

Herald 581

Chapter 581 Manor Defense (Part-1)

Juminus, during his efforts to organize the defense to his horror, found that neither the manor nor the workshop's storage had any spare shields.

Sure the two places had a lot of weapons like bows, quite a few spears, swords, etc.

But unfortunately no shields.

And the reason was simply that shields were neither made here nor much needed.

It was envisioned that in the worst-case scenario, the walls of the manor would act as their shields, with the bodyguards holding off the attackers using choke points inside the mansion for long enough until reinforcements from the city could relieve them.

So in such a case, it was assumed that a good number of crossbows and large stocks of bolts were more important so that even the servants could be equipped with them and shoot down on the enemies through the windows and verandas.

Hence, only the bodyguards were given the large wooden shields, with only a few spare ones kept in storage, mostly for practice purposes.

All these shields had been of course given to the men at the very front, but that still left a lot of the infantry without this basic tool.

And while faced with such a situation, though basic improvisations such as using a heavy wooden plank, a large metal pan, or any other large solid object to hold in front of oneself were possible, the imminence of the attack made such things in such as a short time frame impossible.

Even something as simple as a ditch, which was standard procedure to do could not be dug due to the time constraints.

Thus Juminus simply hoped the concentrated arrow fire would be enough to halt the enemy until properly equipped units from the city could come to replace them.

But this kind of wishy-washy thing was certainly not enough for Cambyses.

Juminus might be willing to recklessly gamble with his life, but Cambyses would not.

So she sought to find a solution to the problem, to give something, anything for the frontline soldiers to defend with.

And thankfully she found it quickly.

"There! Move the carts forward! Use them to make a makeshift barricade." Cambyses shouted to Juminus as she proposed her idea, "The soldiers can then stand behind them and use them like shields," she reasoned.

And hearing this Juminus felt like slapping his head for not being able to think of something so simple.

'Darn! The urgency of the battle must have eaten my brain,' He felt like crying as using the wagon as a defensive structure was an age-old trick.

So, upon getting Cambyses's orders, the man ordered without any delay for all available carts to be moved in front of the lined-up troops, and soon the drivers did just so, leaving their carts behind after detaching the horse or mule pulling it.

"Give me one of those horses," And while one of the drivers was leading his horse back up the hill, the large beast suddenly caught Cambyses's eyes, and so ordered that man to leave his beast behind.

A command the man almost fell to his arms and knees to obey.

And once upon the beast, though it had no stirrups or heavy a saddle, Cambyses found this pack animal not too hard to ride, both because it was a domesticated beast, so much different from a warhorse, and also because she had been taking equestrian classes the past six months.

So once atop the beasts, she very comfortably urged the beast to go in front of the frontlines, where she gave a last-minute speech.

"Men! The enemy before you is someone you have already faced. And someone you would have defeated if not their elephants."

"Now, they have no elephants. So you have nothing to fear."

"You have all heard the loud bang from before. It was goddess Gaia's divine wrath! To aid her champion in battle."

"That means the gods are with us! You fight with the help of divine emissaries!"

"So slay these men before you without fear. Or lose your homes, your families, your lands! Ahhhhh!"

Cambyses finished her speech with a loud triumphant hurrah, and the men naturally replied with an even louder cheer.

Hearing Cambyses's speech and more importantly, actually seeing her filled the 500 or so men with fighting zeal.

Most of the men conscripted to fight here lived around the manor, and so had at least once or twice seen their lord's wife.

Thus, seeing her present with them, ready to fight, instead of running away to the temples was a great morale boost to many, especially the male slaves who had been simply handed a weapon, any weapon, and then told to go and fight.

As such many men began to feel like martyrs.

While in the meantime, no soon had Cambyses finished her rousing speech that Perseus was starting to make his last strides towards them, with even some of the enemy's faces or more accurately their shiny helmets started to become visible under the light of their torches, as they seemingly rose out of the undergrowth.

The clash was imminent.

And seeing this Cambyses regretted a bit that they could not get a bit more time, as they were unable to barricade their flanks with the carts too.

But they did the best they could, and now it was time to put the mettle to the test.

So she wheeled her horse to the back, and

"Shoot!"

With this order, the 300 archers arranged in three groups began to let go of their arrows like their lives depended on it.

Now, these groups of men did not fire the arrows like seen in Hollywood, where a commander would give the iconic three-worded commands,

"Notch!" where the entire army would align their arrows with the bowstring,

"Draw!" where the entire army would simultaneously draw their arrows and hold this heavy bow taut for a long time, and after taking a wide lens shoot of this, lastly would come the order,

"Shoot!" where the entire army would all at once let loose their valley.

Now, Hollywood did this for the theatrics.

Because launching a mass of arrows together looked much cooler than an uncoordinated haphazard effort.

That was not at all how it worked in real life.

One was because holding a bow, especially the kind of relatively heavy bows the archers used, for any period of time would be very tiring.

Two was because not all bows were equal.

There were differences in ranges a bow could shoot at due to the wood used to make it, or how it was treated before manufacture, or even the kind of string used.

So if everyone was made to shoot at the same time, some arrows would fall short wasting that shot, while others would feel they missed getting off an extra shot.

The third reason was tied to the second, being that each marksman's individual skills played a large role in the range of the arrow, like how an expert archer would adjust his posture or even the direction of this bow during shooting to compensate for wind speed.

And lastly was the type of arrow used, as not everyone used the same type of arrowhead.

Some used needle bodkins designed to pierce armor, some used large, serrated heads to tear the flesh, and some used the standard head giving them a balanced shoot.

All these reasons meant that once the enemy got relatively close enough, the commander would give a general command to shoot, and then each of the archers would start letting off their arrows based on their judgment.

And it was with one such command from Cambyses that the first volley of arrows was sent rocketing towards the Tibians who were about 200- 250 meters away and were being personally led by Perseus himself.

It seemed in the fifty-fifty of choosing between the roads, Perseus had won.

And the king seemed to become aware of his prize when he heard the loud cheer following Cambyses's speech,

'Sounds like there are a thousand men, It has to be something big!' Perseus was still not sure if the manor was truly ahead of his, but his ears were experienced enough to tell that there had to be around a thousand men guarding it.

And though he was wrong by a factor of two, still, being able to determine how many enemies there were just based on the sound that even had some echoes to it, was still very, very impressive.

It truly went on to show that Perseus was that good a military strategy.

So, reasoning if anything a thousand men would try to defend, it would be the lord's house, the king urged his men to march that bit quicker, for he was that eager to capture his prize.

Shoo, *Shoo*, *Shoo*

But it was just then he was greeted by a barrage of arrows whistling through the air as they made a low humming buzz.

"Argh"

"Urgghhh"

"Ahhhh"

And the first volley, completely silent and fired with a warning managed to actually wreak some havoc on Perseus's lines, with quite a few men falling at this.

"Shields! Shields!"

"Get in formation and raise your shields."

And at once this command almost instinctively rang out, though not before a second and a third volley came to greet them.

'There really are a thousand archers atop!' And feeling this arrow storm, Perseus became convinced of his number.

Though the actual numbers of archers were only one-third of it, with the instant bow users being half of even that.

But that seemed to be enough.

Chapter 582 Manor Defense (Part-2)

As the first volleys turned to the second, the third, and so forth, the instant bow really started to showcase its power.

The speed at which the arrows were let loose made it seem like there were 10 times the men firing at the enemy, and the intensity of the fire made it quite hard for Perseus to continue up the hill.

Especially after the casualties he took following the first volley where, the hundred fifty (150) instant bow users let off their entire magazine at once, totaling a concentrated shot of seven hundred fifty (750) arrows, accompanied by 150 bolts from the crossbows, for a grand total of nine hundred (900) arrows fired, given a few seconds.

And what made it worse for Perseus was that this concentrated attack of so many arrows came from nowhere to them, at a time when his troops were caught out of formation and without their shields up as the phalanx units marched in a loose array up the hills.

Thus there some about a hundred (100) casualties from that initial strike only, showing just how devastating that wall of arrows from the instant bow actually was.

And to add a cherry on top for the defenders, these shots were quite easy to carry out.

They really did not need to aim but just had to look at the blazing torches against the dark background and let loose their shots around that general direction.

And given how the seven to eight thousand men under Perseus were forced to queue up along the relatively narrow roads leading to the mines, most of the time, these arrows hit something, be it shield, armor, or if lucky flesh.

Plus, the defenders could do this in relative safety, without the fear of getting shot back, for the following reasons as described by Perseus and his entourage when his adjutant came to him from the front shouting,

"Your Majesty! Shoot! Command our archers to shoot back! Or else we cannot proceed!"

The man very reasonably wanted to use their archers to fire back and suppress the defenders as such, while the infantry advanced.

But Perseus shook his head in denial at this, saying,

"There is no point. The enemy is shooting downhill. So he has more range. My archers will be shot even theirs," before his voice started to sound bitter, as he said,

"I forgot about that. That's why a hundred good men (100) died,"

The king seemed genuinely quite regretful and even rebuked himself for letting his emotions get in the way of good military strategy.

