

Herald 421

Chapter 421 The Center Melee

"*Sigh*," Faruq at first let out a visible sigh at this question, as he still found it hard to believe had seen.

But since Ural had asked, he saw no point in hiding it, and so recounted what happened in a simple, short manner, "Alexander faked his army's collapse, and let the chariots run through. Then used the cavalry he had hidden in the back to attack them head-on. Lord Nibraz is currently trapped behind the enemy."

Though Faruq had tried to keep his calm as he said this, he still failed to hide the laced trepidation.

'Trapped behind the enemy' usually meant dead and this meant that not only did both the cavalry and chariot charge fail, but also most of the unit involved had basically disappeared, leaving Faruq with far fewer options to attack with.

Not to mention the back-to-back deception that Alexander managed to pull weighed heavy on the young man.

The innovative way Alexander had dealt with their cavalry, and then how he hid his own cavalry to lure the enemy in made Faruq understand he was facing no green commander.

Faruq himself was a highly decorated military commander, having won quite a few battles both against Adhanian nobles and other rebel tribes who lived inside Kuleef but had their loyalties constantly shifting between Adhnaia and their own chieftains.

So felt qualified to say judge that Alexander was a good commander.

'What more has he got?' He wondered.

"Tha...that...how...arggh," Ural too was feeling a similar sensation.

It was supposed to be an easy victory, something they would use as a stepping stone to gain political and military accolades, but now, within the few minutes they had started the battle, they had lost about 6,500 horses and 6,5000 men.

It was a horrendous loss.

And it made Ural shiver at the thought of what else Alexander had hidden under his sleeve.

While Faruq, who was a far more mentally resilient commander squashed these similar to Ural thoughts after only a split second, reassuring himself by saying, 'These bumpkins were useless to begin with. Me and my men will be enough.'

"And if Alexander thinks his pathetic archers will be able to stop my camels, I will teach that fool why roses are dyed red."

The saying 'why roses are dyed red' was a phrase unique to Adhania

Adhania was famous for its beautiful flowers and the origin of the saying came from the fact that these roses would be seen growing over battlefields, particularly battlefields in vast swaths, almost dyeing the green field red.

This was due to all the fertile compost that would be added to it in the form of dead humans and horses.

But the people of Adhania saw the flowers as the crystallization of their blood spilled to defend their land.

And Faruq was determined to bleed Alexander dry.

"My lord, the soldiers are awaiting your command. Please give the order," While the two men were exchanging reports, a scout suddenly intruded on them to let them know that the infantry in the center was ready to charge.

"Yes, yes, let's start." And since time was wasting Faruq gave the command hurriedly, before turning to Ural and finishing their talk, "You go rest. We will take talk later."

Faruq after all had an army to conduct and perhaps if he hurried, we could rescue a part of Lord Nibraz's force, or at least he held a tiny bit of that hope against hope.

Thus he quickly left for the frontline, but not before reassuring this step-brother-in-law of his by raising his arms into the air and saying, "And don't worry. Remember we have the Jahal mercenaries. Victory will be ours."

Faruq's confident smile and the fearsome reputation of the mercenaries did alleviate most of Ural's concerns as he knew only simple archers would not be enough to stop these lethal warriors.

They moved too fast, and were adept at dodging arrow fire, while the on-foot archers were much more vulnerable to their counterfire.

"Mmmn, be careful," Ural thus nodded, though he just could not help but worry.

'*Sigh*', I hope these two tricks are the only tricks under Alexander's belt,' Ural said to himself, as he dragged himself to his tent to get some rest.

He doubted he would be able to participate in today's battle or any battle for that sake in the near future, and thus decided to get his wounds checked out by the doctors his father had sent with him.

While he had ordered one of his deputies to try and gather the scattered men, treat the wounded, and if possible restore the cavalry unit for one last charge.

Though Ural held little hope for the last command.

'Oh Ramuh! I hope my ribs are not too badly banged,' He thus decided to concentrate on that.

While Ural basically retired from the battlefield, Faruq was busy giving out battle orders, commanding,

"The center will attack the enemy's center."

"Lord Liakit have your archers attack the right flank along with Azab."

"Lord Nyantim have your slingers attack the left flank along with Jabad."

Faruq launched these directives in rapid succession, intending to overwhelm Alexander's flanks using sheer numbers before outflanking the infantry.

Because even after losing 3,500 combat units, Faruq still had the number advantage.

And it was by quite a lot.

For instance, Alexander's left flank of 5,000 would be attacked with 10,000 troops, double their numbers.

While Alexander's right flank would be attacked by an almost similar number of 9,000 troops,

And only time would tell whether these green recruits, peasant levies would be able to hold on against the professional soldiers sent their way, at least until Alexander's infantry had managed to weaken the center enough to execute their plan.

The center of Faruq's army, consisting of compact phalanx units slowly but steadily crossed the kilometer of open field, their synchronized marching footsteps producing the fateful music of imminent bloodshed, their long spears pointing pitilessly at their enemies until finally they made contact.

"Shoot!" The front legion commanders shouted the moment the enemy had gotten in pilum range of about 20 meters, raining a hail of impending death of short spears on them.

Thud, *Thud*, *Arggh*, *Grgghh*

And Faruq's phalanx reacted to this attack the only way they knew they could, by raising their shields to take cover.

Their commanders had taught them of this novel attack, who themselves had gotten it from Amenheraft.

But the pilum was not a simple javelin that was designed to only kill the enemy.

Its primary role was far more insidious, which was destroying the enemy shield by impaling itself into it.

And a phalanx unit without its shield was no phalanx unit.

So for these peasant levies, this realization had a huge psychological effect, as many stopped their march literally meters away from their enemy to try to yank out the pilum, only to find that the shaft it was attached to snapped when they tried, leaving the metal still embedded in the shield.

While others literally had the pilum pierce their shield and arm together, making just holding the shield hurt like hell, much less fight with it.

Just from the way these soldiers reacted, the quality between these levies, and Amenhearft's battle-hardened troops could be seen, who had reacted much more calmly when faced with this new weapon, and the injured simply retreated to the back and let their fresh, uninjured comrades take their place.

And that was done by troops who had no idea about the weapons, but simple battlefield experience had allowed them to come up with the solution on the spot, whereas these 'trained' soldiers, who knew it was coming were seen fumbling.

It went to just show the real level of training these men had received.

"Charge!"

And these conscripts were offered no respite from their enemies, who immediately after launching their two volleys of the pilum, the front three legions charged.

The soldiers ducked their heads behind their shields and run towards the incoming wall of spears, using it to push away the spiked stick to the side or up, and getting in between the spear and the spear holder.

And then the brutal melee began, as individual groups of three to four attacked their opposing part, trying to strike them down.

The legionaries used their shields to stave off the spear thrusts still coming from the 2nd and 3rd rows of the phalanx while using their short, much more maneuverable in close quarters melee swords to thrust and stab at the phalangites.

And it was not only the humans they targeted, sometimes they would intentionally strike the opposing shields themselves, trying to make the hand holding them too numb to properly react to subsequent attacks.

While the really skilled ones would try to do a parry, swinging their shield away from them the moment a spear struck it, deflecting the blow, and creating an opening for them to get a stab in.

Or if that was too hard for you, there was always the good old shield bash, where soldiers would just use their shield to hit the opponent.

And the phalangites were no slouches either.

They would retaliate against these attacks by using their spear's greater range to keep the legionaries at bay and then try and slip through the cracks in their defenses to get in a hit by employing various feints and fakes.

The entire fight in the middle was a brutal, primal clash, where none gave an inch to the others, and tried their level best to kill one another.

Chapter 422 The Flanks

Each row of legionary was designed to fight for 10 - 15 minutes, until the soldiers became tired, whereupon the captain (500 men commander) would blow a wooden whistle, and the legionnaires would take one step to their right, while their comrades immediately behind them would step forward to fill their previously occupied space, and immediately start engaging the enemy.

While at the same time, the tired troops would take a step back, and with their comrades protecting their backs, the troops would turn back and be able to safely retreat to the back, letting the whole cycle continue.

And in this way, entire companies and even the entire legion can be seamlessly switched without having to disengage with the enemy, enabling an army to fight for hours without tiring, with individual soldiers maybe fighting a total of 10-15 minutes per battle.

And this was a huge morale boon for especially the untrained peasants who just had to grit their teeth and hang on for this short amount of time, with the knowledge that after then they will be free.

A luxury that unfortunately the opposing phalanx could not afford.

This was because phalanxes were compact units with no gaps between the men and the formation primarily worked by grinding through the opposing infantry, with the front rows sticking out their spears, and the other rear rows literally shoving them forward, thus drilling a bloody path through the enemy army.

And in such a formation, front-line replacements only occurred when someone died or got injured, meaning a phalanx lost morale much more quickly than a legion formation the former had all its casualties concentrated on one spot risking a rout of the front lines, whereas the legionary could spread out its death evenly throughout the entire formation.

And not only that, a phalanx unit also got weaker much more quickly than a legionary system as it had no way to cycle its rows, which was also why Alexander created that custom-made troop-switching technique.

Of course, it needed to be said that it was not like the phalanx unit had no redeeming qualities.

