

Herald 691

Chapter 691 Camp Followers

With the pristine road connecting Zanzan to the footsteps of Thesalie, it took Alxs only three days to complete the journey, arriving at his destination early noon, as the huge army faced no sort of hindrance from the other party.

The place they chose to make camp was on a relatively flat plain a few kilometers away from the formidable walled city, the specific location chosen due to a myriad of reasons.

It had a favorable flat terrain making it easier to deploy large scale infantry and cavalry.

It had a large lake nearby as well as numerous small creeks and springs for easy access to fresh drinking water.

And lastly, the surrounding was mostly forested and covered with lush vegetation, useful for both obtaining lumber as well as getting feed for the draft animals.

With all these advantages, as well as the place being close enough to their target, Alexander did not need to think too hard about where to set up camp.

Hence the order to do exactly so came pretty quickly, and the soldiers after a short rest quickly got to work setting the place that was going to be their main place to stay for the foreseeable next few months, their effort coordinated under the direction of the few hundred military engineers that Alexander brought with him.

So with tens of thousands of men working together, and with much of the initial materials such as the logs and lumbers already being carried with them, it took the huge army only a couple of hours to get the main features of the camp up, which were the high wooden walls built on a rampart, and the ditches filled with sharpened stakes.

And once this rudimentary barricade was built, all squad quickly began to set up their tent inside, then started to prepare their evening meal.

Over the following days, the camp would be turned into a much more sophisticated structure, but since they just arrived today, that was all the time for, as the men hungry from their march, concentrated more of their efforts on filling their growling stomach.

Thus, eager to have some grub, each member of the squad divided all the tasks among themselves, with some grinding the grains, some preparing the vegetables, some collecting firewood, some setting up the stove, and others doing the actual cooking.

Alexander too was among these hungry people, though he did not have to do the cooking for him.

Instead, he, along with all the high ranking officers were currently in a luxurious tent at the center of the camp having that food served to him.

And it had to be noted it was the same food the soldiers got, bread with a porridge like vegetable soup.

".....Lord Alexander is a man offrugal taste it seems," And seeing the food served to them, the nobleman Jamider (Earl) Tikba could not help but comment this.

It was very apparent that he was not pleased.

After all, being a bona fide noble, he expected his meals to meet his status.

But Alexander very coolly shut the complaint down, saying.

"I know in your armies nobles eat as they do at home, gorging themselves with extravagant feasts."

"But that is not how we do things here."

"Here is my army, everyone eats the same when in the campaign. Be it the regular grunt, the officer, or even the general himself,"

And following this Alexander then patiently explained his reasoning, something he had already done a few times before even before the start of the campaign,

"We do this because the quality of food a soldier got was very important. Men on the march tend to get tired and hungry."

"And if they do not get their proper food they easily turn angry."

"And a large group of angry men with swords are a dangerous foe."

"Armies have literally torn themselves apart over this."

"So I made to show the soldiers that in a war, there are no differences in treatment when it comes to food."

"Everyone eats the same, fights the same, and even dies the same." Alexander firmly declared in a convincing tone.

Though it seemed this rhetoric only caused the Jamider (Earl) to lightly bark, "Heh! Die the same? I never knew you were such a jester."

Lord Tikba of course said this because Alexander's chance of really dying in battle was negligible compared to the average soldier.

Though he certainly put it in a very rude way.

One which caused his colleague sitting right next to him to quickly intervene and explain to Alexander in a slightly panicked voice,

"Your Grace, Lord Tikba meant nothing by this! His head is simply muddled after traveling so long in the heat! Please pay no heed to him!"

The one to come the defense was of course Talkuder (Viscount) Prantik and the man instantly went into full damage control mode after his counterpart made this offensive comment.

No matter what they thought of Alexander in private, this was no way to talk in front of him.

And the evidence of it was how many of his retainers produced scowled looks immediately hearing the comment. I think you should take a look at

"Hahaha, no, no, Lord Tikba made quite the shrewd comment. It was indeed funny for me to say that we were as likely to die as the regular soldiers," But the man himself, Alexander seemed to take the words very lightly, giving a gentle smile as he said so.

But then suddenly his tone turned didactical,

"And that is all the more reason why we need to keep up that facade."

"To make the soldiers think we share the same hardships as well."

"Because the thing that made people angry is not always their own state, but their state relative to others."