In hindsight, when he had heard the loud cheer, he should have been prudent enough to slow his march down and get his troops into proper phalanx formation.

But because he had not done so, they were now being forced to do so under a hail of arrow fire.

As Perseus finished saying this, another high-ranking noble from beside him too chimed in, turning to the adjutant to say,

"His Majesty is right. Our archers will not be able to reach the enemy on the top. So if we bring them up front, they will simply stand there and be killed given their thin armor."

"And that is even if we can bring them to the front lines." The noble then added forcibly, before gesturing with his arms by swaying them around,

"Look around us kid.... surrounded by hills and forests on all sides with only a narrow road leading up. Trying to maneuver any units either front or back is futile."

"Nevermind even if we can actually do that, we might not even know whether the arrows are hitting the enemy."

This sentence was not said by the high-ranking noble but was uttered in a high, pitched, almost feminine voice from the other side of Perseus, and it belonged to a sickly-looking man, with gaunt cheeks and sunken eyes, appearing to be in his mid-fifties.

He was named Mithriditus and could be said to be the third most powerful man in Tibias after Perseus and Leosydas, though his health was not one of envy.

But what he lacked in brawn, he seemed to make up somewhat in brains, as he pointed to the hilltop above using his almost cadaverous hands, and said.

"Try and look from where the arrows are coming from.... where do you think the enemy is...can you find it?"

And at this instruction, the adjutant naturally looked up to try and determine the enemy's location.

And strangely failed to grasp it.

To him, the arrows seemed to be shooting out of the dark night itself.

"See....you can't find them." And Mithriditus of course predicted this would happen, as he explained, "This is because the enemy is firing from above us in almost darkness. They can see perfectly well with all our lit torches."

"But we can't see them except as one of the many shadows up there." He intelligently pointed out,

"So if we send our archers ahead, they will not know where to shoot, and might even end up hitting our troops."

Thus this relatively older man fully explained the intricate reason by pushing the archers forward would not be a good option.

"That..." And the adjutant for the first time felt something like being enlightened, and his eyes widened as he was unable to reply back.

But the others did not have time to wait for this young man to come out of his stupor.

So as soon as this was finished being said, Perseus interjected with his order, saying, "Mithriditus is right. The archers stay back."

"The best thing to do now is to lock our shields together and have the infantry slowly move up through the fire."

"Now go! We are close!"

Perseus of course meant this as an order with the adjutant benign commanded to pass this to the frontline commanders.

"Yes, sir!" And understanding this, the man received it with a loud salute and quickly proceeded to carry it out.

While back on the top of the hill, the fierce release of arrow after arrow continued, as the men almost mechanically drew, shot, and reloaded their bows, all so that they could resume the cycle once again.

The continued motions were starting to take a toll on their arms, especially for the ones using the instant bows, but they knew they had to keep going.

This miracle weapon had managed to do quite a bit in halting the enemy's advances, with the rapid concentrated fire managing to even literally shred some shields in two and kill its holder with multiple grievous wounds.

But the men knew they would have to keep up the pressure or all their gains might be lost.

So they persevered even through the pain.

All while Juminus and Cambyses shouted encouraging words such as.

"Fight! Fight for your lord, your land, your loved ones!"

"Do not let up! The enemy is faltering."

"Be calm! Be steady! Nothing can stand against our weapons."

While to help the men accomplish their tasks, women and children were seen frantically running back and forth from the nearby arrow carts to the frontlines, each time replenishing the stocks of arrows with a new full bucket.

And contrary to Mithriditus's claim that the Zanzan were shooting from a dark place, it was actually quite bright here.

But the reason he had made that mistake was because the light from the braziers was obstructed from reaching him by the wall of men lined along the very edge of the edges.

So it did appear quite dark to the older man.

Due to this, Perseus was unable to offer any counterattack to the enemy and was forced to only passively take the hits while sustaining ever-increasing damage, causing his casualties to rise up.

And when to mitigate this, he slowed his advance down, so that the phalanx units could hold their cohesion, it turned his speed into almost a crawl.

And even then the inherent trouble phalanxes had with moving through terrains in formation remained, nevermind they were also being shot at at the same time.

So the occasional gaps would open up regularly, letting the lucky shots in, and reaping a life and decreasing morale.

But Perseus was unable to think of an effective strategy other than to the obvious retreat for now.

Or just to power through this relatively short distance, resolving to absorb the casualties and then start slaughtering those annoying bugs once they were in range.

The former was out of the question.

Not a single commander or officer dared to utter those words.

And so it had to be the second one.

With that blazing determination, Perseus and his men persevered, and very, very slowly made their up the hill, while the enemy tried to suppress them using volley after volley of arrows as much as possible.

All of which was observed with silent trepidation by Cambyses right from the best sit in the house, right on the frontlines.

And to a bit of her relief, the enemy did seem to slow down to almost a standstill after her archers had started to fire on them, and so for now, the goal of stalling for time until reinforcements got here seemed to be heading in the right direction.

'Where are they? What's taking so long!' But much to Cambyses's chagrin, they were yet to actually arrive.

It was already half an hour till the battle started.

And so she went to meet with Juminus and asked this in a tense tone. "How many arrows do we have left?"

Because she knew they were about to run out!

Chapter 583 Manor Defense (Part-3)

At Cambyses's inquiry, Juminus produced a slight frown on his brows that was visible even through the helmet.

That question really revealed their current Achiell's heel, and the man should have been commended to keep his reaction to just a mild reaction.

"Not many. 30,000 is really not a lot of arrows to begin with," He frankly answered with a rueful shake of his head, before elaborating, "Our stocks here meant each of the 300 archers got a hundred (100_ arrows."

"An average archer, he can shoot about 5 shots a minute. A crossbowman about 1 to 2 a minute. And as for the instant bow...well mistress can see for herself."

The prodigious rate at which the instant bow ate up arrows was a scene to behold.

And though Juminus had suspected it before, seeing it firsthand was an eye-opening experience for him.

As was for Cambyses.

Saying this, Juminus here paused a bit to articulate his thoughts, perhaps ruminating on how to say the next words, before again starting.

"We have already told the men to try and conserve as many arrows as possible. But we also have to keep up a certain rate of fire to keep the enemy's head and slow down their advance."

"So as you can see, though the battle has only been going for 30 minutes, we are already two-thirds down." Juminus pointed to the dwindling stock of bolts on the carts as he said so and ultimately finished by declaring,

"Given such, we can last maybe another 10 to 15 minutes!"

It was a grim prophecy.

Made all the more harrowing when Cambyses was able to see the enemy had managed to make remarkable progress even enough through such hardship, advancing almost a hundred and fifty meters (150 m) in the meantime, leaving them just fifty meters (50 m) away from reaching the frontlines.

Cambyses's heart shook with fear and even a hint of despair as she could not believe any army would be able to still make their way up a hill under such heavy arrow fire.

It had to be remembered that Perseus was forced to channel his army through a narrow road up the hill, all while having to face the equivalent of around a thousand (1,000) archers raining incessant volleys sorely focused narrowly on them.

And the result of this was very visibly apparent even to Cambyses, who standing at the very back of her army, a distance of about a hundred meters (100 m).

But even from there, even under the darkness, Cambyses clearly spotted how mangled and torn the shields of the first few rows of the phalanx formations were.

Each of them had perhaps ten to twenty of these short bolts sticking out of them, and Cambyses dreaded to think how many of these arrowheads had pierced both the shield and arm behind it, locking it in place, and how much it must hurt to even hold on to their shields, much less march with it, keeping it level and steady.

These shields weighed around 10 to 15 kgs and wielding them even in normal times had to be daunting, much less under these perilous conditions.

So seeing the soldiers still persevere, Cambyses felt a foreboding feeling.

While her counterpart Perseus cheered his men on, knowing victory was so close he could smell it.

"One last push! One last push, and you can slaughter the men and have all their women. Make them pay for what they have done to you!" The king shouted.

This climb had definitely not been as easy as Cambyses presumed it to be.

To encourage his army forward through all the obstacles, he had to put his own personal bodyguards at the very front, and have them lead the attack, resulting in casualties among them could be described by only one word- Dessimation!

The concentrated fire, especially from the instant bow wreaked havoc on that unit, and if the casualty reports he got were true, Perseus was pretty sure after this battle, he would have to reconstitute this entire unit from scratch.

And that realization made his heart bleed.

Because it was not as if this was any other unit that he could have to remake.

It was arguably the most elite fighting unit in all of Adhania, formed with the sole purpose of defending their liege.

And the formidable warriors in their roster really showed that for among them there was arguably the best swordmaster in the country, a very talented horseman, and a formidable spear user to name only a few.

Any single one of their deaths would have been a tragedy.

But if going by the report his adjutant had delivered, all of them were either dead or close to death.