In a straight-up front melee, a phalanx was the superior attacking formation, their spears' greater range posing a great threat to the legionaries equipped with short swords.

And they did have a way to rotate their entire unit, bringing in fresh new meat to replace the tired ones, though it was nowhere near as efficient as the legionary system.

Thus the two troop formations decided to duke it out, to see which was the superior one, as they engaged in brutal combat ceaselessly for hours with no signs of it stopping.

While Alexander's center was rock solid at the moment, his flanks appeared far shakier when facing the ruthless mercenaries and the ranged units, at least initially.

The Jahal mercenaries wanted to start the attack like they always did, with a melee charge, because even if the crossbowmen were protected by a row of stakes, sometimes, if the troops were unmotivated enough, there was a chance they could break even during that, fearing the animals would be able to jump for the narrow ditch.

And it especially worked for them because they rode camels, which to many were exotic creatures, and most had no idea of their capabilities.

Perhaps they could really assail the fortifications, many thought.

And with that hope the Jahal mercenaries lined up their camels ready to charge, just seeing which some of the cowardly crossbowmen felt their knees weaken.

But fortunately, on the left flank, Menicus was there to hold the boat steady.

"You coward punks! What are you afraid of?" Look behind you! We have already killed ten thousand men. And lost not one!" He pointed his finger to the trapped charioteers who were being slaughtered to boost morale.

And seeing this great evidence of victory, the left flank calmed down and steadily pointed their weapons at the lined-up cavalry.

Shoo, *Shoo*, Shoo*,

And since the mercenaries were already within the 200 meters range of the large crossbows, the men had no reason to not greet them, letting out an initial volley of bolts.

"What! How are they shooting from so far?" And as the bolts completed the arch and descended upon the mercenaries, they were stunned by the range, barely having the time to raise their light shields to protect themselves.

This was because normally bows of this time had a max range of 80m to 100m.

And though the arrows had lost most of their powers in their flight, simply pinging off the mercenaries' leather and wooden bucklers and dealing minimum damage, their effectiveness against the psychology of the mercenaries was far greater.

"Darm, those archers are gonna be a problem. Charge! Let us try to do a charge!" Azab shouted, hoping that the enemy had low morale.

And thus, even through the arrow fire, which was relatively light due to the long reloading speed of the crossbows, the mercenaries quickly made up the distance and were just 50 meters from their target with their spears pointed and ready to go.

But that was where they encountered another one of Alexander's nasty tricks, the caltrops.

Bleat, *Bleat*, *Bleat*,

As the metal spikes pierced into the soft feet of the camel, the animals reacted violently, buckling and swerving to the sides in an attempt to avoid the painful sensation, which caused a cascading effect across the entire lines, causing many deaths in the process, and destroying the momentum of the charge.

"Haha, see that! See that you punks! That is the lord you are fighting for. Now shoot! What are you standing there for? Shoot!" Menicus encouraged his soldiers, as the green recruits finally gained the courage to stand their ground.

Alexander knew that his right flank was the weakest part of his army, one which was particularly green, and so had placed his most experienced commander Menicus there,

And it appeared Alexander was right in his judgment, as the old man had the combination of strictness and friendliness to make these peasants unite under a common cause.

While Menicus rejoiced in his success, Azab was livid, shouting, "Fuck! How do they have so many spikes? Has that Jakqum used every bit of iron in Zanzan?"

Alexander had peppered the front 50 meters of both his flanks in a field of caltrops hidden among the grass, something the riders missed.

And though Azab was no stranger to caltrops, in his experience they would only be used sparingly, in choke points and narrow passages.

Because steel was bloody expensive and short in quantity.

And so seeing this huge area covered with it was something completely novel to him.

In fact, Alexander had wanted to do the same for his center but found that employing caltrops over such a huge area would be a waste.

Because caltrops were really only useful against cavalry, while the infantry could simply use their feet to push avoid the obstacles, or simply use their hands to pick it.

Which they would be free to do as just as the caltrop field prevented the enemy from approaching Alexander, Alexander was also prevented from approaching them.

And this was the very thing that was happening right now as finally the archers reached the left flank of Alexander, and some of them started clearing out the obstacles as others provided covering fire.

The Jahal mercenaries too recovered from their initial debacle, the speed at which they did showing their experience and expertise, and started returning counterfire.

They attacked in waves, with multiple groups of ten riders charging and circling the stationary crossbowmen, lobbing out barrage after barrage of arrow fire as each line of mercenaries who exhausted their arrows would be followed up by the next wave, thus keeping up constant pressure.

While the preceding riders would go back, restock their supply, and come back, just creating a constant storm of arrows.

It was a brutal tactic that would eat away at any army, no matter how trained or well-disciplined it was, as they would be eventually chipped away if they had no way to strike back.

If the infantry tried to charge, the much faster mobile cavalry would be able to just run away, and might even take advantage of the out-of-formation infantry to charge and break through them.

And if they tried to use archers to counter them, its efficacy was doubtful.

Because the archers would be stationary while the mercenaries were mobile, meaning the former's accuracy was dismal compared to the latter.

And then there was the fact these mercenaries had a range of around 80- 100 meters, a bit better than the archers of this time.

And the way that the weak bows of this time, made even weaker by their smaller size, necessitated by their need to be able to be used mounted, were able to accomplish that was by virtue of the mount's speed.

The running motion of the camels would impart some speed to the arrows which would enable them to just outrange their counterpart.

And this was the greatest secret of the Jahal mercenaries, the secret sauce behind their invincible status.

Which was why Azab was so distressed when he witnessed the insane range of the crossbow.

And this fear proved to be correct, as even when the crossbowmen were outnumbered 2 to 1, using their superior range, Alexander's men could hit more of the Jahal mercenaries and the opposing archers than they could hit back, while at the same their pre-prepared pavises allowed them to shield them against arrows much better than their counterpart.

And thus that part of the battlefield too reached a stalemate for the time being.

Chapter 423 An Uneasy Stalemate (Part-1)

The battle ranged on from the morning till midday, with no end in sight.

The soft glow of the spring sun turned harsh and hot by this time, making both sides sweat profusely as many a parched throat cried over for a sip of water, but was immediately squashed by the neverending bloodlust to not give the enemy an inch.

For the moment, neither side appeared to show any sign of budging.

In the meantime, Alexander's left flank had been almost drowned out in arrows, with the surrounding soil looking like it had been planted with wooden arrows like it was some kind of cash crop.

But even through all the blizzard of hailfire, the crossbowmen still held, taking refuge behind their pavises most of the time and only sneaking their head out to launch their shots, before quickly again ducking behind their protective screen to rest and reload.

The whole thing appeared like a game of cat and mouse, as the mercenaries and the archers tried to catch the crossbowmen between their transitions, timing their volleys accordingly, while the crossbowmen would try to aim, fire, and duck as quickly and with as much accuracy as they could.

But still, for both sides, most of the arrows they fired missed.

While in Alexander's case, many were stopped by embedding themselves into the large shields in front of the crossbowmen, until there were a few with so many arrows stuck to them that when the lines were rotated, the fresh new men would come up with their own pavises to replace the ones in the frontlines because they would look more like wooden porcupines rather than solid defensible shields.

The fact that a solid slab of wood, plated with copper could be basically destroyed using just arrows was a phenomenon that had to be seen to be believed.

But even with this impressive display of lethality, still, when some arrows did manage to find their target, especially on Alexander's side, it was not like it was not an instant kill.

Because arrows were not bullets.

They were primarily meant as a suppressive weapon, used to make the enemies keep their heads down, while the other parts of the army could do their job unhindered.

The primary reason for this was because by the time the arrow managed to penetrate the chainmail and linen thorax of the crossbowmen, there was little penetrating power left over to deal much damage, most time dealing flesh wounds, or at best a broken bone.

Certainly painful, but usually not deadly, and many times not even enough to stop the man from continuing to fight.

But while the heavily armored crossbowmen took these blows quite well, and the lightly armored but mobile Jahal mercenaries had no problem holding the line, the archers under Lord Liakit were not so lucky.

Because they were lightly armored, had only small shields, and stationary units.

Lord Liakit had not bothered to equip his men properly to save on cost, and it was coming back to bite him now.

The accurate, long-ranged crossbow attacks proved very deadly for his men, and even though only 2,000 crossbowmen engaged 5,000 of them, it was the outnumbering archers who were put on the back foot, unable to provide a proper response and thus forced to simply weather the arrow storm.

It appeared it was only a matter of time since these archers broke and ran.

That was the situation update for the left flank.

Now for the center units.

The fighting there was still going strong, though the intensity did seem to have slowed down a bit as time passed, with both sides beginning to tire after 4 hours of brutal melee. though the tiredness of the phalangites was becoming much more noticeable.

Many were seen visibly huffing and puffing and their thrusts appeared weaker and sluggish, and they much preferred to take refuge behind their large shields when attacked, rather than actively parry and answer back.

"Darm this strange formation. The enemy might be able to fight for weeks," One of the phalanx captains cursed under his breath looking at the smooth rotation of Alexander's troops, and seeing that the ferocity of the enemy's attack had really decrease even after so long, while they themselves were close to their breaking point.

