

6 Winds of War

1312, the 8th month, 30th day

Iason and I began our duties as pages and as all other boys in the castle, our studies. Unlike the other pages we continued to stay with our mentors or in our own apartments. Other than that we dressed, ate, socialized, worked and were educated with the others. Our guardians spent their time in training and socializing with the other Royal Guards, for those times they were not protecting us, which was when in class or running messages. For the first few weeks we would not carry messages alone but accompany one of the more experienced. For me, almost all the castle complex was new and needed to be learned. Iason knew most of it, that helped him a bit. While we were functioning as pages we lost our guardians and our titles. Pages came in two groups, no distinction was made between. One group were boys who would stay in that service and eventually become messenger riders like Janus or be sent out as non military government officials. Others like Iason and I were to serve for periods of time from six months to two years or more and then be moved to different functions.

Many knights and military commanders spent at least six months as a page. Not only did we need to learn the castle top to bottom but the city. Our training included much physical activity like running up and down long stair ways and over long distances. Our tutors taught us many methods of improving our memories so we could easily remember names, faces locations and long verbal messages.

Our Chamber Boy is Ikaros. He has 15 years with brown curly hair and dark eyes. His lips are thick and red. He is not very tall but has wide shoulders and narrow hips. His arms look powerful and he walks or moves with great purpose but as silently as a cat. He has a deep but soft voice. Heron told us Ikaros was very fond of the girls and they fond of him. That he plays the syrinx as I do and is one of the best fencers in his group.

1312, the 9th month, 5th day

We learned today that the spies have been uncovered and additional plots are afoot. Uncle Iason told the council that he had received several messages from our people abroad. I take it we too have spies. The three spies will probably leave in the next few days since the ports and borders will be closed by the 15th day. Knowing who they are is a great boon to us he announced, for we can feed them much false information to take along.

One of the knights wondered if these people had been successful in setting up accomplices. Karyakos just smiled and assured him they had. That suggested to me, those accomplices were trusted by him. A dispatch from the neighboring

Duchy, the one across the mountains through the only pass, complaining that our proposed closure would cause great hardship to the merchants of this place and the Bishop of that Duchy was unhappy being cut off from our Bishop and Church. I took this to be threats against us. Several of the knights boldly proclaimed the snows of the pass would run crimson with their blood should they be so foolish as to try.

Uncle Iason asked one of the scholars to prepare a long and detailed response. "Make the following observations: 1. We are and have always been a truly sovereign people. Something our neighboring states can not claim. 2. The last time anyone, being the Roman Legions, attempted to invade by that path the cost was exorbitant for them. 3. The trade between us by that route is minimal and a 90 day suspension would not greatly hinder what little existed. 4. Since we are a secular state with no official religion, what the Bishop or clergy of any religion thought was irrelevant to our mutual political relationship. Since they supported the Eastern Church and our Bishop reported to the Pope that reasoning seemed soft. 5. Since the time of Alexander, our two states have been always at peace and respectful of our differences as well as our commonalities."

That night Iason and I took Ikaros to our bed. We each took a turn in his anus and he giving the other the most wonderful sucking at the same time. I was just surprised that he showed no real interest in returning the favor in our asses but took us in his mouth with great relish.

1312, the 9th month, 6th day

Today we began our military training in addition to everything else. Book lessons, page duties, exercise of our animals, serving our mentors wine and so on. We were given wooden swords and began learning what to do with them. Our class is almost 20, all 12 years like us. After a brief introduction by the fencing master we all worked with Royal Guards coaching or instructing us. Damao and Pyrros gave Iason and I special instructions. I was most impressed with the metal of their weapons. They told me it is iron that was smelted in the Frankish lands and made into finished products in the armory behind the Castle. They insisted the quality was equal to the best Dimashq or Egyptian blades and had proven it in battles with the North African pirates who were soundly defeated in every attempt to invade.

I will make an effort to inspect these armories and foundries in the near future. Each day our mentors and several knights ride out to inspect the military preparations for invasion. I hope we will be able to go with them in the future. I wonder how real this threat of invasion is. Had not our people been peace loving and totally independent since the beginning of recorded history and even before that. Our ancestors are reported to have migrated here from Ithaka not long after

the time of Odysseus. No one knows for sure just when and who. We are proud to carry Ithaca, the island symbol of adventure and longing for homeland; the symbolic path to education and self-knowledge, as a proud symbol.

Our tutors claim the great poems of Homer tell the story of our people with just as much truth and voracity as the Christian or Islamic myths. Unlike them we do not claim they are anything but the stories of men, for men and by men. (Translators note: The Greeks were the first people to place man in the center of things like art. Their pantheon and the stories about their gods were designed to illustrate how men should go about living and how they could get along with each other in that living.) The tutor also claimed all of us are part of one large clan formed by the founding families. That is why we are all citizens, free men and have always been so.