"Even if the entire army is starving, soldiers will not rebel if they know everyone is starving equally."

"And conversely, even if the army has enough food, even if the regular soldiers get their fill, if the officers indulge in better food, there will always be resentment within the grassroots until they get the same quality food."

At this point Alexander's voice had lost all that smooth soothing undertone, as he turned to look squarely at the indulgent nobles, and in a hard tone said,

"We generals have huge tents all to ourselves."

"We ride on horses when marching."

"And we have an entourage of servants slaving away to fulfill all our requests, even bringing our food delivered right to our feet."

"So the least we can do is have the same food as the soldiers to at least pretend to have that veneer!"

By this point Jamider (Earl) Tikba had lowered his head to stare at only the bowl of soup, gazing at it with such concentration that one could be forgiven if he mistakenly thought that the world's most interesting drama was playing out in it.

Clearly this harsh admonishment was Alexander's way of getting back at him for the comment.

And facing the reasonable words, the older noble found no retort and had to take the hits with muted silence.

"Hahaha, yes, yes, lord Alexander is most erudite. It is because he thinks like this that we will finally take the city this time."

"The army we wield is nothing like the ones before!"

As soon as Alexander finished bashing the noble adjacent to him, Talkuder (Viscount) Prantik quickly launched an rescue attack to save his partner, speaking in an almost oily tone as he flattered Alexander.

It had to be known another reason for Jamider (Earl) Tikba's cranky reply was because he really did not want to come in this campaign because he thought there was no point.

And before Alexander could nitpick on that, Lord Prantik quickly changed the topic by saying,

"I still cannot believe we were able to make such progress so quickly! Truly astounding!" as he then turned to Alexander to grin,

"This is surely validation of all the training you put the men through, my lord. With so many well trained men, our victory is all but certain!"

Here the noble was of course referring to how the soldiers were able to achieve more than thirty five kilometers of distance per day even while carrying the heavy supplies they were expected to transport.

And to be honest, Alexander too was pleased with the result.

Though it was his general Menicus to was much more vocal regarding the praise,

"Yes, even though the road was good, still the men did well. If it was so easy, the camp followers would have been here too."

"But it seems they were unable to keep pace." He cleverly pointed out.

But here Alexander chimed in to add,

"Well, that is also because all our food was carried by our soldiers. Our supply train was much lighter."

He did not want his army to grow complacent with just one successful march hence the nitpicking, as he reminded that individual men carried the required three days of marching food with them, shedding a lot of their baggage train.

And as soon as the matter of food, Lord Prantik quickly interjected to add,

"Ah, regarding the food my lord, I remember, Lord Prantik saying that he has already asked his men to start delivering the food stored in his depot."

"They will be here by tonight."

It seemed he was trying to embellish his partner in front of Alexander.

And hearing so the young lord did feel his acridness fade a bit, as he turned to give a soft nod of approval to the sullen lord.

Chapter 692 Alexander's Siege Plan

For the past two months, Alexander had been building up all his supplies on Jamider (Earl) Tikba's fief, which was a day's march away here, with the idea being that once the siege began, these stocks could be easily accessed to get the camp going while replenishments from Zanzan slowly catch up to backfill the depot.

Alexander had come up with this tactic as a way to navigate around any potential problem that might arise due to supply issues, something that had plagued the army the previous time.

He reasoned that if things were to be done this way, then even if the army did not get any supplies for a while, it would still have no problem sustaining itself using the stocks at hand for quite some time.

It was a tactic with a much greater margin of safety.

But a critical part of that idea hung on the Jamider (Earl) Tikba bringing the supplies from his fief to the camp itself.

Without those Alexander would starve just like before.

And so hearing those were already on the way certainly pleased Alexander.

"Good. Then we can finish completing the camp within a week, and begin our seige then!" He cheerfully said as he turned to give a grateful nod to the noble who seemed to have cooled down a bit.

But as Alexander made mention of the siege, this finally got Menes of all people to pose, "Alexander, isn't time you told us about the battle plan. We still do not know how we are supposed to take the city. It surely can't be through a brute frontal attack right!"

The strong, black general appeared to throw that idea out of the window right off the bat, not even taking that was possible.

And who could blame him given the strength of the walls, the terrain, and the many, many precedences?

So instead he bet his money on Alexander having a secret spy or something like an informant who could show them a secret passageway they could use to infiltrate the city and take it down from the inside.