Fights longer than 4 hours were possible for phalanxes, but usually there would be a rest in between for both of the equally exhausted sides to catch some breath, making it a contest of which side had the better trained and physically fit soldiers and see who could regain their stamina quickly.

They never faced anything like the continuous meat grinder currently being lobbed against them.

But what could they do except grit their teeth and hope that the enemy broke first?

Or that other sections of the army was performing better.

And while the second hope had yet to manifest, the first hope was surprisingly closer than they thought.

Because just like they were cursing the rotation system, Alexander's commanders in the front lines were rejoicing about it.

"Darm, if we did not have this rotation system, we might not have lasted this long. Our casualties are really heavy." Was the consensus of the vast majority of frontline officers.

This was because in terms of sheer attacking power, a phalanx was really unparalleled, and even when Alexander tried to even the playing field using the pilum and taking some of their shields, it was still not enough.

Because there were rows after rows of the spear which the legionaries found it hard to penetrate, and hence the ratio of casualties was actually still on Faruq's side.

Thus if Alexander had not managed to distribute the number of wounded throughout his entire army, and if Alexander's units did not have much deeper lines (20 rows as opposed to the phalanx's 16) which made them believe they had more backup and thus gave them more courage, perhaps the lines would have still held, but they would never have been able to weaken the enemy enough to commence their plan.

Of course, it is important to state that a phalanx might also be not able to do critical damage to the legionary.

Because that was not the primary job of a phalanx.

A phalanx's job was not to cause a mass route by killing enough enemies.

But it was either to poke and prod them enough and make them believe they could not hurt the opposing side and they were just delaying the inevitable by choosing to resist, which could cause them to scatter.

Or to use their spears to keep pushing the enemy back until they were up against a natural barrier, or their own camp, at which point they would have nowhere to go and scatter.

Or to keep the enemy pinned down until the allied cavalry could outflank the enemy in the classic hammer and anvil strategy most famously used by Alexander.

And thus a kind of stalemate was reached in the center, Alexander's men working to weaken and erode the opposing side while trying to minimize casualties for themselves until the higher-ups decided it was time to deal the final blow.

Lastly, there was the right flank, where things were going about as well as in the left flank.

Melodias was in charge of this sector, and he faced half of the mercenaries and 4,000 slingers.

These slingers of Lord Nyantim were his pride and joy, soldiers who were not trained but bought up in that lifestyle from birth, and they were one of Adhania's deadliest fighting force.

These people wore little to no armor, and used lead balls as their projectiles, giving them vastly greater range than the weak bows of this time, at around 300 to 400 meters.

And they were highly accurate adding to that, the most experienced ones able to make his shot go through a small ring at a range of 150 meters, with a rate of fire of seven times a minute, making them one of the most feared units of the battlefield.

A shot from them would get your teeth knocked out, eyes smashed, and if one was really unlucky even the throat punched.

These slingers carried three slings, one around their head, one around their waist, and the third in their hands, with different slings being used to hit targets at different distances.

The longer the sling, the larger distance it could cover.

And their ammunition was stone, clay and in this battle lead, with some even having holes drilled in them to give off a buzzing sound, reminiscent of an agitated wasp, making it one of the earliest form of psychological warfare.

And often, these bullets contained inscriptions and images.

The most common were the images of a lightning bolt, a snake, or a scorpion.

While some bullets also had inscriptions such as: "Take this", "Catch", "Ouch", or "Get pregnant with this."

The only drawback of the slingers were their long training time, requiring literally decades to master the art, making each loss a heart-rendering one.

And Lord Nyantim was experiencing that pain very frequently, as some lucky crossbow shots were managing to slowly whittle the armorless slingers, as the two weapons had similar range.

And slowly over time, Alexander's armor, pavises. and the general greater lethality of the bolts was starting to eke out a lead while at the same time, the slingers were experiencing a shortage of projectiles because the cheap stake lord did not think they would be such a long, drawn-out showdown.

In this way things were overall going pretty well for Alexander.

Chapter 424 An Uneasy Stalemate (Part-2)

"My lord, Lord Nyantim reports that his losses are too great. So he is pulling back his forces." Finally unable to bear the losses, the commander of the slingers decided to pull his men back and sent a herald to Faruq to relay that.

A key point of notice here would be how Lord Nyantim had not asked for permission from Faruq before doing this, which was in much contrast to Alexander's command structure where his word reigned supreme.

But that was natural as Faruq's army had a much looser hierarchy than Alexander's.

And it was here the coalition's drawbacks started to show itself.

"Dammit!" Faruq gritted his teeth and cursed hearing this, but limited himself to only that.

Because he did not have jurisdiction over those forces, and so could only accept their withdrawal, even if he thought it was unreasonable.

Though in fairness, the slingers had truly suffered badly, losing close to 300 of their men, or about 7% of their total force being dead or wounded.

Which might not sound like a lot, but for an elite, taking literally decades to train unit, this kind of casualty was eye-watering.

And besides, most of them had already run out of ammunition by now and had had to resort to using the stones and pebbles dotted around the field as makeshift projectiles.

And that worked to a certain extent, but since these did not have the same range as their lead bullets, the slingers had to move closer to their target, thus exposing them to a greater volume of accurate crossbow fire.

"Dammit. I should not have skipped on the lead bullets!" Lord Nyantim frustratingly gritted his teeth as he withdrew his force.

Lead was not cheap, and lobbing masses of it towards the enemy seemed to him like hurling money.

And as he had expected the Jahal mercenaries to do all the heavy lifting, he had only bought with him a limited amount of ammunition.

But even that would not have been a problem if not for that accursed weapon, the crossbow.

A thought that Lord Liakit who lead the archers shared fervently with his compatriot, which was expressed by the message he sent to Faruq a little while later after the slingers started pulling back.

"These new cursed bows are too much for my men to handle. I have to save them. My deepest apologies."

The archers that the man had bought were specially trained, and were used specifically during assaulting walls to suppress the wall defenders while the infantry carried out ladder rushes, and thus losing them in an open field was not sustainable for the lord.

But this did not mean he was a coward either.

The man had taken more than 600 losses as dead or seriously wounded, double of Nyantim's losses in actual numbers, and one and a half times percentage-wise, and was originally still ready to fight.

But when he saw the slingers leave the battle, he figured it was unlikely that this battle would be won, at least today, and thus wisely decided to pull out instead of suffering unnecessary casualties.

When Faruq received this report, contrary to the angry cuss he had let out previously, he only pursed his lips and nodded to the scout, acknowledging he had gotten the report, while his mind was busy concentrating on trying to come up with his next move.

The two armies were now basically evenly matched in terms of number and without a way to take out those new types of archers, Faruq could not think of a solution.

'Azab tells me that the flanks might be weak. Hopefully we can break through them soon,' Thus Faruq could only rely on his elite troops to grind through the enemy.

For the young man still held out hope for victory.

But soon a herald came to him showing that the heavens would not permit him that luxury of waiting and praying.

"My lord, the center is buckling. We can't hold on for long. What are your orders?"

In keeping with the line, 'when it rains it pours,' it appeared had Faruq's troubles got much worse, as the once solid line had started to buckle, and was starting to appear like waves, wobbling and shaking as it smashed against the rock that was Alexander's infantry.

Finally, the legionaries had managed to make the enemy reach their exhaustion and the stress from the brutal melee to near the peak, and if steps were not soon taken to reinforce the center, it was only a matter of time before it broke and initiated a mass rout.

"..." Faruq gave himself some time to think before trying to immediately answer the man, while internally he cursed, 'Strange tactic, strange bows, strange weapons, strange formation. Dammit Alexander, you witch!'

The strange tactic referred to the flaming ropes,

The strange bows referred to the crossbows,

The strange weapons referred to the pilum and

The strange formation referred to the legionary formation.

Faruq had certainly noticed how efficiently that particular type of formation was able to change their rows, and it left a bittersweet feeling in him.

Sweet because as a militarily focused man, this new type of formation left his heart marveling at the much better infantry technique.

But bitter because it was being used against him.

While he called Alexander 'witch' because he felt the word wizard or sorcerer had a much more positive connotation.

And then, after failing to find any good solution except retreating, Faruq could only lampoon in his mind, 'This was supposed to be an easy fight. Now even losing with dignity might be hard. Dammit!'

Thus finally a while later he simply said, "Ask all the commanders to meet me. I will decide what to do after consulting them."

Faruq was ready to order a retreat if no solution could be attained.

"Yes, my lord." The scout gave a military salute, and a while later, the officers in charge of various fronts of the army saw themselves gathered around Faruq who was situated at the rear of the army's center.

Faruq quickly and succinctly explained to them the general situation of the front lines, and then turned to them to ask, "So what are your thoughts?"

Faruq would heed the advice of the majority..

"My lord, I suggest we retreat. These peasants are currently like scared rabbits and I have no idea when one of them will start running and others start to follow. Fucking sheep *thoo*." This was said unsurprisingly by the overall commander of the center army, who was really afraid of an imminent collapse.

Phalanxes usually could not fight for so long without resting a bit, especially not when faced with the kind of unrelenting barrage Alexander's men were dishing out.

But what was much more surprising was how he spat and degraded the brave men who fought for him, reflecting the popular attitude of the nobles towards their peasants.