But though Perseus wept for them, with many of them even being his close friends, he did not regret his decision.

Nothing mattered as much as capturing Zanzan.

Both to him, and to them.

And it was because of this they followed Perseus's orders without flinching, advancing stoically even amidst that lethal shower of arrows, slowly but methodically, and even heartlessly stepping over their comrades' fallen bodies in the process if they had to, thus bravely using their own fleshy bodies as a bulwark to lead the rest of the peasants up the hill.

All for the final victory.

In the eyes of every Tibians, they were the very incarnation of the word 'Hero.'

And as Cambyses's gaze suddenly locked on to one of them, the crazed determination that burned within them actually scared the girl for a moment, as she doubted if her hastily recruited slaves and servants could stand against even one strike from them.

'Hmmp! No matter what the gods are with us!' But soon she stared back with an even manic gaze.

Cambyses was convinced even if the 500 men were to be slaughtered, and even if she were to join, the gods would find a way to save Zanzan.

She was sure of it, hence her eyes too began to blaze with a zealous fervor.

"Charge!" And just as she reinforced her conviction, did Perseus's men reach close enough to the frontlines, and immediately afterward launched a manic charge a furious roar, where they lowered their spears and started to sprint forward, intent on skewering 'every single of those fucking archers' as they swore.

But alas!

Reality was much different than they had hoped.

Because though they managed to cross that last 20 meters in a heartbeat with negligible casualties, their dream of puncturing through one, two, or even three men at a time in retaliation for the attacks they suffered till now did not manifest.

Instead, most of them were met with the unpleasant sensation of iron hitting wood or the bronze plating of the shields, and soon afterward a few unlucky ones had one or two puncher wounds gifted to them, as the infantrymen standing securely behind the wagons first let the inanimate object absorb most of the blow and then counterattacked in their full fury.

"What!"

"Spears! Infantry!"

"The way forward is blocked!"

"They have infantry defending the top!"

And this came as a complete surprise to the Tibians, who let out panicked shouts of disbelief and even despair.

They could not believe it.

Up until now, they had always believed that reaching the top would be the end of their suffering, a place where they would be able to fan out, and then slaughter those abominable but now defenseless archers.

And it was that point that had given these reaching their breaking point to still continue.

But reality seemed to have hammered a cruel nail in the coffin to that wish.

For just in front of their most hated foe stood a row of infantrymen guarding them, protected by what seemed to be wagons.

The Tibians in the darkness had entirely missed these men or mistook them for archers, which was why they had commenced that suicidal charge.

The result of which were even more needless deaths of some very famous Tibian warriors.

And it was all for nothing.

Because not only had their charge failed, it was only now that the Tibians were becoming aware of the fact that Juminus had placed his troop at the very mouth of the road, which created a narrow choke point that was very hard to pass through, given Perseus's two flanks were covered by dense wood.

And so bulldozing straight through seemed to be the only option.

An option given the only narrow road they could stand on would take a long time to carry out, if ever.

Yes!

Just arrows and archers were not the only tricks Cambyses's sleeve.

They also had soldiers holding a dreadful choke point.

In fact, it was precisely because of his strategic location that Cambyses had allowed Juminus to defend outside the manor, and not use the manor's stone walls to hole up inside and fire arrows in all directions.

And as Cambyses's lines held, Perseus's lines despaired.

These men had already been close to their breaking point and only the sweet desire of revenge that laid at the top of the hill had kept them going.

But now seeing that they would still have to go through this solid bulk of men, solidly entrenched in their position and defended by a thousand archer, even Perseus's hardened bodyguards began to break down.

They had trekked up a treacherous route for almost six hours, under treacherous conditions, taking untold casualties, all to be stopped at literally the very mouth of the gate.

It was heartrending for them.

Chapter 584 Manor Defense (Part-4)

Perseus felt his heart fall at seeing his army being stopped at the very edge of the gates to his dreams.

They were so close.

By now, given the amount of resistance he had encountered and through even the few loud shouts he could pick up on, he had become certain the manor was definitely up there.

Which made it all the more heartbreaking as knowing he had come so close, having endured such hardships, only to be presented with such a tough challenge once again...well it was enough to make even this charismatic leader with a heart of steel feel crestfallen.

And like him, his army, who had taken hundreds of casualties as dead or wounded to get here, amounting to as much as 5% of their total force, too felt like breaking.

It had to be noted that even now the arrow fire, though reduced in its intensity, had not stopped, but had continued to pick off a few of their unlucky comrades with each volley, decreasing morale lower and lower.

'If I can't break through that choke point soon, I will have to retreat,' Perseus's heart bled at the thought of coming so far, spilling so much blood, losing so many friends, and then ultimately having to go back empty-handed.

But even with that imminent inevitability, he was ultimately unable to think of a proper response.

And it seemed he was doomed to fail after coming so, so close.

Perseus actually felt his eyes turn red at the thought.

While his counterpart Cambyses too felt her eyes redden, but for the opposite emotion- joy, instead of sorrow.

"The enemy is stopped. Hold firm! Hold steady! The enemy is stopped!" The girl could be heard shouting at the top of her voice as she rode in her horse behind the lines.

Her worst nightmare of the lines snapping at the first charge did not come true and instead, the men seemed to be doing reasonably well.

'The enemy can't break through!' And further looking for a bit at the current stalemate she concluded as such, for she could clearly see how after the initial charge, the Tibians seemed to have all their zeal sapped away, their attacks becoming slow and lethargic.

It was as if they had lost their will to fight.

And as she saw this, she understood the threat had been mostly neutralized.

All that remained was to gather the reinforcement and push them back.

And this realization made Cambyses feel a sense of intense, almost overwhelming relief washed over her.

Her heart, which until now seemed to be beating loud enough to smash out of her chest, finally calmed down, and she even began to feel a bit weak in her limbs as the adrenaline started to wear off.

"My lady, Lord Menes is here. As well as a few of the lords! They have all brought reinforcements!" And as if to add cream to the cake, suddenly Takfiz came running to Cambyses to inform her of this.

And a few moments later the evidence of this became clear, as hundreds of men began to pour into the backyard.

"Finally they are here!" And seeing the familiar armor and livery, made Cambyses mutter so in a sigh of relief.

It had to be nearly two hours since the first distress calls went out, and frankly, Cambyses was very irritated with the slow, lax response.

"My lady, we gravely apologize for the delay. Organizing the troops took longer than anticipated!" And as soon as the man leading them, Menes saw Cambyses approach them on horseback, the man slightly bowed as he said so.

To which Cambyses lightly glanced over him and produced a stoic nod, and then not deciding to criticize the general up front, instead only said, "Mmm, its good that you are. We were waiting for you."

And then quickly gave the battlefield report, "We have stopped the enemy's advance at the mouth of the hill. But we need your help to push them down. Please go assist our defenders!"

"Yes!" Menes replied so with a deep nod, though it was largely unnecessary as under his adjutant's instructions, the frontlines had begun to be automatically reinforced.

And seeing their numbers swell, the Zanzan defenders excitedly cheered, while Perseus finally despaired.

He finally understood that there was no way he would be able to break through here now.

So he internally acknowledged his defeat and resolved to blow the retreat sound.

But just as he was ruminating on that, suddenly he noticed the winds of fortune seemed to turn towards him, as if performing a complete one-eighty, and started blessing him with all their fortune.

For all of a sudden, he started to see the enemy soldiers holding the chokepoint, whose solid formation till now was almost reminiscent of a steel wall, now appeared to be wavering and slowly breaking rank, almost like they were crumbling into a sand castle that was hit by the waves.

Perseus had no idea what could have made an enemy so close to victory do such a suicidal thing.

'Perhaps their leaders have died somehow,' He assumed for a split second.

But an instant later he figured it did not matter to him one bit why this happened.

Only that it did.

"Attack! The enemy has broken. He is routing! Attack!" So to immediately capitalize on the situation, Perseus in almost a maddened voice shouted like there was no tomorrow as he instantly ordered a counterattack.

While the soldiers at the frontlines too noticed his change, and with reddened eyes rushed forward like the very garden of Eden laid in front of them, killing and slaughtering anyone in the way.

Finally, their most hated enemy was in front of them, and after suffering for more than an hour under their arrows and spear, the Tibians were eager for revenge,

While the Zanzan defenders who had held so strong for so long, suddenly seemed to have lost all hope for victory and began to run away like headless chickens.

But then the question became what actually caused this change?

And to know that one had to go back to around the time Cambyses met with Menes and some of the other council members such as Grahtos, Menicus, Harun, and Jazum.

There, after only a brief time Takfiz gave the glad tidings, and the men the lords had bought with them began to fortify the frontlines, a very ominous message came to Cambyses.

Or more specifically it came to everyone present there.

For all of a sudden a barefooted man, with sunken eyes, and ragged clothes covered in bloodstains all over, burst through the back door, and in a hoarse, panicked, high-pitched voice shouted, "Enemies! There are enemies attacking the workshops. Look! Tens of thousands of enemies are coming from there."