Or perhaps there was a deserted part of the wall they would scale at the dead of night even no was looking like they had done when they captured Jabel.

Or perhaps there was even a turncoat who would open the gates at night to let them in.

As Alexander had refused to reveal his plans to even his military officers, all sorts of such wild and creative theories were conjured up by those in charge, as they tried to guess Alexander's next brilliant move.

Though they might as well not have bothered.

Beaune Alexander very frankly revealed, "Oh, why not? I was indeed planning to attack the city head on."

And to say this came as such a shock to everyone would be an understatement.

Those at the table even briefly wondered if they had lost control of their hearing.

"That...that..." Menes was particularly hit hard as his mouth opened and closed like a gaping fish, while his eyes threatened to dislodge themselves from the socket.

He did not doubt for a second that Alexander was not aware of what he was proposing.

So instead of trying to make Alexander see the error of his ways, Menes quickly tried to think of a way to make sense of strategy.

"...." And after a while his black complexion even appeared to turn a bit flushed, as if he was heating up while trying to think too hard.

"Catapults! Are the catapults that strong my lord!" When suddenly Grahtos loudly pronounced this, his voice happy and ecstatic.

He was sure he had found the answer.

But Alexander only turned to give him a light, enigmatic smile, neither confirming, nor denying it.

Instead, he went to a seemingly completely different topic, as he posed to everyone,

"Those 40 to 50 thousand camp followers, what do you think of them?"

And naturally everyone was a bit caught off guard by this bizarre question.

They were unable to see the connection.

But Talkuder (Viscount) Prantik answered regardless, spitting out one word, "Hmmp! Vultures!"

And this hostile attitude was mostly because whatever may be the reason these people had for following the army, at the end of the day they had one true real goal.

To tail the army and take part in the looting of the booty.

And this never sat well with most commanders as it was seen as these people benefiting from other's hard work.

"Haha, well there is no need to be too prejudiced against them. After all, with so many being here, it means they believe we have a good chance to take the city." Seeing the noble's attitude, Alexander lightly chuckled.

And this reasoning had precedence in both this world and in Alexander's previous one.

For example, The Roman historian Livy described an interesting campaign against a place called Liguria where there were almost no camp followers following the Roman army because the region was poor and offered little plunder.

So the presence of the number of camp followers worked as a kind of indicator of the wealth and prosperity of that region.

"But what do they have got to do with anything?"

But although all these were interesting tidbits, no one was able to see the connection with the question posed.

Thus Jamider (Earl) Tikba gruffly said that.

"Haha, okay, okay, here is the plan," And Alexander, seeing everyone else's patience was also starting to run thin decided he had been leading them for long enough.

So he revealed,

"First of all, we will deploy our crossbowmen, scorpions, and catapults near the front wall and engage the defender stationed there."

"But our main intention will not be to kill them and clear the walls. That would simply not work. So instead our men will work to keep them occupied."

As Alexander said this, a flash of intrigue ran across the gathered people, who really could not see the point of that.

Killing the enemy was always better than just keeping them buddy.

So they waited to hear more, as Alexander continued,

"The reason they will need to do that is because just behind them we will have tens of thousands of workers building a huge wall!"

"The wall will be as high as the city's second wall and be almost as large as it lengthwise."

"That's why I bought so many construction material with me, along with so much cement."

"To build it as soon as possible."

As Alexander revealed this, some parts of his plan began to become clearer to the others.

It seemed the wall would be built very close to the walls so the crossbowmen would be needed to provide covering fire for the workers from enemy arrow fire.

But beyond that, none of the people present were able to understand the reason behind that.

Sure it sounded impressive, but what did it have to do with the siege?

At first, when Alexander mentioned the wall, they thought he wanted to build a completely ringed wall to surround and cut off the city from all outside help.

But that seemed to be not the case as going by Alexander's plan the wall was planned to be built on only one side.

This made no sense.

But Alexander was not yet finished, so none of them interjected, as he continued,

"Once this wall is constructed, we will put our crossbowmen and catapults on top of it."

"With a higher elevation, they will be able to better suppress the wall defenders."

"And they will need to do a good job at that because it is where our real siege will begin."

"Because at this point, we will start recruiting the camp followers to go and start filling up the ditch with earth, while at the same time, the construction of a ramp leading right up to the wall will begin."