And once this opinion was raised, it soon gained traction, as many other nobles commanding smaller parts of the army joined in to express their support.

Because none could see the enemy break before them..

'Dammit, is there no other way?' Faruq cursed in his heart.

And this was not because he was ashamed to retreat for fear of being called an incompetent commander.

Instead, it was because if they retreated today, he could see no way of doing things differently tomorrow that would guarantee them victory then, especially when they would have a less net number advantage as of now, for some troops will inevitably be lost during the withdrawal.

"Retreating is an option." Faruq acknowledged with a nod, and then turned to his mercenary leader with the question, "What do you think Azab?"

Faruq was basically asking if this experienced mercenary leader had any alternative ideas.

And fortunately for him, it seemed the answer was yes.

"Young master, I have told you that the enemy's left flank is the weakest. So what I propose is to gather all our cavalry, and charge down their flank, bypassing the archers to hit them from the rear. Because remember my lord, their infantry flanks are technically empty. The archers are about 500 meters in front."

The experienced mercenary had the sharp eyes to locate the weakness inevitably created by Alexander's strategy and was proposing they exploit it.

But the problem with that was immediately pointed out by the others.

"What! If the 5,000 Jahal mercenaries on our left went to reinforce the right, then the 5,000 enemy archers there will be free to attack our left flank. The collapse of our center will be immediate." They loudly cried, making a very reasonable assumption.

And so the question now rose whether the Jahal mercenaries would be able to swing around Alexander's force and destroy them before their center would be able to demolish Faruq's forces.

And it was a gamble that the vast majority of the nobles were unwilling to take, a fact they very staunchly let it be known.

"No! No way. It is too dangerous. We do not agree." They said in the most clear-cut way possible.

Because if it worked, then all was well, but if it failed, it would be their men, peasants who were needed in their fields to lose their lives, while the mercenaries would be left relatively unscathed.

The nobles would be foolish to agree to such a lopsided tactic.

And so it appeared the group had reached a stalemate.

Chapter 425 Deadly Interlude

The vehement denial by the nobles was not just out of their desire to win the battle or because they cared about their men, but more so because in this strategy they carried an unproportionate greater amount of risk than Faruq.

They had far more to lose from this than Faruq.

And until that simple equation was much more equalized, they would not sanction this move.

This line of thought was not alien to Faruq who had been with the nobles long enough to understand this mindset.

So after a bit of thought, he proposed a compromise, "Then let us retreat for an hour or two and give the men some time to rest. In the meantime, we can figure out a solution."

But this idea sounded a bit weird to many because it seemed that Faruq was just ordering a retreat.

So the man in charge elucidated, "My lords, let me clarify. This is not the end of fighting for today. No, we will attack again. And we have to attack again today!"

Faruq repeated the last line to illustrate the importance as he went on to explain why, "Because the difference in power between us and Alexander will only shrink over time. So if we give him an entire day to rest all the losses we suffered today will mean nothing."

This last sentence made many commanders change their countenance because they soon understood Faruq was right.

They reasonably correctly guessed that Alexander's center had certainly taken a beating, even if it was not as much as theirs, it certainly had to be close.

And so letting them rest and recover a full day, and then attack with an even smaller force while expecting a better outcome would be foolish.

And the same thought process went with those 10,000 crossbowmen, who surely would be exhausted from firing so many shots, and frightened from being shot back so many times.

All humans had a break point after all.

So letting them rest would be also a bad idea.

As the various military commanders face color changed due to the realization dawning on them, that fact was not missed by the talented military leader, Faruq who capitalized on it by saying, "Of course, the best would be to strike now and here. Give the enemy no respite. But it seems that is not possible."

Faruq had a regretful tone voice to his voice, a fake one he created to bait the nobles into agreeing to the operations right now.

But these nobles were not verdant chickens to the art of politics, and many of them put up an equally regretful face to say, "*Sigh*", yes, if that was only possible. But these peasants are really unreliable. We can't trust them."

The nobles skillfully managed to pass the blame on the soldiers who had been literally fighting tooth and nail for them for the last 4 hours.

"So, how does my lord wish to order the retreat?" As any imminent attack was put on hold, and the retreat strategy adopted, the question arose of how to implement it.

Because while planning for a fight might be hard, fighting harder, it was running away from it that was the hardest.

Especially if one wanted to minimize his casualty while escaping.

"Easy. The second half of the infantry will act as the rear guard while the first half breaks contact and runs. And my Jahal mercenaries will stand by ready to provide backup in case of unforeseen circumstances."

The 'unforeseen circumstances' could only really refer to one thing, Alexander's infantry chasing the fleeing soldiers.

And in this case Faruq actually really hoped that happened, for there was nothing more delicious for a cavalry than infantry out of formation.

Because remember, it was not as if the Jahal mercenaries were only ranged units.

They also had the ability to charge. I with their spears.

Thus if they were lucky enough and Alexander's men were particularly unruly enough, it might be the predator that could be turned into prey.

Perhaps that one blunder within Alexander's leadership would enable Faruq to turn this undesirable position into an instant victory.

That was Faruq's hope anyway. I

The nobles were a bit surprised by how Faruq made the retreat sound as if it was any other military maneuver.

But his confident demeanor and body language made them accept the plan without bickering and hence soon trumpets began to blare all around Faruq's part of the army.

It of course signaled the order to retreat.

"Haha, running! They are running!"

"We won! Thank Gaia we won!"

"Lord Alexander! Glory to Lord Alexander!"

And just as the soldiers making up the noble coalition breathed a sigh of relief and felt a breath of exhaustion leave their bodies, the opposite mood permeated the other side, Alexander's side.

Happiness, elation, joy, relief, and all such positive feelings washed over them as these men cheered and rejoiced seeing the opposing sides drop most of their spears and turn tail and run.

The reason why the men dropped their spears was because it was much easier to turn a 180 without the risk of skewering others if you did not carry a pointy object as tall as a one-story house.

And while the nobles' soldiers tried to run as fast as they could without causing a stampede, some of Alexander's men did try to get a last-second kill by chasing after them.

And many did get a lucky backstab, some even dealing critical damage killing some of the fleeing men.

But overall the number was pretty small, because the moment the rout was initiated, loud voices started to ring out from all across Alexander's sides, with the officers urging his men the following, "Stop! Don't chase! Don't get out of formation!"

This coordinated response came about as pre-battle Alexander had repeatedly urged his officers to not give chase to the fleeing enemy, citing, 'They have cavalry while we do not. Meaning at any moment they have the ability to turn around and charge, destroying us. Do not risk turning victory into defeat.'

And it seemed the officers had heeded that command, as being demonstrated now, much to Faruq's disappointment.

'A cautious commander abhorrent to risks.' He judged Alexander's fighting style as he noticed the soldiers being discouraged to give chase, thus allowing the levies to march in file while a part formed a solid line to guard against possible attacks.

But since that did not happen, the withdrawal was mostly smooth.

And seeing this, Faruq then decided to return to his camp to have a chat with the lords.

'I hope these incels have shits for brains and are not totally empty,' He thought as tried to come up with the exact way he was going to convince them to go along with the plan he had come up with.

And he knew it was likely not going to be easy.

While on the other side of the camp, there was a general feeling of ease and release of tension, which affected all parts of the army and along all its branches, ranging from the grass roots to all the way to the highest echelons.

"Haha, congratulations my lord. We have won!" Grahtos wanted to be the first to say these words to Alexander.

But that man was the only one who did not share similar sentiments as the rest of the army.

Because he felt it was still premature.

"The enemy's retreat is too orderly. Meaning they still have some fight left in them." Alexander crunched up his eyebrows as he said so, feeling Faruq gave up too easily, and further went on to dash Grahtos's cheerful mood by predicting, "So they will likely again fight us tomorrow. Or even today if they are desperate enough,"

Though his last line was just a throwaway statement, meant to cover all the bases.

He seriously did not think they would attack again.

"Ahh.." Grahtos was a bit thrown back by Alexander's lack of enthusiasm and doom forecast and quickly tried to brush it off, "Haha, my lord, it is good to be cautious. But the men at the front really have no strength. Both us and them. So launching an attack today is impossible, And tomorrow's attack we will deal tomorrow."

Grahtos like Alexander too shared the belief that the battle for today was over, but much vehemently, and though he could not say if there would be a battle tomorrow too, he was very confident in their chances.

Because the enemy would have far fewer resources to throw at them tomorrow than today.

So if they could survive today, why could they not do an easier task tomorrow?

And though Alexander would not openly admit it due to fear of the army growing complacent, he too shared those thoughts.

He was very confident about winning.

But it was a level of confidence that would have been seriously challenged if he could hear Faruq's proposed plan to the nobles.

"My lords, here is what I suggest," He said as aloud as he laid out his plan.

"The center will again attack the center pinning the enemy down."

"At the same time, the 10,000 Jahal mercenaries will attack the enemy's left flank and try to break through while the slinger and archers cover our right flank."

"And lastly, we will have Ural's cavalry swing around the enemy's right flank in a double pincer attack."

"So even if Alexander deploys his reserve to deal with one side, the other side will be able to break through."

It was a deadly plan.

Chapter 426 Faruq's Millitary Council

Faruq's plan was bold but actually quite feasible if he could get the others to agree with him.