"Look!" The man repeated as he pointed up towards the hill to his right, and in a shrilled voice urged,

"Run! Run for your lives! The enemy has already broken through!"

The alarmed shouts and the gestures naturally drew everyone's attention to him, and then to the place his fingers were pointing to.

And there they saw!

Even through the fog that had begun to settle in, they saw!

Torches!

Many torches! Many, many torches!

Numbering in the thousands, possibly tens of thousands if going by the man's numbers, these torches were all rapidly descending down the hill, and seemed to be heading straight towards them!

And as you might have guessed, it was indeed Leosydass, who had first gone to the cement crushing plant, and then understanding that it was not the place, intended to turn back.

When suddenly he noticed another road leading to the same place, or from Leosydass's perspective the same light source Perseus was attacking

And better still, he could clearly see the place that had become much more illuminated than before, with many, many, shadows seeming to move to and fro in the dim light.

And this left no doubt in Leosydas's mind about what that could

"Found you!" The man hence let out a wolfish smile when he had seen this.

And then, deciding against turning back and rejoining his king, he instead opted to follow this second route, intent on attacking the manor from the other side.

And the closer he got, the more assured he became that it was the right path, for he could see almost no soldiers there to stop.

"Men! Hurry! The enemy has moved as its troops to fight against our liege. It is a golden opportunity. We must relieve His Majesty as soon as possible!" Leosydas had urged as he pushed his men up.

And he was absolutely right that in that order as Cambyses had indeed moved all the guards from the workshop that laid west of the manor to reinforce against Perseus.

Leaving the way completely open for Leosydas.

The man's gamble of not rejoining his king had paid off ten folds and more.

While at the manor, it soon became clear to every man, woman, and child that the enemy had just pulled off a successful two-pronged attack, and they had been already placed inside a cage, with the door about to be closed imminently.

And if they wanted to escape this imminent encirclement, the time to run was now!

Hence the complete collapse of the frontlines, which no one was capable of stopping,

While Cambyses sat atop her horse like a statue, her heart filled with only these two words,

'I forgot!' 'I forgot!' 'I forgot!'

She kept repeating it.

Because she just remembered she had forgotten to send that contingent of soldiers to the cement plant like she had wanted to.

Chapter 585 Manor Defense (Part-5)

The sight of another army descending from the other side of the hill made Cambyses almost faint as her heart momentarily stopped beating and all the blood drained from her head and face.

After coming so close to winning, after things had gone so well till now, she could not believe this was actually happening!

She just could not believe the enemy had such a move in their sleeves.

And worse still, it was a move she had noticed at the very start of the attack.

But had failed to act against it.

The realization of this made her eyes darken as the light seemed to consciously avoid entering it, her tongue dried up in fear, and her ears appeared to have gone deaf, no longer even being able to register that ragged man's alarming message, which by the way was still being blasted out, destroying the morale of the army.

Instead, Cambyses had to put in a herculean effort just to stay conscious atop her horse and did not even have the time to bother to care that her solid frontlines had begun to crumble like dust after seeing that sight.

While her almost-dead heart was only filled with bitter regret.

Regret because she had seen that army before, the one which separated itself from the 'main army' and headed towards the cement plant.

At the time she had laughed, even cheered that she would have to only fight half the enemy.

But that was not what she was actually regretting.

What she was actually regretting was that though she had made a mental note to send a contingent of soldiers along that way as a redundancy, she had forgotten about that.

Because immediately after she had made that promise, one of the coal storage houses burst into a spectacular explosion, making her distracted.

And then with that momentous event still fresh in her mind, plus the imminent arrival of Perseus, she and all those around her seemingly became too focused on that particular threat, failing to notice the other half of the enemy.

Who were also helped a bit by the weather, as with dawn approaching, the familiar winter morning mist had begun to set in, aiding Leosydas in hiding the light from his group's torches.

So it was only when Leosydas had actually made contact with the walls protecting the workshops and then burst through it, and then started to bulldoze through it to try and reach the manor that the people even became aware of an entire army being present at their very doorsteps.

And it was chaos, as the people there screamed and ran in terror at the sight of the incoming army.

While Leosydas and his men showed no mercy to anyone who got in the way, putting all men, women, and children they could get their hands on under the sword, and taking no prisoners.

And in the resulting massacre, several small-scale fires also managed to break out as the Tibians used their torches to burn the homes, some of the hearths in homes that were left unattended caught fire, and many braziers outside got toppled over, and a few lucky the dying embers fell on a bit of dry hay or wood, reigniting themselves again, and being born anew into a blazing flame.

The consequence of all this was soon the rise of plumes of smoke from the workshops, the distinct mushroom-like black clouds reaching high into the sky, clear for anyone near to easily see.

All this was of course terrible news of Zanzan, as, if not for the smoke and the ragged man's message, perhaps the Zanzan higher-ups could have played off the enemy forces as their own, and at least retained a bit of the morale.

But given the state of affairs now, with the burning fire, the seemingly low cackle of the pleased enemy as they tore through the citizens, and lastly the mournful, desperate screams of men being beheaded and women and children being killed or humiliated, no one would even think the force was friendly.

While seeing the fire and hearing the screams, many of the men present with Cambyses began to break down.

"No! My family! My wife, my daughter!"

"Why? Why? Son! Son!"

"Kashfa, Opesia! Be alive! Oh god be alive!"

"Kala! Kala! Oh my god Kala!"

These mournful screams and tearful cries broke out among almost the frontline defender, as most of them had families residing in those workshops, many of whom had not evacuated because they thought staying inside the wooden walls were much better than trying to cram into the temples like the entire city was trying to do or wonder hopelessly around the city looking a place of refuge in this weather.

And it was not the recently recruited servants and workers who were mourning and running.

Even many of the proper soldiers and guards too started to break rank in order to go and try defending their own families, for many lived near and around the workshops.

But perhaps the most notable person to break down during all this was Takfiz, who was among the first to run after seeing even the very first thin wisps of smoke rise to the horizon, howling in fear for his grandson he had sacrificed so much for.

And this had a profound impact on many of the soldiers, who saw clearly such an important person desert them, and combined with the anxiety of wanting to go to protect their own families, it was only natural they saw no point in staying here and so soon afterward the sturdy lines began to melt away like soft cheese under fire.

It was a terrible sight to behold.

But what was the ultimate result of his breakdown of military discipline?

Did the men manage to actually go save their kin?

Did they manage to fight off Leosydas and his men?

Did they at least manage to meet their families?

No, of course not.

Most did not even get to escape the vicinity, as they were soon beset upon from both sides.

This was because as soon as the choke points were loosened, it was like the floodgates had been opened for Perseus and his men, who seemed to have transformed into an even more fierce, vicious bloodthirsty wolf than Leosydas's men.

And this beast, one which had been trapped in that pass for so long, and one which had endured for so long being peppered with tens of thousands of arrows, let out an enraged and excited roar of satisfaction the moment it broke through, rejoicing at being so callously released into the wilds, and then in a mad rush started to kill anything and everything that moved.

They had endured long enough taking so much punishment and now it was time to make everyone and everything pay.

So the moment they broke through, and saw their prey running away, they all instinctively started to give chase to the fleeing enemy, using their huge, long spears to attack the defenseless backs of their hated foes, while other's eyes fell on the women and girls that were just till now running the supply lines.

"Kill! Kill to your heart's content!"

"Slaughter them! Leave none alive!"

"Women! Find the women!"

"Where are the pretty girls? Where are the concubines?"

Just judging by the crazed, manic shouts of many of Perseus's men, it almost appeared that they had by now gone half-insane and now seemed to be using their weapons and the resulting bloodshed to vent all of the pent-up emotions.

Or letting their primal lust take hold and violate any woman to cool down.

While from the opposite side, Leosydas also pushed his men forward, completing the encirclement, and killing any men running toward them.

So by running, the men had actually made the situation much worse for them.

Not that it mattered to them anymore, for most who ran were already dead or captured.

"Into the manor! Get into the manor! Cambyses get into the manor!"

But even amidst this chaos, at least there were a few level-headed men in Zanzan's rank.

The most prominent one being Menes, who, upon seeing the enemy and disintegrating line, had instinctively begun to shout this, waving his sturdy arms to draw attention to him as he did.

And following the giant's quick thinking, the other council members and the few bodyguards they had with them too began to shout the same instruction, while one particularly brave soldier even went up to Cambyses shaking the stunned girl out of her stupor.

"Yes! The manor! We will be safe inside the manor! Run inside! Run inside!" And after breaking out of her almost hypnotic stance, Cambyses too began to point the people to the most obvious place to take refuge, as she too started to approach it.

And seeing the lords enter the place and hearing their shout, many of the panicked men, and more specifically the women and children who were towards the rear lines appeared to make a dash for it.