1312, the 9th month, 8th day:

The harbor of this city is the only one capable of ships larger than small fishing boats. I am told that a draft or the depth in the water a ship has when loaded can not exceed one orgyia (1.85 m) in any except here. The water in this harbor is very deep about 1 Gleghorn (30 m).

Today we did not attend classes or serve as pages, we rode with our mentors to inspect the fortifications along the harbor. I was glad to be astride of Zephyros again for more than a bit of exercise. I think we were an impressive group setting out from the castle that morning. Iason, Father, Uncle Iason our 8 guards, the Ingegnere Generale and several Knights including Prince Tertius and several of his men and their squires.

The Ingegnere Generale is Archimedes. This is a very apt namesake for him. Like the original mathematician, astronomer and inventor he too is very adept at applying his study to the real world. Our tutor was encouraging us to try and think like Aristoteles and the old Archimedes in going out and learning of the world by observing and testing it, instead of just thinking. Iason and I were most impressed by what we saw. To be fair, since everything is new to us, perhaps it was only so impressive because of it. To be fair to Archimedes, he has taken the natural conditions of our land and designed strange looking machines that could only be of use upon it.

Our harbor is at the end of a long narrow channel. The entrance on the seaward side is narrow and filled with rocks. Only one opening can pass ships larger than a small fishing boat. The walls of the channel are very steep and of strong, very hard rock. The cliffs are high above, some 6 peltra (185.4 m) rising from nothing in a short distance reaching 4 peltra and to 6 at the coast.

(Translators note: I take this description, which I have greatly shortened to be a fjord. Either these people did not have an equal term or it was not known to Arden. The Greeks did have terms which would have shortened his description considerably. They must not have been in his vocabulary. He is only 12 and hales from an inland farming community.)

The name Koalhurst is not a Greek name at all. The area has coal deposits or mines, although he has not yet mentioned them in his text. I do have the advantage of having read much forward of this date and he does mention coal being gathered near his village. Given the name I suspect Welsh or other Anglo-Saxon miners were brought in at some point to assist in exploitation. Another topic he has not addressed. Hard rock mines such as gold and silver along with quarries were well known to these people and their ancestors. Coal is not widely found south of Thessaloniki and was probably not much mined there in early times. Coal was not widely used as a fuel much before 500 CE. Some records of coal being used by Greek smiths 1000 years before exist, they called it "fossil substances". The coal near Thessaloniki is lignite, i.e. of low rank and probably still clearly shows it was made up of plant materials.)

We rode along one side, along the crest of the deep valley. I could see on the other side installations not unlike the ones on this side. When we got to the highest point above the harbor entrance we could see out to sea, along the coast to the north and south. On the other side is also a headland but it is a bit lower. We could see sails out on the water a long way off shore and some fishing boats much closer to the shore. Most of them had no sail or very small ones.

Father told us these were our most seaward observation posts. The soldiers were on guard here all day and night in all types of weather and had been so for hundreds of years. The observation platform is built of stone and had a thatched roof. Archimedes told us from the water this place looked like the natural rock and as long as no light or highly reflective objects were visible, no one would even know it exists.

The sleeping quarters, stable and so on were a little down hill from this and could not be seen from the water. As we looked along the coast to the north I could see other observation posts and a road that connected them. Each post had a stable so I assumed the riders connected them. Archimedes showed us a series of ingenious signaling devices made of polished copper. They were modest sized bowls standing on edge. He called them parabolas. They were pointed the bottom of the bowl, that is the center of the parabola, toward the stations. Four were set up but one was covered, it was the one pointing out to sea. In addition to the main parabola were two arms and pivot points with two smaller parabolas that could be pointed toward the main bowl. They could be adjusted to reflect the light of the sun into the main bowl. On another arm a small lamp could be lit and its light reflected into the main bowl. I assumed to be used at night. Iason

thought on nights with the full moon to reflect, it would work as well.

Archimedes told us that the great ancient Archimedes had used giant parabolic mirrors to set the Roman fleet afire in a battle at Syrakuse about 1500 years ago. That's what the stories say. He had experimented with this but it would not work in our conditions, however it is effective, if the sun is shining, in confusing and making it difficult to operate a ship especially in a small harbor like ours. As a signaling device it was of great value. By using a device that looks like a baker's paddle, the light can be interrupted into short or long intervals and by combining them, say two short and one long followed by a very long, to mean something specific. In addition, flags are used but only in the day time and clear weather. The mirrors can be used at night and as long as one can see the light.

