

During the *Hetairideia*, the Festival of the Companions, the king formally recognized Hephaistion as a royal Hetairoi in Amyntor's place.

The opening ceremonies involved a purification sacrifice. The king would decapitate a black dog for Hekatē, then he, his sons, and any other Argeads would pass between the two parts, followed by the Hetairoi, and then the army, whereupon he received the soldiers' oaths of loyalty. These days, the army was too large for every man to participate, so they made oaths to their officers, who then represented them. Also, if once held at Aigai, these days the ceremony was offered wherever king and army found themselves each spring equinox. This year, it was Dion's precinct of Zeus Hypsistos, the Highest. Before the sacrifice, all new Hetairoi had to take their vows. For this, Alexandros stood at his father's right hand, Amyntas and then Arrhidaios behind, as all Argead men held the oath of the Hetairoi.

Only a king could make a Companion. It wasn't guaranteed, although it was rare, the cause of some great affront, that a son wouldn't take his father's place. More often, kings bestowed the title on new men, even non-Makedonēs. Philippos especially had used it to win friends in the South. This year, with the Asian campaign looming, six men stood before him to receive the honor and none was Makedonian by ancestry, even the one who claimed it as his identity.

He stood first, dressed in a rich black *khiton* that Alexandros had given him to mark the occasion. He hadn't wanted to accept it, but the prince had insisted. "Kleopatra spent two months on this; you'll insult her if you don't wear it." After seven years, he knew how to make his friend take a present. Hephaistion worried—Alexandros thought overmuch—that others would believe his loyalty all about favors, yet the Hippomenes clan was wealthy enough to purchase the glossy black wool for themselves. Alexandros had wanted to do something to mark him out, and black looked well on him, setting off his dark coloring. Kleopatra had hemmed it with a fine pattern of galloping white horses.

Yet he wore neither cloak nor belt. Those were in Alexandros's hands. The king gestured for Hephaistion to approach and he halted in front of Philippos. They were almost exactly of a height. Philippos set his right hand on Hephaistion's left shoulder. "I grant you all the lands of your patrimony, and name you an Hetairoi of my court. In recognition of that, I present you with a belt for bearing a sword in my defense."

He reached behind without looking, and Alexandros passed him the belt, which he put on Hephaistion with his own hands. This was no simple leather affair, nor something a man would ever wear into combat. Purely ceremonial, gold plaques stamped with rosettes decorated the length with a gilded oval buckle as big as a woman's hand, bearing the sunburst.

Philippos reached for the cloak, which Alexandros gave over. If the belt were new, the cloak had belonged to his Amyntor. Philippos had held it since the funeral. Now he swung it around Hephaistion's shoulders, scarlet cloth flashing in the sun, to pin it in place. Hephaistion reached up to grip the edge, knuckles tight. Alexandros watched his friend's face. It was as hard as marble, but Alexandros could see his lips pressed together tightly to keep them from trembling and his dark eyes were wet.

He might have his father's status, but Alexandros knew he'd have traded it all in an instant to have his father back.

*(Why this was cut: It's largely ceremonial and doesn't add much to the plot. We already know Hephaistion misses his father.)*