While once inside, still on her horse, Cambyses asked in a loud, alarmed voice to Menes who was beside her,

"Menes! How many men have you brought? Why are there so few? Where are all the tens of thousands of defenders?"

She asked this because as far as she could see, the reinforcements that Takfiz had said had come till now only amounted to a few hundred men.

There seemed to be a few zeroes missing there.

Chapter 586 Manor Defense (Part-6)

The lords of Zanzan and the lady of the house were the first to enter the manor, along with about twenty or so bodyguards accompanying.

And once inside, though the soldiers tried their best to secure all the entrances, their efforts proved futile.

Because they were really too few.

And it was this lack of numbers that made Cambyses inquire where were the rest of the reinforcements.

She guessed it had to be at least 6 am by now, and the army should have been here by now.

"The soldiers are still gathering downhill. But they should be making the climb as we speak!" Menes quickly answered the inquiry, though he sounded a lot less confident saying that second sentence.

One which Cambyses noticed and narrowed her eyes in anger, her pupils blazing with fury.

"Speak the truth! Where are the defenders? It's been so long and they are still not here? Why is it taking them so long?" Menes had never seen Cambyses have such a scary look as she shot these questions.

But then again she had never been in such a scary situation.

"...we thought it would be prudent to wait and gather forces before coming. So they are waiting for my instructions to advance." Finally, unable to bear pressure from Cambyses's glare, Menes muttered this in an almost mosquito-like voice, which the hyper-aware Cambyses of course caught every single syllable of it.

And it made her heart almost turn black with fury,

"What! Why! Why would you hold off on this?"

"Do you want Zanzan to fall?"

"Do you want me to die?"

"You disloyal snake! Alex's eyes must have been eaten by shit to have put you in charge!"

"Not only did you lose us the war, but you can't even do this properly?"

"Do you think you can put on a pair of clown shoes and dance on my head just because I did not say anything about the last battle?"

"When did you become such an imbecile? You fuckingxxxxx.....xxxxx....xxxx"

Hearing this, finally, Cambyses's dam of patience burst open as she began to lambast Menes in a way most of the people there did not think was possible, as Cambyses in her vituperation uttered words no self-respecting woman was expected to say, drawing stunned eyes from all over.

None had seen Cambyses become so mad.

While the person in the direct line of fire to it all, Menes, only drooped his head in shame as the shrilled shouts bombarded him.

He would admit he had made some grave errors in his duties.

Regarding the reinforcements, what he did was place them at the bottom of the hill leading to Alexander's manor, and then told them to wait and build up mass before advancing, as he figured one large combined force would be much better than sending units one by one to face the enemy individually in a piece-meal fashion.

This was also the reason why that guard Cambyses had sent to get the active defenders had not come yet.

They were stopped by Menes's adjutant who then told them to wait for more of their comrades.

And though the man protested, they were held off.

Now, to be frank, Menes's plan was not a bad plan in theory.

Certainly sending a few hundred troops apiece might have been just feeding them to the enemy one by one, letting the enemy deal with each individual unit separately instead of a wider, coherent force.

But in thinking that he failed to take into account the fact that the manor might desperately need reinforcements, even just a trickle of it, right now to survive rather than wait to get a whole lot of it much later.

That was what he should have done.

And as Menes realized this, along with the other council members who too had suggested this only hung their heads.

And seeing this, Cambyses finally chose to finish her tirade.

She knew the enemy was fast approaching, there was little time on her hands to be engaged in such infighting.

So climbing off her horse, she then suddenly instructed Menes.

"Now go! Take this horse and run down to the hill. Gather the men there and come rescue us," as she handed the reigns of the horse and almost in a metaphorical sense, told him to go grab the reigns of the army.

"Bu..but...no Cambyses! You should go! I will stay and guard the manor. Because if anything happens to you I will not be able to show my face to Alexander,"

But Menes wanted to refuse, as he then pointed towards the direction of the front door to shout

"The enemy is yet to encircle the front gates. You can still get out! Quick!"

"You must live! The people still need you!"

And he was joined by Grahtos too, who said,

"That's right, My lady. This manor barely has any defenders to defend itself with. Please escape while you can!"

To which Cambyses only sneered, before turning to Menes and saying in a mocking tone, "So you do you know me dying is bad? Looks like everything is not shit inside you after all."

Judging by the voice she was still very mad.

As Cambyses then steeled her voice and spoke in a commanding voice,

"It's good that you know that."

"So ride this horse out and bring the army to rescue us. Aren't they waiting for your orders? What good will I escaping do?" Cambyses taunted, even though she could very much command the army if she wanted to, and then finished her speech with this very explicit threat,

"And know that if you fail and I die, Alexander will have your ass!"

Cambyses was basically saying 'go and take command of the army or die trying.'

And hearing this absolute command and feeling Cambyses's seething rage, Menes knew there was no way around it.

So he at last leaped onto the beast with haste and then with a silent nod and a stony face, urged the horse forward, hoping the enemy had not closed off the entrance to the manor by now.

Because then, the lone man would then have no choice but to die.

"Mistress, we should try and leave the manor too. Let us follow General Menes," As they saw Menes navigate the horse through the narrow doorway into the corridor, his head lowered to the same level as the beast's shoulder, the remaining council members urged Cambyses to follow behind him on foot, hoping they could be fast enough to outpace the enemy.

But the stoic Cambyses shook her head in denial, making all the council members think,

'She is not going to say to hold the manor at all cost is she? There is no way that's possible! The enemy is both at the back and the left, and is rapidly encircling us.'

Hence these members, who had come ahead of the main force to reassure Cambyses, now felt like ants in a hot stove and wondered if they should try and make a break for it on their own.

Because if Menes could do it, perhaps they could too.

But such treacherous thoughts were put to rest immediately by Cambyses's next sentence, where she said,

"No need! We will take the secret passages! It leads to the southern district! It will be much safer."

And this made all the lords widen their eyes a bit.

Yes!

There were still the secret escape routes every noble dug for themselves.

How could they have forgotten about that?

"Ahh! Of course!" Grahtos's voice went up a few octaves as he said this, an air of relief and comfort escaping his mouth.

He had become a lord just a few months ago and did not want to die so soon without having enjoyed anything.

While Harun who was accompanying them chimed an inquiry, "Ahh! But then mistress why did you let General Menes take such a dangerous route? The southern district is not too far from us. He could have come with us and the attack would not have been delayed too much."

"Perhaps the tunnels are very winding?" And Menicus was there to provide a possible answer.

But Cambyses denied that, saying, "No, the tunnels are not too long. It places you just outside the walls of the port."

Which made the three men confused as to then why Menes could not come with them.

So Cambyses gave the real reason in a cold tone they had never heard before,

"General Menes has many mistakes in the past few months. So I sent him out through such a dangerous path to see if he still has the goddess's favor."

"If he lives, he can still command the army. If he can't....then he is not worthy anymore."

The callous way Cambyses said it made the men subconsciously bolt their spines a bit out of fear as they suddenly felt an aura of respect from her.

This was not the Cambyses they knew.

And it was in fact true.

Because this Cambyses was somehow changed about witnessing that explosive.

And this authoritative and decisive style of judging one's worth, especially one who had proved incompetent was something the ancient people actually admired.

"May the goddess bless him," So Menicus placed his hand on his heart hearing this, as did the others, not daring to speak up against it one bit.

While Cambyses ignored this, and only said, "Come, time's wasting," before suddenly her an idea flashed inside her...setting fire to the manor and killing foes and allies alike!

Chapter 587 Setting One's Own Fire

As Cambyses and her entourage made their way through the various winding corridors, hurriedly advancing toward a remote part of the manor that led to the secret passages connecting a passage to the outside, suddenly Cambyses felt an idea birth inside her.

She got this from looking at all the burning candles on the walls and chandeliers which she walked past on her way, all of whom worked to illuminate all the expensive carpets, the embroidered currents, and the beautifully crafted furniture that laid inside this magnificent manor.

And as she looked at them, seeing all these exquisite items flash before her, quickly made the girl's heartache as she understand that all this was about to fall into the enemy's hands.

Never even mind the huge stockpiles of gold they had in their treasury, which Cambyses had already given up any hope on saving, plus all those expensive paintings of Pasha Muazz stored with them that Alexander intended to sell at auctions.

Cambyses even wished that giving that all up would save her and her city's life.

'Why let them have it?' But suddenly, on her way, Cambyses found a voice inside her asking this question.

And as she gazed at all the candles and burning lamps, watching the flame on them sway and flicker innocently, she repeated the question to herself, and with each repeat her eyes became sharper and sharper.

'Yes! Why let them have everything? Why leave anything in fact?' And the more she thought about it, the more she saw no point in doing so.

Until finally, with a sudden booming flash, an idea thundered inside her.

'Let's burn everything! Let's burn everything and kill as many of those bastards as possible,' Cambyses came to the conclusion as her eyes then began to stare with a crazy fascination at all the burning flames around her.