The keyword being 'if'.

A phenomenon perfectly demonstrated the very next second by Lord Nyantim, "My men have suffered too much today. That new kind of bow is too much to stand against. Sorry!"

The nobleman saw no point in risking his elite troops for the sake of others.

"Right. I stand with Lord Nyantim too," And Lord Liakit, who commanded the archers expressed solidarity with his compatriot, sharing the same thoughts as him.

The two lords clear opposition made Faruq's plan untenable, and the man could not help but lament.

'Tssh! If had known before, I would have placed Azab and his men on the right, and the archers and slinger on the left. That way, the enemy's right could be pinned, while Azab broke through the weaker right flank.' Faruq regretted his initial decision to split his mercenaries and felt he had missed his chance at an early victory.

And then lampooned that now he had to grovel at these people.

Though in fairness, splitting one's cavalry to attack both flanks simultaneously is a classic technique, meant to clip both wings of the army while protecting the infantry's flank.

And if Faruq did do that, though there was the chance that the Jahal mercenaries would be able to overcome Alexander's left flank and his reserves to win ultimate victory, there was also the chance of the slingers and archers routing before that happened, thus exposing their infantry's own flanks to crossbow fire.

That would be a disaster.

But it was a gamble Faruq was willing to take.

And so, as time was in short supply, he got the point straight away.

"I understand your concern my lords. But this attack will not last long, at best an hour. So your men will be safe." Faruq reassured.

But was quickly interjected by the other lords, who wanted to rebut, "Still, that seems too..."

"We will double your reward." Like he was interrupted, Faruq too decided to interject the two lords' whining and simply decided to throw money at the problem instead of doing into long, tedious arguments.

After all, DJose was wealthy enough to double the reward they promised each of the nobles for cooperation.

And Faruq repeated the statement to make sure the others had not misheard him.

"Let me say it again. If you agree to send your men today, just for an hour, I promise whatever royalties you were promised, I will double it. Do you agree?"

"That... " The two lords looked at each other as greed grew and floured inside them, as they were both certainly tempted by this, but then they remembered it was DJose who was footing the bill, not Faruq.

"You do not have that kind of authority to make such promises," Hence they stated, exercising caution when it came to trust in the man's word.

But Faruq was ready for this, as he confidently said,

"You should know how much my father wants to kill Alexander. I assure you he will pay it if you explain the difficulties of the situation." and then even provided an alternate method of payment, "And even if he doesn't, I will let you sack Zanzan, and make up the difference from there."

Faruq was ready to pay through the nose to win this battle as illustrated by his decisiveness and determination.

Because this battle was politically that important to him.

His father greatly trusted him to win it, with rich rewards promised, and though no threat of punishment was made, the implicit warning was there.

Faruq could not afford to mess this up.

Not if he wanted to take over Kuleef as an illegitimate child.

While Faruq made his offer, the two lords tried very hard to balance the cost vs benefit of the offer.

But ultimately the upside of the offer won out.

The two men reasoned that since they had already suffered large losses, a kind of sunk cost fallacy had set in, making them gravitate toward the offer to try and recoup their initial investment.

So they at last agreed with a nod, saying, "Okay, we will do it."

But not before adding a kind of disclaimer statement, "But let us say beforehand, we cannot hold on for long. So whatever you want to do, you have to do it fast."

"Sure," Faruq kept his answer short and curt.

For he believed the maneuver would be short and decisive.

"I do not want double the reward. But I want the Jihsan mines," Next it was Ural's time to open his mouth, and it was not just wide, but a gaping maw.

The amount of greed expressed in that demand was something that only those in the know-how would be able to truly appreciate.

The mines that Ural wanted was a huge copper mine that lay over disputed territory between the Marquiss and Pasha, and there had even been covert skirmishes between the two great houses over this vastly lucrative mine, even though they were really good allies and even relatives.

So for Ural to want this was preposterous.

Because no one but Pasha DJose could make that deal.

"Is it your that are ribs broken or is it your head?" Faruq was incensed by this demand.

He initially had a favorable view of Ural because of how quickly he had come to this emergency military meeting despite the injuries.

But now it appeared it was just to make fun of him.

Faruq thus turned his body away from Ural frustratingly and decided to commence the plan without him.

After all, Ural was not as important as the other two who would be needed to hold the flanks, and though having Ural would significantly boost their chances of success, he was not as critical as the other two.

If the two lords had demanded this, Faruq might have reconsidered, but not for Ural.

"Now, don't be so hasty, Faruq." But Ural was not turned off by this hostile display, as he kept calm and went to explain why he made such a ludicrous demand.

"I'm well aware how important this battle is to you. So tell me, are some mines worth risking Kuleef's throne over? And besides, don't you think it is unfair to use us to win the Pasha's throne for you without giving us the proper recompense, hmmm? "

Ural had a sly smile and oily tone of his voice as he said this, smugness overflowing from his face as he felt he had managed to grab Faruq by the balls using this insider information.

And as Faruq turned to face him, he had an intense urge to punch the guy.

"...Even if I wanted to give it to you, you know I do not have the power. So what do you really want?" Faruq icily said.

If he had jurisdiction over the mines, he would have truly given in to Ural's demand.

But Ural was really asking for the impossible.

"Then swear to the gods in front of all of us that you will hand it over to me once you have the power. I can wait," Ural suggested.

If Ural could get those mines not only would they be a boost to his territory, but the fact that it was him that got it would be a stellar mark on his political career.

He would be a fool to let this opportunity pass.

".....: Faruq narrowed his eyes as his head worked overtime to calculate the pros and cons, and finally the ambitious young lord, gave the most logical answer,

"Okay. With the gods as the witness, and the people in here as guarantors, I hereby swear to transfer the Jihsan mines as soon as I take the position of Pasha of Kuleef. If I fail to fulfill this promise, let the curse of the heavens be upon me."

There was no need for complicated paperwork or legal procedures as Faruq said this, because in this period such a swear was far more binding than any legal contract and judicial systems of the modern times.

Such practices were deeply ingrained into the cultural norms of the society, and so when Faruq swore the deal, Ural was pretty confident in its bindingness.

"Haha, good, good brother-in-law," Ural smiled heartily hearing this, ecstatic at having finally secured this lucrative territory his family had been fighting since the time of their grandfather.

And then, to truly show his appreciation, the injured man even walked over to give Faruq a bear hug and laughed and said, "Haha, don't worry, we will not embarrass you too much when you do transfer the deeds. We will just say you gave it as a gift to your nephew. You know Zaisha is pregnant again, hahaha," as Ural again broke into hearty laughter.

Zaisha was Fatrak's sister and born from Djose's main wife,

And since she was a legitimate child, an illegitimate child like Faruq had barely talked to her outside of formal occasions, and even there the conversation was strictly restricted to hi and hellos.

So to propose that Faruq would be giving such a lucrative piece of territory of a child from a woman he barely knew the name of and nothing else was ludicrous.

And thus it was really Ural's way of poking fun at Faruq.

Faruq bore with the insults for now, because winning was the most important thing now, but also darkly thought, 'The wind does not only blow in one direction, Ural. My chance will come.'

People had killed for less after all.

Chapter 427 No Respite Interlude

"You seem pretty sure I will get Kuleef's throne. What if I don't" Faruq icily answered back to Ural's joke.

This was certainly possible as though Djose's main wife had no male children or unmarried daughters, Faruq still had a lot of brothers, both younger and older than him, all of who could be viable candidates.

Not to mention it was not impossible for Djose's main wife to conceive another main heir.

The woman was still in her mid-thirties.

"Hahaha, well if you can't then that's it. But I'm confident in you. So, think of this as me investing in you, brother-in-law," Ural spoke like a true politician, even shamelessly drawing familiar blood to smooth over the wound he had created by asking for so much.

Faruq had never heard Ural call him his brother-in-law as he was too down the pecking order then, and usually, the address would be previously attributed to Fatrak, who, as he was the heir to Kuleef could interact with heirs of other noble houses as their peers, while Faruq would be left to the wayside.

But instead of being happy at the close address, the circumstances under which it was said, only made Faruq's skin crawl.

He did not want to be associated with his guy and so he only turned his head.

But his mood turned even more sour right after hearing the next words drift into his ears.

"Ahem, my lord," Lord Liakit began with a slightly embarrassed cough, but still continued, "Now that we think about it, double might be a little too low for the risks we are taking.....We want four times."

The two men felt no shame when they decided to take advantage of one's ally, and instead really regretted they did not share territory with Djose, and so could not fleech some kind of land concession.

After all, money was good but not good as land.

"..." Faruq went past the stage of rage and anger and simply produced a stony face, glaring at the two lords who had decided they too wanted a piece of the meat with smoldering rage in his eyes.

'Well since I have drunk the poison, might as well drink the pot,' But the man was calm enough to still make rational judgments, and so in a cold voice responded,

"Fine! I will give you five times the amount. But only if we win."

"Hahaha, great, great!" The two lords readily cheered, believing the war was already in the bag.

Finally, done with convincing these parasites as Faruq would like to call them, Faruq at last finalized some last-moment strategies, and then turned to the leader of the Jahal mercenaries Azab, who had been mute up until now, to only say, "Everything will depend on you."

