I went around the pool meeting each guest and greeting everyone. Those Palace Boys that were not needed and that didn't need a bath, departed. All the remaining entered the pool and began bathing each other. Once clean Iason and I started throwing sponges. The Palace Boys knew this game, the guests learned very quickly. It ended with Iason and I kissing each other while everyone else cheered us on or got to it themselves.

By the time we arrived in the dining hall Karyakos and Tertius were already at the table. Each Palace Boy-Guest pair was greeted by the princes so their names and ages could be learned. When everyone was seated Karyakos rose and made a short speech. He officially welcomed the guests to our home. "We know you and the others arriving in the next few days did not choose to come here, we sincerely hope you choose to stay. Each of you is assigned a guide. You will spend the next fortnight in the almost continuous company of that guide. Alexandros the Second Steward wishes me to remind all that should this arrangement prove difficult, for any reason, to approach him for rearrangements. It is our desire that the guests and guides become friends but we know friendship can not be mandated, only the desire. Any boy under the age of 12 must be placed in the care of a palace family until 12, when he may live in the dormitory. Sex with any child under the age of 12 is forbidden to adults and discouraged among children.

The guides have been assigned since our language and culture is significantly different than what any of you have known before. Here respect for office is freely given. Respect for the person filling that office is earned by their deeds. When Prince Arden placed you under our protection you became wards of the Crown. That means you are now children of the King, as such you are now brothers all. Brothers stand by each other and work together for the benefit of the family as well as the individual.

Except for the exceptional beauty of my sons, I trust you all noticed something that goes to the heart of this kingdom. When naked in the bathing pool everyone of you are the same. I know you have been told since you were born that you are some how lesser than someone else and being children, everyone else. In this kingdom all citizens are equal before the laws and what ever god or gods you choose to worship. No man or woman is greater or lesser.

To King Iason and myself the greatest treasure in this kingdom are its children. In every religion we are aware of, children are considered a gift from god or gods. Gifts from the divine must be honored. This brings to mind another difference between ourselves and other places. Here, honor is not a finite commodity to be gained or lost at someone else's expense. Here, honor is granted to you by others. As it is granted it can be taken away but never at the expense of someone else. When you choose to stay or go that decision will not dishonor us or yourselves. If you choose to stay it will honor us greatly but if you choose to go it will also honor us.

I was surprised to see most of the servers were Knights, Squires, even scholars. All former Palace Boys, I was told, who had served under Alexandros as boys. From the looks on the faces of the guests and the questions they were asking their guides it was obvious the message was coming through very clearly.

Just as we were about to leave for our sleeping quarters Janus burst into the room, still dressed in his cloak, dripping water. "I bring the best news of the day. The twin brother was found and is now sleeping in Princess Elpis' quarters."

"Come Janus, eat and tell us about it," Prince Tertius boomed.

"The King sought me out and opening his cloak bid me to look well upon his new son Joulous and to find his twin brother Justus. I took Zephyros Prince Arden, as my house was badly in need of rest." Kleitos was up and heading for the door. "Kleitos all is well you need not bother. I rode to three camps and found him at the third."

"Well my brother is quick off the mark if nothing else," Prince Tertius remarked.

"What of the other boys," Iason inquired.

"All seemed well Prince. They were well sheltered and have been fed. I don't know about the north but in the south at least 50 between the three camps, also about 15 are in the city being brought to shore by the fishers. The word of your protection order has spread, all I saw were being well cared for."