And as she made up her mind, she abruptly stopped, which caused the entire group to halt too, for both she was their leader and was also leading them as only she knew where the secret passages were.

"Mi...My lady...why have we stopped? Is something the matter? Did you forget anything?" Even the usually solid Menicus found himself currently a bit jumpy, as things were looking pretty precarious for them.

Hence the alarmed inquiry.

"No, I just want to set the manor on fire!" But Cambyses only coolly replied this back to the aged man, her neutral, almost non-chantant tone betraying the gravity of what she was about to do.

"Wha...what?" And this answer naturally made the three lords stunned.

They had not even dared to think of setting fire to their own lord's house.

"M..y...My lady what are you saying? How can we set fire to the manor! It is Lord Alexander's abode! It is where the council meets every day! And we have not lost it yet!" Harun was the first to shout his objection at the idea, the incredulity palpable in his voice.

He was not saying those sentences as questions but as reminders.

And he was immediately followed by Grahtos, who repeated,

"Yes, yes. The manor is not lost yet." before pointing toward where they came from and saying, "And Lord Menes should be here any moment. So even if the enemy takes the house, it will be for but only a moment. And then it will be back in our hands again!"

"Mmm, the two lords are right," And Menicus too joined with a nod, showing his support as he believed Cambyses was under too much stress and saying things without thinking properly.

So he further added to point to her, "I also believe that it would be premature to set fire to the manor just now. Because remember that currently there are a lot of women and children inside too."

"And it is possible very much possible that the Tibians will choose to spare them or capture them as slaves. So with lord Menes's imminent arrival, there is a large possibility we can still rescue most of them."

"I urge my lady not to be brash."

Menicus's said the last words with great sincerity and seriousness, and his clean bearing really showcased why he was considered the leader of the council members.

And all these points made perfect sense.

But whereas any other time Cambyses would have listened to this advice with respect and sobriety, even if she did not agree with it, her recent change made it not so any longer.

"It is my house, it is my order. Now obey!"

Hence Cambyses gave an answer that shocked the men, where she snapped the word 'obey' with a hard, almost cruel emphasis.

And this made the men think this was not the girl they knew.

Normally, even if Cambyses did not agree with them, she would have definitely tried to reason with them, perhaps arguing about how the women would be maybe better off dead than having to live with the scar of what the soldiers were about to soon do to them,

Or perhaps she would argue that the manor was actually lost and that they should now focus on killing the Tibians rather than trying to save the already doomed souls.

She might have even reasoned that it was all to prevent the enemy from getting to the treasury that was in the basement.

In wartime, all these would have been valid points.

But Cambyses did nothing of that sort.

Her answer was only a simple, short order for she saw had made up her mind and saw no reason to waste time arguing with others.

And backed by her onyx eyes that seemed to radiate an oppressive pressure not even Alexander was capable of producing, the three council members and the twenty or so odd trailing bodyguards all somehow began to feel much smaller in front of her, even though Cambyses was actually the shortest person there.

It was like Cambyses was somehow glaring down at them.

"..." So following her command, a few, very tense seconds passed, with each passing moment feeling like an eternity under those glaring eyes.

The men felt like they were wax puppets under the blazing sun, and a part of them urged to say yes just so the scorching heat would subside.

But while Menicus and Grahtos managed to hold off that pressure and fight against Cambyses, hoping to make her back down, the other man finally cracked.

It was the civilian minister Harun.

Though this was very predictable given the other two were veteran survivors of the battlefield who were also long-time leaders of their own and had many times even looked at the eyes of their superiors and directly said no.

While Harun was a civilian till very recently and his past experience and also the society he grew up in cultivated a practice of following any command from a 'real' nobleman or noble lady without question.

"...Gazum, do as the madam says," Hence hearing Cambyses's order he transferred the command of his bodyguards to her.

To which Cambyses immediately produced a light nod and slight smile, before turning her gaze to the three men who had stepped up and instructed them,

"Take the burning candle and lamps you see on the walls and start to first light the curtains on fire. Once they start burning properly, the rest will follow."

Cambyses sounded eerily calm at ordering this act of arson on her own house, and even perhaps a bit excited.

"Yes, ma'am," And the three men instantly replied with a loud chorus, before going around to doing just that, taking off the candle from the candlestands that were lighting their way and placing the bright flames near the edges of the curtains.

Though at first the curtains actually proved to be quite fire resistant, for they were made specifically as so, in order to prevent any accident like the wind blowing them over onto the lit fire and quickly turning the entire manor into a blazing inferno.

So for the initial few tries, the three men only saw the edges catch fire and burn, before quickly sputtering out on their own, leaving only a black spot on the eye-wateringly expensive fabric as a trace.

But under their mistress's ever-watchful eyes, the three men were not deterred, and seeing they were unable to start a sizable fire individually, the three pooled their candles together and started to attack the same point, even douching the curtain with some oil from one of the nearby lamps to help them get it going.

And a while later it began to have results, as the flame started to slowly grow from a light ember to a bright glow, and then to a huge burning mass covering half the curtain.

Following which it just kept on growing and growing.

While Cambyses turned her attention to the other idle men, who, now facing her, and seeing one of theirs had already started to follow her, felt the pressure being multiplied by magnitudes.

There was really no other pressure like peer pressure.

"*Sigh*...you guys follow Lady Cambyses too....Go!" So seeing the writing on the wall Grahtos flipped too, and a while later so did Menicus.

Thus unbeknownst to almost anyone, a group of twenty-odd men got to work setting a remote, currently completely deserted part of the manor on fire, starting with first the curtains, which then spread to the carpets before lastly moving onto the wooden structures such as the doors, windows and the furniture.

While seeing this all Cambyses did was produce a crazy smile as she made her way towards her escape.

Chapter 588 Juminus's Struggles (Part-1)

As Perseus's men began to flood out into the backyard, Juminus and his men found themselves completely vulnerable as the screen in front of them began to disappear.

Also, being archers with no shield, as they had given those to the frontlines, meant they could not even go to the front to try and reinstate the blockade.

"Back! Back to the manor!" Hence, Juminus, being their leader shouted out loud, while waving his hand in a fashion to imitate that action.

And fortunately for him, many of the men, especially those who knew him personally responded, and they managed to cluster up around their captain, forming somewhat of an effective fighting force.

And then, being at the rear, these expert soldiers managed to cleverly use the other fleeing man as almost a kind of human shield who distracted the enemy for long enough so that Juminus and his group could quickly perform an orderly retreat.

Hence this group of about a hundred (100) men managed to reach the manor with relatively few casualties.

But though Juminus managed to overcome that initial, perhaps some might even say the most dangerous hurdle easily enough, actually entering the manor suddenly proved to be a much more difficult challenge!

This was because when he got there, he could already see hundreds of men, women, and children beginning to dash for the safety of the manor, trying to cram themselves through the small door all in the hopes of reaching that sanctuary.

And because the doors were not large enough to begin, certainly not enough to let in hundreds of people in at one, an inevitable scene of crushing began to unfold right in front of Juminus, as people pushed, shoved, thrusted, and even struck others in an effort to squeeze oneself inside.

And predictably this caused many to die from suffocation as they were squashed from all sides, making them unable to even breathe, with small children begin the most susceptible to such tragedy.

And couple this with a light stampede over the rush and panic, and you got a recipe for disaster.

And it was exactly such a disaster that Juminus found himself a witness to, where people died of asphyxiation or tripped before being trampled to death.

But Juminus had little time to worry himself over the unfolding tragedy.

His one and only course of action currently was to get inside like any other man and then barricade the entrances, and with Perseus hot on their heels, they did not have any time to spare for the clump to clear.

"Clear the way! Make the men clear the way! We have to go inside," So when he saw these people blocking his way, he could only give the order to make them disperse.

"But how commander? These people have lost all sense! They will not hear to reason!" While one of the soldiers nearby was quick to ask this.

This was an obvious question because if stampedes could be stopped by mere words, then stampedes would not occur in the first place.

Everyone in the crowd had mostly lost all their senses of their surroundings and only the primal urge to run remained.

"*Clang!* Like this!" And knowing this, Juminus fiercely brought out his sword from his scabbard, and then to much horror of everyone around, started to violently hack and slash the defenseless backs of the fleeing civilians, his eyes tearing up as he did.

"What! Captain...wha...are...!"

"Stop! Have you... gon...?"

"Thi...how...!:"

This of course made the men around him become shell-shocked, for they could not believe their commander was asking them to kill the very civilians they were tasked to save.

But Juminus shouted, "Look back! Look how close the enemy is! And know that once they get here, they will kill us, and they will kill them too."

"So kill men! Kill!"

"Kill your way into the manor so that we may live. And save the lords inside!"

Juminus thrust his sword high up into the air as he shouted this short speech and the loud speech and the grand gesture worked wonders in raising the morale of the men.

Yes! The lords!

Cambyses, Menes, Menicus, and all the others were still inside the manor according to these men, likely hoping for their rescue,

And it was these men's first and foremost priority to protect them.

