

The Emperor's Guards

By Reese Fleuren

Chapter 1

The island of Chios was alive. The leviathan eyed galleys came into port. The archers readied arrows and fired at the boats packed with skoutatos. They cheered as their head Strategos appeared. He smiled and said, “Your emperor is pleased that we could expand into the isles south of Theodora, our Nova Ravenia”

“We are with you, Caesar John.” A spearman shouted, “Say the word, we take it.”

“Prepared to land, see you all at the palace.” The skoutatos landed as the marines landed with axes and maces. The rest of Chios infantry fell back or fled. The Despot's guards stood as they held back the skoutatos. The rest paused as the big man with a warhammer polearm appeared. John shouted with his spear pointed, “You and me Commodis, we end it like true warriors.”

“You are an old man, John,” Commodis sneered, “Ending your Niocletian religion of Cristos and instituting Solius will be my sole duty to the Ravenian empire!”

The two nodded and charged. Commodis smashed John's lance and refused to fight fair as he pinned him with his oblong shield. John, an experienced fighter in Maygarian tactics, stabbed him in the foot. Commodis screamed and dropped his warhammer as John stabbed him in the stomach. The tagmata descended into chaos and started looting which angered John. He pointed at the Stratego and shouted, “Summoned the Vigla and make haste now!”

The Stratego left as he entered the villa with his immortals. He admired the gold and sapphire jewelry as everything was richly adorned columns and women in togas. A captain entered from the bedchambers and said nervously, “My emperor, we found a concubine named Irene.”

“Show me!” The captain led John to the now widow as he admired her trappings. She wore blue toga with a purple veil different to green chitons that women modestly wore. Her hair is brunette but beautiful as her facial skin sported hue with red blush. John smiled and asked her, “Are you Irene, wife to Despot Commodis who was a descendant of mad Commodis of the Ravenian empire?”

“I am,” She replied as she set her goblet on the table, “I'm also descended from him and an actress.”

“I have a son, John the Angle slayer...” He's interrupted by a captain, “What is it?”

The captain said it sadly, “He's dead while fighting the Wends-”

John turned to Irene and sighed, “Would you like to meet Alexios?”

Irene nodded, “Why are you scared to introduce him?”

“He's a warrior monk and is suffering heartache from a Russetian Khanate widow-” John admitted, “After hearing the truth, would you like to meet him?”

“I would love to meet him, my emperor”

“This way my dear,” John took her hand and led her to the docks as she looked back briefly and acknowledged her freedom. They boarded a galley as the men were pushed back to troop boats. The people watched as their new regime left. The small skoutatos stayed with a military governor.

Five years passed after John's death. The arena at Theodora cheered as harlots with signs frenzied the crowd. Alexios came with Irene as both wore blue to represent the Cyan party. They waved as the crowd cheered loudly. Alexios talked politely to Irene, “ Thanks for suggesting the races my love. I have never seen this much since fighting rebel Strategos.”

“My dear husband needed a break,” Irene smiled and gave him a present, “ Happy birthday, you are going to like this more”

Alexios opened it and said excitedly, “ Saint Nicolas’ works on Trinity of Cristos, but you shouldn't have.”

“It’s for the many gifts and chitons that I got,” She looked at Alexios for a moment and asked, “ What's troubling you?”

“The senator's daughters?” Irene pointed at the reserved seats. Alexios beamed with joy, “ There they are. I wanted honorary sisters for this event”

“So they aren't mistresses?”

“No, they just are kind souls who volunteered, and I have eyes for Irene of Chios.” Irene giggled and felt assured of the Emperor's humorous intent of having family here at the races only. The sisters waved at the emperor and showed appreciation. The Bishop of Theodora was gloomy as Alexios took notice. He smiled, “ My Bishop doesn't approve of sports?”

“It's for degenerates and harlots.” Bishop said grimly. “I find this distasteful as would the Mother Abbess.”

“Be calm, my Bishop.” Alexios said happily and motioned the race to start, “ I think people need a pastime that doesn't involve rebellion. I hope that you smile today.”

The races commenced as each chariot were led by red, grays, roans, and black horses. Three matched the horses, but the roan team pulled a green chariot. The crowds roared as the excitement built up in the stands. Alexios cheered for the red chariot that had the red horses.