"Don't worry young master, my men are ready," Azab confidently replied.

He had fought wars harder than these.

And thus the order to reengage the enemy was given out as trumpets blared out signaling the restart of the conflict, which the tired soldiers could only forcibly accept.

So most of the soldiers who were sitting in the middle of the field, drinking water and resting reluctantly got up, bringing power back to their feet and arms as they picked up their shields and spears and under the barks of their officers got into formation, ready to charge.

'Sigh, again,' They tiredly thought.

But compared to Alexander's men, they were the lucky ones.

Because Alexander's thought that the enemy would not attack today was long ago proven wrong as he quickly noticed that though the enemy infantry had retreated to a distance of around 500 meters, the Jahal mercenaries had not.

Yes, Faruq had decided to keep these expert men in the field, lobbying arrows all across the front and keeping Alexander's men generally on edge.

These mercenaries not only attacked the flanks but also sometimes tried to charge the center, though they never committed to it, and so all of them were fake.

The reason for that being obvious, the flaming chains.

If not for that new weapons, the Jahal mercenaries would have been able to charge pretty confidently without any threat of arrow fire from the flanks because Alexander's center was 1.5 kilometers long, and his crossbowmen could cover only around 200 meters to 300 meters on either side, leaving a safe corridor of about a kilometer for the mercenaries.

Which was more than enough to demolish the center.

But since they could not, the mercenaries settled for harassing all the front lines units, making fake charges, shooting arrows, mocking their opposition, and generally agitating the enemy, all in an effort to frustrate the enemy.

And they succeeded in this because even though the mercenaries failed to do any real damage, Alexander's men still had to respond to their attacks by raising their shields and keeping in formation, not getting any rest.

This was because they had to be ready to respond in case this attack was the real one, or if the attack was indeed a fake one, but the experienced mercenaries decided to turn it into a real one sensing the enemy's weakness.

This, in this way, though Faruq's men got two hours of rest, Alexander's men got none and where Faruq's men got to recover some strength, Alexander's men got weaker and weaker over time.

With their only saving grace being the rotation system which mitigated much of the damage.

"Thank Gaia, we can rotate our soldiers, Without that the battle might have been already over," Grahtos breathed a tense breath of relief as he waited with nervous trepidation while the enemy readied themselves for the next round.

A feeling shared by all, from grass root soldiers to even Alexander.

'What are they planning?' As it was obvious the enemy planned to attack again, for the enemy soldiers had not retreated to their camp, Alexander tried to think of what the enemy could do by them himself in their shoes.

But he failed to think of anything that could seriously threaten him.

And this was because Alexander failed to take into consideration that the routed slinger, archers, and cavalry had reorganized themselves, and were ready to fight again.

Because according to him, those men were done and dusted, and not a threat anymore.

And so, finally unable to find an answer, he decided to take some precautions,

"Grahtos, the one thousand infantry we have," He drew the attention of his cavalry captain, and instructed him the following, "Have them mount some of the horses we have captured. In this way, whatever tricks the enemy has, we will be able to respond to it quicker."

These units will not be true cavalry with the barding (horse armor) and lances, but light cavalry, who would be also able to fight as dismounted infantry if needed.

"...Yes, my lord," Grahtos saw the creation of a fully mobile reserve as a very good plan, and so immediately complied.

And as this transition was going on, the mercenaries kept up their attack, sapping away Alexander's strength.

One might posit whether the mercenaries who were also denied the rest would also become tired.

And the answer was yes, they would, as riding on any mount was tiring, and shooting bows was one of the most exhausting things to do on any battlefield.

Every other action on the battlefield, whether it be thrusting spears, swinging swords, or using lances, nothing was as physically draining as drawing a bow.

Because it took a lot of strength.

This was very poorly reflected in video games, where usually, the dexterity stat was used when using bows, such as in the rogue class, while the strength stat was denominated to the fighter class using swords.

Whereas in reality it should have been the opposite, with swords requiring dexterity to skirt past the enemy's defense to stab him, while bows required great strength to pull back the string to launch the arrow.

And in the same vein, anyone who said a bow is a woman's weapon clearly had never touched a bow in his life.

Because it's far easier for females, who are generally weaker, to use a sword than wield a bow.

But ultimately these mercenaries were much more trained and experienced than Alexander's peasant levies, having literally decades of fighting wisdom ingrained in them, and so they were able to withstand much more punishment of the elements on the battlefield than Alexander's men.

This was a battle of endurance and a question of who could last longer.

And speaking of lasting long, the Jahal mercenaries seemed to have perfected the art of ammunition replenishment for their weapons, enabling them to stay on the battlefield for as long as they wished.

They did this by having a thousand (1,000) camels as mobile arrow carriers, with each beast able to carry 3,000 arrows, who would go around the battlefield and let the left riders refill their stocks then and there.

This not only meant the mercenaries could stay longer on the battlefield but also meant their own steeds would not tire as quickly as they did not need to make the long journey back to the supply wagons each time their quiver ran empty.

Whereas Alexander's own crossbowmen had their supply wagons to their rear, and arrow boys had to run to the frontlines to manually deliver the arrow.

The total number of which up until now being 1 million.

Blare, *Blare*, *Blare*

And amidst this resupply, did everyone on Alexander's side hear the call to restart the battle, as did Faruq's men, and thus the second round began.

Chapter 428 Alexander's Counter Deployment

The trumpet call made all of Alexander's infantry huddle together to brace for the inevitable impact, as soon the enemy phalanx was on them and a repeat of the previous encounter replayed itself.

As they had practiced, the legionaries threw their pilums once the enemy was in range, and then charged, intending to deal a heavy blow to the incoming enemy.

But this time the phalanx, having suffered once, adjusted to the situation much better, and effectively counterattacked, thus drawing another stalemate, where two giant bodies of men, wood, and steel meshed together to produce a pool of blood and gore.

'The same thing? What are they planning?' Alexander appeared confused at this one-trick pony-style attack.p'

But soon, his confusion began to turn into concern as they saw the slingers and archers whom he previously thought had been routed begun to make a comeback.

And both of the contingents, now totaling 8,000 saw themselves converge on his right flank, and started concentrating there, peppering the soldiers there in an intense shower of arrows and stones

There were now a total of 13,000 soldiers attacking Alexander's 5,000 men and it made the Zanzan lord think, 'Should I order some battalions in the left flank to attack the enemy infantry? That should force the enemy to divert some of the troops to reinforce that front.'

Alexander was thinking of ways to relieve some of the pressure on the right flank.

"Hold! Hold! Do not lose courage. Stay behind our shields and hold!" And while Alexander was thinking, Melodias was screaming at the top of his voice, as he sensed his flank weakening under the heavy attack.

They had been under on and off the arrow rain for over 6 hours, and the peasant crossbowmen seemed to be nearing their end limit.

And so, as the legion commander, Melodias called his herald to deliver the following messenger, "Tell, Lord Alexander, we can't hold on much longer. We need reinforcements!"

Here he was of course referring to the reserves.

But soon that messenger only came back with these words of reproachment, "Melodias, tell your men to keep their heads down and shoot calmly. The enemy can't break your shield, so what are you afraid of? Stand strong man!"

Alexander was a bit peeved that Melodias was calling for help so soon, and thus the angry rebuke.

And besides, Alexander would be foolish to send his reserves to a place the enemy had no way of breaching and the men were in no danger of being overrun.

So Alexander only scolded his general for failing to inspire courage and bravery in his men and then got about with sending his word to his left flank to attack the enemy infantry.

'What do you think I'm doing?' While Melodias could only sourly receive the message, before sending messengers to his offices down the chain of command urging them to inspire the troops and fight harder.

And thus soon cries like this began to drift out of Alexander's right flank,

"Fight! You beat them once, you can do it again."

"Haha, lads look these pansies are back for more. Fuck them up."

"Don't be afraid. Look at those cowards, they have arrows sticking out of their butts. Those cowards only know how to run."

The officers were trying their level best to raise the morale of their troops.

And soon the sector began to stabilize, though not for the reasons one might expect.

The stabilization had more to do with the fact that the Jahal mercenaries had begun to withdraw themselves from that front and seemed to be retreating than Melodias's and Alexander's actions.

"They are routing?" Alexander thought incredulously, as it seemed all too sudden.

Weren't they supposed to be this elite, almost indestructible monstrous cavalry?

And didn't they only start the second round?

Why were they running away so soon?

Something did not sit right with Alexander.

But on the other hand, as he thought about it a little longer, a rout was certainly possible.

This was because many times a rout did not happen gradually, but all of sudden, almost like a figurative landscape, as illustrated many times in history.

In those cases, an army would appear solid and strong, but then a few disillusioned soldiers would start running away at first, and then a few more others would follow, and then a few more, then many would follow until the whole army started routing.

Just like at the start of a landslide, first a few rocks would fall, then a bit of soil, then one or two trees, and then all of a sudden the entire mountain would seem to be dissolving away.

A horrifying sight.

And given that the mercenaries were fighting nonstop for six hours firing from regular bows, which was far more tiring than the crossbows, this horrible circumstance manifesting was certainly possible.

It would only require a few rogue, tired personnel, and a bit of luck.