And so with Juminus reminding them of that, and the man leading the charge himself, the others too drew their steel swords, and moments later, horrific screams of despair and sadness began to ring out from the crowd as the soldiers who the people of Zanzan once thought were their protectors started driving the steel blades into the backs of innocent women and children, their strikes equally as brutal as the ones from Tibians.

"Aghhht...they are here!"

"Kyahhh...the enemy is here! Let me go, let me go!"

"Urgghh....push! Fuck....push harder!"

"Run! Run away arhhhhh..."

And this sudden attack made the crowd even more frenzied with many mistaking Juminus for Tibians, as they screamed, howled, and ran for their lives.

But the hundred or so men showed no mercy no matter who got in their way, men, women, and even children.

It made no difference to them who fell under their blades, just that they did.

For in the minds of these ancient people, even killing all these thousand people was nothing compared to the lives of even one noble, and so these men truly felt they were right in their course of action, which was to go to the defense of their master or mistress.

Though that did not mean many did not feel guilty or hurt, with perhaps the best example being Juminus himself.

For as the man hacked his way forward, clearing the way, like one could cut the overgrown plants and leaves while trekking through a jungle trail, the man in his frenzy did not really have the time or mindset to pay attention who or even what he was killing, just that he was, except for one body that suddenly caught his eye.

It was that of a small girl, around seven to eight years old and wearing worn-out clothes, who had suddenly turned around just as Juminus was about to swing his sword down, her black eyes, glistening with tears at everything going around her meeting Juminus's eyes crazed red eyes.

And this gaze produced a flash inside Juminus as he remembered seeing this little girl.

He remembered that she had several times delivered arrows to him as an arrowboy, or girl, during the battle, and at one time even had come with her mother to say a few words of encouragement to him.

At the time she looked so happy, tired but full of smiles.

And as if the girl also recognized him, she now too produced that familiar smile, glad to see a known face amidst this chaos.

But alas, how more could she have been any more wrong?

For right now, Juminus was about to snatch that very precious smile from her face, and with his own hands nonetheless.

Because try as he might, the momentum of his swing was too large for him to ignore and before Juminus had even a chance to respond, the cruel, sharp steel, had already run across her chest, producing a fountain of red as a huge gash opened up on the flawless skin with the strike even cutting many of her ribs in half, and almost cleaving her two.

And the impact of this immense strike immediately sent the innocent flower hurling across the air, her eyes bulging out in disbelief and confusion at what had just happened, as she finally fell onto the muddy ground with a dull *thud*, a searing pain course all through her body, while her body instinctively convulsed and her mouth foamed out puddles of blood.

"Ah!" And as Juminus witnessed this horrific scene, he could only get that short burst of air out of his lungs, which might have carried all the regret in the world, for an instant later his chest seemed to heat up like it was burning.

He could not believe that he had actually done such a horrific thing and seeing the small girl lay motionless on the ground, dead or dying, his eyes shook like they had seen the most fearful scene in his life.

While her unfocused eyes seemed to meet Juminus's terror-stricken sockets and it seemed to be asking him,

'Why? Why did you kill me? What sin had I committed?'

'Did I not do my best?'

'Did I not carry all those heavy buckets of arrows just for you?'

'Did I not give you enough arrows?'

'I did, did I not?'

'Even with this small body I did,'

'Even when my arms ached I did!'

'Even when I fell on my way, scraping my knees and it hurt to even walk I did!'

'Even when I was so scared all the time I did!'

"So why? Why did you kill me?'

"Because I got in your way? Just because of that?'

'Could you have not killed me?'

'Could you have not just kicked me aside?'

'Could you have not shown that little bit of mercy to a small girl?'

'Did I not deserve even that!'

'A kick of the guts?'

The girl's cries seemed to batter against Juminus's heart and conscience, and Juminus felt like breaking down.

He had never felt that weak or helpless ever in his life.

Chapter 589 Reaching The Top

As Juminus continued to gaze at the lifeless body, he seemed to begin to enter an even deeper level of hallucination, as to him suddenly it seemed that the unfocused eyes had regained their voices, and even though the body lay prone on the ground, her hand seemed to move to point to a dead woman.

'*Sigh*', but perhaps this is for the best! My mother is already dead, killed by your orders. So me living all by myself any longer will just be tortur.....*crack*!' The ghostly girl's monologue was abruptly put off by a heavy foot crashing against her small head, lightly cracking it and even knocking a few of her teeth out.

Now even that innocent flower's face had been ruined.

"Captain! What are you doing? Advance!" But Juminus had no time to keep gazing at it.

For the owner of that foot then quickly urged him to move, and this loud shout made him regain his focus.

And so as Juminus raised his head to see the owner of the shout, he found it to be of a young man from his own unit, with the man standing with one of his boots on that now dead girl's head, squashing it against the ground like he was stepping on a bug.

The man had not probably even witnessed.

A sight which did not actually make Juminus mad.

But only feel hollow.

'What is the point of all this? Is all this worth it?' A small voice then asked inside him, a voice that had not existed till now, a voice that sounded eerily like that little girl.

'Yes! What was the point?' And Juminus was unable to answer.

"Captain! Hurry! The enemy is almost here!" While from the outside world, the concerned shouts of his colleagues rang out again, who seeing Juminus just stand there felt that he might have exhausted himself.

And for the time being, this noise helped to drive out the overwhelming hopelessness Juminus found himself swimming against, and temporarily drowned out that little voice.

"Yes! Let's go!" And so understanding it was no time to be daydreaming, Juminus summoned back his strength to his limbs, and quickly grabbed his swords before continuing the act, though all of a sudden his moves seemed to lack any spirit behind it.

It was like Juminus had become a puppet who was only mechanically doing what he was supposed to, the fire that had burned in his eyes till now seemingly died out.

The death of that small girl might not even register to almost anyone, but to Juminus personally, it felt like he somehow had destroyed the entire world with that single death.

And he felt like he would eternally see that ghastly, dying face of that girl every time he closed his eyes.

If it was not obvious, Juminus had just suffered from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) right now, and even if he could survive the current ordeal, it was like he would be mentally crippled for the rest of his life.

But in a way perhaps this was the heaven's way of punishing him, perhaps this was his price for giving that cruel command.

A price that seemed to litter the way to the manor, as Juminus noticed many such bodies laying along the path, while the crowd, after receiving a few casualties, quickly dissipated in terror, leaving the way open for Juminus and his men to enter.

"Secure all the exits. Take control of all the doors! Put those with the shields in front. The archers at the back" As soon as Juminus entered the familiar house, he seemed to at least externally get his bearing back, and began to shout out coherent commands, intent on trying to hold the manor for as long as possible, and finished by loudly ordering, "And find me the lords and Mistress!"

Thus, under Juminus's supervision, the narrow doors and other passageways were quickly reinforced with teams of ten to twenty men, with the few one's having shields and wielding a spear at the very front followed by others who stood behind them touching shoulder to shoulder to give the formation mass and support.

The troops immediately facing the enemy were mostly fresh men that Menes and the others had bought, hence the presence of the appropriate gear, while those at the back were much more exhausted, having already fought and without everything given the circumstance back then.

But though they could not offer any offensive help to those in front, if the enemy tried to push past them, they could certainly shove back.

So with the initial control of the manor under Juminus's hands, and the passages secured, under the guard's supervision, people began to enter much more quickly while being in a much more orderly manner.

"Men first!"

"Get back! Let him in!"

"Go away stinky brat! We don't have room!"

And following this, though it might seem very weird, it was men who began to be prioritized to be granted entry into the manor, for the simple fact that men were more useful than women and children for defending the manor.

And remember, the goal of these troops was not to save the citizens and servants but to protect the manor and the nobles dwelling inside.

Hence, it was the reinforcements who had come with Menes that were let in first, followed by other men, while small children were cruelly turned away with a shoo or even a cruel kick, being left to fend for themselves all on their own.

Most of whom would end up being killed by the crazed Tibians.

Or worse!

And more tragically for them, Perseus's men did not discriminate when it came to boys or girls for achieving their enjoyment, leaving truly deplorable scenes to unfold in that backyard.

Speaking of Perseus's men, a question might arise of where they were while Juminus was organizing a defense of the manor.

Why hadn't they attacked yet?

The distance from the mouth of the road to the manor was at best a few hundred meters, and they should have been here in mere minutes.

In all honestly, the manor should have been already taken by now.

So why hadn't it?

And well, the simple answer to it was that Perseus had lost control of a part of his army, leaving those at the front to target the weaker and tastier prey such as the women and running men.

Rather than to try and go after the harder target such as the manor, which, even at its weakest had a lot of men, being it a logistic hub and still being guarded by a few men, and even housing the lords and their bodyguards.

But of course, even that would have mattered little to the vastly superior Tibian army...if they had any cohesion.