The heart of our defense is surprise or the unexpected, effectiveness and skill. We are a small nation and almost anyone who would attacks us will have greater numbers. We must be more cleaver. Our coast is very rocky with no suitable anchorage for ships of any size. We have very little coast line anyway. When one looks at the map it is clear that impassible mountains surround us with only the one harbor on the sea and one pass in the west that is only open to travel a few months of the year.

As we rode back toward the castle I could see numerous Catapults and other like devices positioned along the cliffs on either side of the fjord. Any ship getting past the entrance would be subjected to almost continuous harassment of the deadliest sort. Should they ever get into the wider part of the harbor close to the town it will be up hill from the water toward the defenders. The castle is truly a mighty fortress with high and thick walls. The steep cliffs of the north mountains on that side, a fresh water lake on the east and a salt marsh on the west which is impossible to navigate across. The south has a steep and deep river from the lake to the sea with a draw bridge. On the castle side are high and thick stone walls. The town itself would be literally abandon, people going into the hinterland or into the great castle complex. Fresh water is from wells, close to the lake but within the walls, much food is in storage.

Archimedes claims to have a number of secret and very powerful weapons just looking for a real test. I wondered about our navy but nothing was said except they are at sea. We could see his great war machines were catapults and like devices that could throw large and heavy objects onto any ships passing below. The distance was such that the water area could be hit from both sides. I suspect a rain of fire and exploding things as well as large rocks were in his mind.

At the narrowest points archers could shoot down directly and in the wider areas upward to form an arc. A rain of arrows could be launched. We could see some of the catapults launching large boulders into the water below. The ingegneres were calibrating some kind of sighting device. It was very cleaver, taking into it

the weight of the throw, the distance to the target, the speed of the target, the strength and direction of the wind. It worked by moving a series of vertical spikes along different horizontal arms. The machine is positioned by moving it back along a rail with notches evenly spaced and raising or lowering its front or throwing end.

After our bath, Iason and I took Ikaros to our bed again. This was a most pleasurable experience for all of us. Ikaros is not overly fond of fucking us but he is most pleased to be fucked. He had prepared a large vessel of warm water for us and assisted in helping to reach those spots we could not easily reach ourselves. Iason and I would have gladly helped each other but Ikaros insisted it was his job. We made short work of this task. By the time we dried our bodies he was on his hands and knees in our bedchamber presenting the nicest small round ass to us. His buttocks are very small and his hips as well as his waist. His shoulders appear quite large when in this position and the smile on his face when he looked back on us was most appealing. Ikaros even at 15 is smooth and hairless except for his head. His scrotum is large and is his penis but his legs and body seem to have no bulging muscles.

Iason went to his head fist so I moved up to his rear. Ikaros' mouth gaped open and engulfed Iason's erection, who placed his hands on the boy's head to direct him. I coated my erection with olive oil and pressed some into his anus. He took me as easily as if it was my own hand although exerting considerably more pressure. I could see Iason in the warm glow of the afternoon light. His long thin legs terminating in small almost invisible buttocks his hips slowly moving in time with Ikaros' head. My buttocks are fuller than either of them and very round. All three of us have small hips and narrow waists. I pushed and pulled as did Iason while Ikaros murmured in pleasure. We all collapsed on the floor spent and giggling like girls.

After a brief respite Ikaros got up and presented us with new kilts and special tunics that he had fashioned. The kilts had many more pleats than normal and were made of fine wool. One unique feature was an inner lining made of Egyptian cotton which was shorter than the outer wool layer. He giggled and told us the lining would protect our tender parts and the extra pleats would make it easier for our mentors to feel our delights. Somehow Ikaros restrained himself from laughing but when Iason and I began he soon joined in. Our new tunics were narrower around the middle and showed off our physique instead of hanging like little tents from our shoulders. Being a warm climate, in the valley and by the sea, we do not need long robes or hose and head covers, except to keep the sun away, was not our custom. I am told more northern peoples have much longer robes.

Longer robes, tights, leather britches and often hoods are important for those who live in the mountains, and leather stockings for when we ride. I noticed most of

the scholars and many older men had long robes but us younger men with nicely shaped legs and fit bodies are a pleasure to look at and we are not shy to show our assets. The knights and solders often have armor working uniforms. They tend to be loose fitting for freedom of movement. We are not a rich land and are not greatly pretentious. Clean, mended, utilitarian and revealing are more to our style. Women and girls are a whole different matter, of course. For us men dressing to impress others is just not important.

I am told that in some lands only nobles can ware certain kinds of textiles. Not here, costly things like silk are only imported for the ladies. Only the knights and some of the more successful merchants can afford them. Mostly we dress in simple styles of utility. Few have Jewely either. Some like Uncle Iason and the knights have large signet rings. Some have medallions of office or profession. The pages, guards and us princes have insignias on our uniforms. The pages also have little, round, black, hats of office with a chin strap.