So knowing this Alexander contemplated whether to use his reserves to fish for some kind of opportunity.

But just like Alexander had dashed Grahtos's jubilant cheer a few hours ago, it appeared the cavalry captain's turn to do the same had arrived as he decided to squash these ideas of Alexander.

"No, that is unlikely my lord," He responded to Alexander's theory about the mercenaries' routing.

And then proceed to give his explanation.

Grahtos pointed to the archers and slingers on their right flank and said, "See those men. They ran away from us just two hours ago. So they should have low morale even now."

"And so if they thought the scary, trained mercenaries on horseback were running away, they should have likely broken and also ran. Or at the very least there should have been some chaos in their ranks as they saw the riders past them." Grahtos sharply commented.

"But there was nothing like that. Those men kept shooting arrows like nothing happened. That can only mean that they knew this was going to happen. Meaning the mercenaries retreat is a fake!"

Grahtos was very confident in his hypothesis, as his tone was cock sure with no doubt in it, almost as if he had insider job knowledge.

Though the real reason was just experience.

The simple experience of spending a lot of time on the battlefield, seeing many tactics, and surviving for so long until he developed a kind of 6th sense for seeing through the enemy's strategies.

"..." Alexander first only silently marveled at the deduction, and at this instant understood firsthand how important it was to have good generals leading the army.

They were needed in cases like this.

To see through the enemy's deceptions using their battlefield experience.

Experience which could not be taught but had to be gained.

If Grahtos was not here, Alexander might have committed his reserves of the enemy's now exposed left flank (toward the right side for Alexander), and left himself completely out of any cards.

So Grahtos might have literally saved Alexander and even Zanzan.

"Hmmm, you may be right. So what should we do?" Alexander thus almost differentially asked for advice from his senior in military experience.

Because Grahtos had been doing this fighting and killing far longer than Alexander had.

"The enemy will likely swing around to attack our flanks. That's the classic hammer and anvil technique." Grahtos was able to piece through Faruq's plan using this simple move and then suggested the following countermeasure.

"So, I suggest we get the reserves ready into formation to do our own counter-charging formation. And also have the 5th legion turn around to deal with them. Because we are only 2,000 and if that half of the mercenary is planning to attack us, that will be 5,000 camel riders. We will be too outnumbered!"

Grahtos seemed to have thought about everything.

And hearing this proposal, Alexander contemplated it for a minute, trying to find some obvious flaws.

But there were no glaring inconsistencies evident to him, only a few minor considerations.

And so he agreed, "Okay, I will tell the 5th legion to turn. And I will also tell Heliptos (who was in charge of the 2nd legion and currently in front of the 5th legion) to brace himself."

"If the charge happens, the 5th legion will reinforce the flanks. If not, we will also start moving the 6th legion to start our plan. Our men are getting tired, and if we wait any longer, they might not have the strength to pull off the maneuver, " Alexander hence laid out his plans.

"Yes, my lord," Grahtos supported his move and thus saluted in response, before attempting to ride off to organize the cavalry's charge.

But was stopped by Alexander's call from behind, "Wait!"

This was where those minor considerations would be addressed.

"The 1,000 infantry we have on horseback. Keep them with me. They do not have the stirrups and will not be able to use the lance."

Alexander reminded, as without the stirrup, the recoil from the lance would knock the riders off.

"That.....then let them ride behind us, my lord. The enemy might outnumber us so much that every man might be needed," Grahtos wanted to be on the side of caution.

And hearing the request, and remembering how the man might have literally saved his life, thus Alexander consented, though only to half, 500.

And in this way, though little did Alexander know now, that single action might have saved his life, as now he would have at least something to defend against Ural's attack.

Though whether he would be successful was another question entirely.

Chapter 429 The Pincher

"I will give you 500 mounted infantry. And they will act as your rear guard in case things go bad. But the others will stay with me just in case." Alexander delineated his troop deployment.

And the reason for keeping the small amount back was not because he sensed something, but simply because of his cautious nature.

Alexander always believed in keeping some troops in the back no matter the situation just in case.

Which some would call smart, others cowardly.

But regardless, that was the deployment he wanted.

And seeing his staunch stanch, Grahtos could only nod and accept.

On the other side of the battlefield, Azab, whose command had been temporarily switched from the right flank to the left (this is the opposite when viewed from Alexander's perspective), was currently swinging his cavalry all the way around the battlefield in a wide arc, intending to come around to smash into the left flank of Alexander's infantry.

And while he was on the way, he ruefully thought, 'So, the enemy did not give chase'.

The feigned retreat was a classic move, and he hoped to catch the enemy off guard using this, for if Alexander committed his reserve there, Azab's path to success would become wide open.

And then Ural would not have been even needed.

'Hmmp, I guess it's true they are mercenaries,' Azab thus grudgingly admired the enemy commander's foresight for not taking the bait, attributing it to his former profession.

While soon, under the screen of the already 5,000 mercenaries on their right flank, the extra 4,500 camels, because 500 of these camels were supply camels, soon crossed and positioned themselves to their new side relatively undetected.

And then they soon readied themselves to charge.

Their formation was in the classic 10 by 10 men, 3 rows deep and 150 men wide, arranged as such because infantry formations tended to be thick and thus usually required greater mass to smash into before they broke.

And instead of using their iconic bow which they were famous for, Azab and his men equipped themselves with their sharp spears, and with shields up and spears pointed, these bloodthirsty men started their slow gallop into Alexander's exposed left flank.

"Hahaha, so they are here," Grahtos had noticed these extra men long ago.

After all, there was no way anyone was going to miss 4,500 camels when they were so close,

But instead of being scared of being outnumbered more than 3 to 1, the cavalry commander was actually thrilled.

Because to his knowledge, this engagement would be the world's first clash between light skirmishers and heavy cavalry.

And this was an actual heavy cavalry, with heavy, thick chainmail horse armor, stirrups, and lances.

So Grahtos was looking very forward to seeing the results.

Because if they were anything replicative of the practice results they had, then it would be a bloodbath...for the mercenaries.

Time would tell.

And in anticipation of that Grahtos placed his 1,000 men evenly in two rows, forming 5 blocks of men per row, with each block being made of 100 men, in preparation for intercepting Azab's much wider, 15-block row.

Then, to compensate for his shorter wing due to lower numbers, and thus mitigate the threat of encirclement he faced from Azab's much wider wing, which would be able to fold and close around from both of his sides and trap him, Grahtos placed the 500 infantry-turned-light skirmishers evenly on both sides of the second row.

The idea was that when Grahtos charged, these 500 men would stay behind, and engage any enemy coming from either side to prevent a complete encirclement, at least until the 1,000 elite cavalry could break through.

And with this plan made, just as Azab led the charge from the front row, so did Grahtos, both doing so to increase ally morale, as their clash appeared imminent.

"So it was just as Grahtos said," While from the back, Alexander muttered this under his breath, for it seemed like the landmass to the left side of his periphery vision was starting to move, caused by the two sides starting their charge.

When Alexander first saw the camel appear out of the horizon, he would wholeheartedly admit he was very scared.

But it was not because of what their appearance meant.

But what they could have meant.

If not for Grahtos today, Alexander would have been caught totally off guard by this move and would have most likely had to escape the battlefield, leaving his army and many of his retainers, and all his friends to die or be captured.

And that was if Alexander could escape at that.

So apart from breathing a sigh of relief, Alexander also felt his feet go cold at the thought of what it could have been.

But a second later, his relief was snatched away from him, and he was only left with cold feet.

For Hemicus had drawn his eyes to something troubling.

Something very troubling that was approaching him from the horizon around his right flank.

"What's that?" Alexander squinted his eyes to get a better look after Hemicus pointed it out, but the dust being kicked up made it difficult to too well into the distance.

So to him it only looked like black dots moving slightly up and down, and shaking a bit side to side.

But paradoxically, that dust also gave away what it could be been.

Because nothing on the battlefield could kick up dust like that that fast except expect galloping horses.

"Cavalry! They are cavalry!" Hemicus shouted at the top of his in alarm.

And the fact that the usually nonchalant man reacted as such conveyed just how fearful and afraid the man was.

Of course, he was not fearful for himself, but for Alexander's life.

And so immediately turned to Alexander to scream, "Run! Alexander, you must run!"

In his haste, he even addressed Alexander as normal as he felt the boy's life was in mortal danger.

And this sudden development certainly made Alexander want to tuck tail and run.

He had grown to love the luxurious life of Zanzan, and for a brief moment, it seemed the earthly delights had eroded his will to fight.

But that was only for a brief moment.

"Calm down!" Alexander first and fore shouted, calming not only Hemicus and his personal bodyguards of 100, but also the 500 light skirmishers.

Just as the temptation of running away spread its sweet fragrance, Alexander remembered the thoughts he just had prior.

The thoughts about what would happen if he used his reserves before Azab's men made their appearance.

And so he knew running away was not an option.

So since flight was not an option, fight was the only choice left.

Thus he calmly said to the people around, "The cavalry that is coming towards us is tiny. Remember all the scouting reports. All the enemy troops we know of are already here."

"The 30,000 infantry are fighting our infantry."

"The slinger and archers are fighting to the right."