As to why they didn't, well that had happened because while along the narrow trek upwards, Perseus had formed his army in a long queue, and placed the least trained and most expendable part of his force at the very front, so that they would bear the brunt of any enemy attack while preferring to keep most of his trained, professional men at the back with him.

And then to guide these lesser troops, he had placed a small group of elite men with them, most of who, as you might have guessed, had died to the arrow fire, leaving the levied peasants without a proper chain of command.

Combine that fact with how these frontline soldiers had suffered for so long, hence once they were 'liberated', these men forgot all about military discipline and dispersed themselves to wreak as much havoc on the surroundings as possible as a way to vent.

And lucky for them, there were almost kinds of entertainment for them all laid out.

There was the game of tag where they could chase and spear down all the running men.

There were many women around the vicinity to comfort them.

And for some of the more crazed people, there was even a group of soldiers who were stubbornly defending without retreating, who were soon surrounded and hacked to bits, these Tibians taking particular pleasure in killing a prey that could fight back.

It was also here that one Tibian man showed evidence of just how insane they had become, as after killing one of the Zanzan soldiers, the man cut open his guts and ripped out his liver before starting to chew it raw right then and there.

How could Perseus, or anyone for that matter even dream of controlling his group of crazed demons?

And so Perseus didn't.

Instead, he only ordered the remaining part, the still sane part of his army, to move up slowly, telling them to pay special attention that the crazed peasants did not attack them in their drunken stupor.

And so given the army climbed cautiously, it gave Juminus just that extra bit of time to prepare.

While upon reaching the summit, Perseus first gazed with feverish eyes onto the manor, looking at it like it was the holy grail.

'Once this is taken, Zanzna will be taken!' Perseus was convinced, and his heart was filled with ecstasy.

"Attack!"

So as soon as he got to the top, without any delay, Perseus gave this order, and Juminus, who had been able to hold the doors relatively easily, instantly felt like he was being crushed by a mountain from all sides.

Because the best Tibias had to offer was being sent to crush his paltry force of a few hundred.

Chapter 590 Cambyses's Escape

Juminus had managed to just barely take control of some of the doors and get only a few of his men in proper order before Perseus already launched his attack.

"Close the gates! Quick! Close the gates!"

And seeing the mass of men rise from the slope of the hill and approach them with menace and purpose, immediately the order to slam the doors shut went out, as the soldiers then began to brace against the door to act as a human barricade.

Bang

Slam

Crash

And a few moments later the Tibians made a thundering contact with the closed wooden structures, smashing against the back door with their shoulders, delivering powerful kicks to break it down, and even putting their shield in front and running at the door like a makeshift human ram.

All of which made the door groan and creak in pain, its cry getting louder and louder with each strike.

Because these doors, though relatively sturdy, when compared to the challenging foes they were facing, proved to be too thin and fragile,

So the poor two-paneled oak door leading to the back yard, which would have been called adequate any other time found itself buckling and splintering under the heavy attacks, and soon parts of the door began to be literally torn off by the attacking enemy, with many of the soldiers using their bare hands to break open the solid wood piece by piece.

All while from the other side, the men let out menacing threats accompanying their crazed howls and forceful grunts,

"Come and fight fuckers cowards! What are you afraid of?"

"Huh! Why are you hiding now? Weren't you having fun killing us just now?"

"You think this flimsy piece of shit will save you? I will gut every single one of the motherf*ckers with my bare hands you swine!"

"Be good and open the door! I promise to take good care of your wife and children, hehe!"

"I heard your lord's women are soft as pillows. Hadn't ever had a high-class pussy like that!"

"Hey, if you open up, maybe we will let you have a go after we are done, hahaha!"

All sorts of curses and taunts and even enticements were uttered by the Tibians.

White with each passing moment, they themselves seemed to be getting more and more impatient and the increased ferocity of attacks seemed to reflect that, while at the same time, all the barriers holding them were beginning to disintegrate bit by bit.

It was only a matter of time before they breached through and started slaughtering everyone inside, and the men inside the manor knew it.

And their only way of getting out of this alive lay in the hope that Menes could get here on time.

"Dammit! Have you still not found Mistress? Look again! Check the servant's quarter! Maybe they hid there! Go!"

While Juminus, he was much more anxious over the fact that they had not yet found any trace of the lords and more importantly Cambyses.

'Where could they be?' He raked his brain, hoping to find them before the enemy broke through, and so sent small groups of women and children to scour every single of the few hundred rooms in the manor looking for any of their traces.

As for what he would do after he found them, how he would protect them from Perseus, well the man had not thought of it so far.

For now, he only concentrated on getting to them first.

Though unbeknownst to him, the twenty or so men and one woman were long gone from anywhere near the vicinity of the manor, having already left via one of the many escape tunnels present.

"To think such an elaborate tunnel existed beneath the manor? Truly impressive" And as they traveled through it, Harun could not help but let out a praise of admiration at the sturdiness of the narrow route, as his hands felt the walls being made of granite.

But the thing Harun perhaps found most impressive was that there was very little water or even dampness all around, which was a remarkable feat for any underground tunnel given all such structures tended to leak rainwater.

But since it did not, it went to show just how much care Muazz and his family had put into its construction.

Which also might not be all that surprising given the fat lord's love for life.

But anyway, as Harun marveled at the architecture, he also could not help but reminisce about how they entered here, through a small, inconspicuous iron door barely wide enough to let in an adult man.

In fact it was so narrow that the portly Muazz might have even not been able to fit himself even if he wanted to do.

And this rust-covered, dull, unimpressive door looked so old that it seemed to almost mesh with the rest of the old stone wall, with the poor lighting even making Harun miss the thing entirely on his first glance.

Cambyses on the other hand spotted the gate instantly and with powerful steps approached it, only to see it being locked with a heavy lock.

This was of course natural given the nature of the door, and something Cambyses had expected.

So without having had the time to fetch the keys, she then asked some of the men to use the pummels of their swords to smash it open.

Clang

Clang

Clang

And surprisingly it only took a few solid hits to do so due to the age of the lock and also the primitive designs of these mechanisms.

Following which the soldiers quickly pried open the small door, it producing a low, painful creak as the rusted joints proved unwilling to cooperate.

But ultimately the entire door was made ajar, and immediately after, everyone was greeted with a gust of aged, musty aged air that had been trapped there for so long, the smell of which made everyone wriggle their nose with discomfort.

And then they laid eyes upon it.

Thier ticket to freedom.

A passageway, almost as narrow as many's shoulders, smelling of mold, and shrouded in pitch-black darkness.

Honestly, it was pretty scary to think they would have to go through it.

'What if the walls collapse?'

'What if the passage is blocked by something?'

"What if there are dangerous insects or snakes?'

'What if we get stuck at any point?'

The narrow walls and absolute darkness permeating out of it certainly produced a very oppressive, almost claustrophobic environment that sought to bring out the worst fears in most men.

Harun particularly seemed to be having second thoughts.

While the others did not even pay any attention to him.

Instead, under Cambyses's guidance, several nearby torches, kept there for this exact purpose were lit by the soldiers, and with them taking the lead to tackle any bugs, insects, or dangerous reptiles, the group silently entered the tunnel.

They even remembered to slam the door shut behind them to prevent anyone from easily finding this was the exact door they escaped through.

And this was how the group made their way through the tunnel, in complete silence, both because it was quite tight and everyone wanted to concentrate on not grazing against the walls, but also before such tunnels were echo chambers which carried any words spoken a long, long way.

So if any enemy had managed to enter the tunnel they might be able to detect them.

There was the further precaution of preventing anyone from hearing from above as these tunnels were usually built relatively close to the surface.

With all these in mind, the close to half an hour walk was a quiet affair, with the only real sound being the rhythmic tapping of the feet as the group made their way forward, each engrossed in their one thoughts.

Or perhaps mostly one affair, the burning room they had left behind.

Because before setting off, they had made pretty sure to set that section of the manor well and truly on fire, both so that the enemy could not, or at least had a difficult time chasing them through it, but more importantly to make the manor burned from there.

And to ensure that a relatively hard-to-burn piece of property like a stone manor was set alight properly, the soldiers had only left once the carpets, the curtains, and even furniture were properly on fire, one that resembled a bright inferno rising into the sky, or ceiling in this case.

'Oh such a shame to destroy such beautiful and expensive decoration,' And seeing this, many of the soldiers felt this way, knowing that they were setting fire to things they would not likely be able to afford even if they worked their whole lives.

But it was a command from their lords, and hence they obeyed, only leaving the place once the heat coming from there started to make their skin sting, and the dense smoke filled up the rooms to make many choke and cough.

But even after they had already left that burning time bomb long behind, as many reminisced what they had done, subconsciously they felt they would smell that distinct burning smell stick to them even now,

And it was not a pleasant smell.

And it was among these thoughts that suddenly a sudden, needle-thin ray of white light hit the leading soldiers, who quickly ran forward to its source.

"It's here! It's here!" And upon approaching it he shouted, for the end of the tunnel was a small cave entrance at the southern beach.