"The 10,000 mercenaries are to our left."

"And the 6,000 charioteers are lying there" Alexander pointed to the ground in front of them, where there were still the tied-up prisoners.

'So, what they have left to throw at us are the losers who ran away during the initial cavalry charge. So what are you afraid of such cowards?" Alexander sneered.

And then boosted morale by saying, "Think back to how those men had crashed, collided, and stumbled over each other when they saw our weapon. So how many do you think they have left? 100? 200? Maybe 500? We can easily take them on!"

Alexander shouted energetically while raising his fist to the sky.

"Yes!"

"Woohhooo,"

"Yeah!"

"Fight!"

And convinced by this, as Alexander's bodyguards began to cheer at this, the other 500 soon followed.

While in reality, Alexander himself had no confidence in what he said.

Because though sounding very logical, there were some major flaws in his logic.

One was the assumption of such a small number of the cavalry, that Alexander simply chose because it was slightly lesser than his troop number of 600.

And this number was completely wrong, for Ural had more than 1,200 men, almost two and a half times Alexander's estimate.

Two was the assumption that Ural had gotten no reinforcement.

But there was always the possibility that Ural had men in the camp, who had not participated in the initial charge for whatever reasons.

Or simply some of the servants in the camp were made into temporary soldiers.

And third was the assumption that it was Ural's cavalry at all.

After all, with so many horses and camels running around, it was certainly possible that it was one or two thousand (1,000 - 2,000) Jahal mercenaries who were coming through this side to complete pincher.

This was certainly possible as the leftover others would be able to suppress Alexander's flanks for long enough to complete this project.

And the force that Grahtos was engaging was just a distraction, a bait.

Any one of these made Alexander's heart want to leap out of his mouth and run.

But he held.

And he put up a brave front.

A front of courage, calmness, and steadfast strength.

As he then instructed, "Hemicus, get you men to equip their lances. Arrange the formation in a wedge shape. We will charge against them!"

Chapter 430 Decisive Charge

[Troop formation pic in comments]

Ural had managed to get at around 1,300 men for this attack.

This was out of the original 2,000 he had started with, of which he had lost 500 as dead or wounded in the initial charge, and a further 200 proved themselves to be wounded enough to be not fit enough for the next battle, as they only barely managed to limp back to the safety of the camp.

But still, for the remaining men, just the fact that even after losing 35% of their forces they were still ready to fight was a testament to their eliteness.

Most other formations would have dissolved long ago, its men running into the wilderness to escape, and only coming back to the camp after the battle had finished.

Thus it showed that these warriors bred by Matbar (Marquiss) Uzak were no pushovers, and it also showed that Ural was no stupid commander, and was still able to command the troop's respect, as evidenced by how they were willing to follow him for a second time even through all the casualties.

But for this particular battle, it was not Ural that was leading the charge, owing to his injuries, and the high chance one had of suffering injuries when leading a charge.

So instead he chose to let his cousin have the honor.

And his cousin was happy to take this position, even when it was inherently dangerous.

Because leading a cavalry charge was the epitomic display of a noble's courage.

'Hahaha, the way is open,' He gleefully thought as he saw Alexander's flank now almost bare, save for a few scant scattered units he presumed to be Alexander's bodyguards.

And, now, in addition to being the champion who would bring ultimate victory in this battle,

'If I can capture that Jakqum...hehe,' The man also dreamed of handing Alexander over to Pasha DJose himself, which would likely shoot his political career to the moon in Kuleef by the grace of its ruler.

And so in that anticipation, he urged his horse to ride as fast as possible without breaking formation, intending to take full advantage of the gap.

While Alexander, as he watched the enemy get closer and closer, finally revealing their number, first and foremost breathed a sigh of relief.

'*Sigh*, good, it's only about a thousand to fifteen hundred,' If it had been any more, Alexander's charge might have been similar to the charge of the light brigade, except it would have been spears from the front, spears from the left, and spears from the right.

"Men! Form up! Form up! Our charge will snap the enemy in half!" Alexander yelled to encourage his men and even placed himself in the very front row.

This was certainly a dangerous place, but they were in a dangerous position.

And he needed to do everything he could to encourage his men to fight and not simply flee.

This was because though his one hundred (100) bodyguards were undoubtedly reliable, and would never run, he was not so sure about the other five hundred (500).

They were not purely green troops, but they were not veterans either, consisting of mostly former Cantagenan slaves and servants.

'Darm it, I should have built a bigger reserve knowing my enemy was so much more mobile, I could have easily taken five hundred men from each legion without a problem. And that would have left me with a large number of troops to deal with emergencies.' Alexander berated himself for this mistake as the troops readied himself.

Alexander now understood that instead of 30,000 vs 30,000, 27,000 men fighting against 30,000 would have been good enough.

But he had focused too much on that plan of his to consider this, and so had instead reinforced the part of the army which really did not need reinforcing, or at least not as much compared to the other sectors.

And because of that mistake, he was suffering now.

With the only solace being Faruq too had made a similar mistake, which was not reinforcing Ural's cavalry with some of his own mercenaries, thinking the double pincher with the number he had on hand would be enough.

Which was reasonable given that he had no idea about Alexander's heavy cavalry, which was making its first debut into this world.

And this left Alexander a shiver of chance for eking out a victory.

Alexander scolded himself as such while the troops got into the standard 10 x 10 formation, and Alexander himself changed horses and armor with Hemicus.

This was because the horse Alexander was on and the armor he wore was especially gaudy and eye-catching intentionally designed as such to attract the troops' eyes to him, thus acting like a beacon and a rallying point for the army, and reassuring all the men with faltering morale that their leader was still with them in the fight.

To accomplish this task, his armor was painted gold and made very shiny, thus making it almost glow under the sunlight, while the barding on his horse was embellished with similar, excessive decorative patterns, thus drawing all eyes to him.

And those were the upsides.

While the downside was evident to all if he thought about it for a moment.

If it could draw one's own troops' attention, it could also draw the enemy's attention, or more specifically their aggro, for killing the enemy leader was one of the best and quickest ways to end a battle.

Hence, like Amenheraft had switched garbs with Kefka, Alexander decided to switch places with Hemicus.

In this way it was hoped that though both men would ride in the front, this guard captain would draw all the attacks away from Alexander.

And the time when its efficacy would be proven was closing quickly.

Thus, in preparation for meeting the enemy, Alexander positioned his men in a wedge-like formation, which looked almost like an arrowhead from above.

And at the very front of the arrowhead, acting as its tip was Alexander's unit, consisting of 100 heavy cavalry.

Alexander had fortunately dressed his bodyguards the same way as he did his cavalry, with the thought behind the heavy horse armor being that they would be better able to resist arrow and javelin fire, and the use of lances being that they would be able to counter opposing cavalry and if things were truly desperate even the phalanxes with their longer spears.

And this most elite unit was now made the tip of the spearpoint, tasked with bearing the greatest brunt of the enemy.

While the much less heavily equipped infantry, who had no stirrups, a short spear, and only a large shield was placed at the back and sides.

Two units of such light skirmishers were placed directly behind Alexander's unit, looking like the shaft of the arrow, while one of each such unit was also placed at the sides to act as wings of the formations, protecting Alexander's flanks.

This formation soon took shape and in the meantime, Alexander sent the following message via a herald to the 5th legion, "Send the 9th and 10th battalion to the right. We are under attack from about 1,500 horsemen. Lord Alexander himself is fighting to hold the line. Reinforcement is needed urgently. Send them NOW!"

The urgentness of the message need not be said to the legion commander.

But even then, it would take the 1,000 men some time to come to Alexander's rescue.

They were foot soldiers after all.

So in the meantime, Alexander was left on his own, having to hold on no matter what.

Or die trying.

With these thoughts firmly etched into his mind, and the troops finally ready, Alexander clutched his shield closer to his chest, lowered his head so that the shield would cover his mouth, and then brought his lance down to a horizontal level.

He was ready for the charge.

'*Sigh*, If only I had equipped my infantry with those flaming ropes, then this attack would have evaporated into nothing,' Alexander lampooned one last time over another of his mistakes, the reason for which was that he never thought troops so much in the rear would need it.

And thus had chosen to equip only the front few ropes with the special weapon.

A mistake that could very well cost him and all his people's life.

But it was what it was, and so vowing to learn from his mistakes, and promising to be much more thorough in his next battles if he lived through it, Alexander steadied himself for the charge.

The enemy was almost here.

Ural's formation was a standard cube, arranged in two relatively even rows of 600, men, with 6 columns.

This was opposed to Alexander's paltry 3 columns, but Alexander made up for it with his center column being 3 rows deep as opposed to the enemy's 2.

And this was according to his strategy, which was simply to use brute force and a greater mass of soldiers to snap the center column and cause a rout, while the two wings prevented an encirclement from the sides.

So in this way, Alexander's plan was very similar to Grahtos's.

And like Grahtos, Alexander hoped that his heavy cavalry would prove too strong for the light cavalry to withstand, because if the enemy did not break and chose to absorb the losses, Alexander would be likely dead.

Much like how the vastly outnumbered Grahtos would be.

So it was kind of like a game of chicken.

And it was a game that both Grahtos and Alexander were playing at the same time.