"And once that is completed, we will drive our siege towers right up the ramp and let our soldiers flood the first wall directly."

"And once the first wall is taken, we will repeat the process to take the second one too!"

"And the city will be ours!"

Alexander firmly declared with a confident tone.

While the others were for a moment flabbergasted.

Alexander did not lie.

He really was going for a frontal assault.

But he was not also wholly truthful.

Because it was also not the kind of frontal attack they thought it would be, which was brute ladder rushes designed to overwhelm the enemy through sheer numbers.

And for a while they were unable to respond it as they tried to wrap their head against this never before seen unorthodox technique.

To some it seemed too whacky and too time consuming to work.

"That...so that's why my lord mentioned the camp followers." Realization dawned on Heloptos's face, white he then muttered,

"Yes, this might work," Though his tone was a bit unsure.

But the unsure whisper seemed to be enough, as it tipped the scales of reasoning in favor of the tactic within the minds of all other military officers.

"Yes! Of course! oF course, it can work!" One chimed after feeling convinced.

"Haha, as expected of the lord. You truly are a once in a thousand years genius!" Another praised with a boisterous laughter.

"Yes. I agree. And if we build multiple such walls, and force the enemy to defend multiple places simultaneously, it will be even quicker," This helpful tip was given by Melodias.

It seemed everyone was on board with Alexander's plan.

Chapter 693 Alexander's Main Camp

As Alexander revealed his plan, there was of course no objection to it.

On the contrary, all the military leaders cheered at the approach.

It was not in any way subtle, but given their superiority in firepower, it certainly had a large chance of success.

One noble even added that this was a very good idea because even if they failed, the casualties would be relatively low.

After all, it would be those camp followers doing all the dangerous work, while the soldiers would have the relatively safe job of shooting arrows.

Something that gained much approval from the other nobles as even Jamider (Earl) Tikba seemed to have shed his pessimistic outlook to put on a happy, expectant face.

Although he still did not believe they could take the city, at least the losses they were likely to suffer would be far less than he had anticipated.

Thus Alexander's plan was given the green light and things over the next week proceeded without much incident.

In that time the soldiers mostly worked to fully build up the camp and turn it from a makeshift abode to a sturdy, robust stronghold.

Thus all the nearby available timber was cut, processed, and made to serve in building the truly massive compound.

The walled structure was shaped as a square with each side being twice the size of a football, giving the camp an astounding internal area of 40,000 sq meters or almost 10 acres!

Once completed the camp, or perhaps it would be more appropriate to call it now a fort, had four central gates facing the four directions, with thick wooden gates controlling access to them.

And inside it, was housed everything an army could ever need.

The fort was mainly divided into three sections, the front, the center, and the back, each located in the position their name suggested.

Out of these three, the center section was the most important section, housing the army's brain and nervous system.

At the center midpoint of the squared fort, i.e.- smack down in the middle of the entire structure was the most important structure- The administrative building.

It was a two storied wooden structure, and it was from here where the entire war was conducted and coordinated by processing all the paperwork involved.

It was here where the records of all the available supplies were kept, all the soldiers' monthly payment receipts issued and all the orders given by different officers and commanders overseen and passed along through the appropriate chain of command.

All this was done by a large team of men working tirelessly to keep the cogs of his huge machine moving smoothly.

Next to this vital building, to the right was Alexander's tent, which was the second or first depending on how you see it, the most important place in the camp.

The large tent belonged sorely to him, and it came furnished with everything he could want, multiple private rooms, an indoor shower, a small kitchen, and most important of all, his war council room, from where he could instruct the entire war effort.

There was even a large enough courtyard right in front of his tent where he could have a small assembly if he wanted to, such as to address his officers regarding something.

While Alexander lived 'right' next to the administrative building, to its left was an obvious structure everyone could guess there would be- The temple.

After all, how could you hope to win a war without the grace of the gods?

Following this on both sides were the various quarters of the high- level nobles and generals with each adobe usually shared by two or three people, along with a few servants.

After that were a few huge granaries, holding not only grains but all sorts of produce required for sustenance for both men and animals.

Multiple of these structures were created, and all were scheduled to be filled once Jamider (Earl) Tikba finished moving all the supplies from the depot in his territory to here.

In front of the granaries was the large medical clinic, which till now empty but would no doubt fill up soon, and lastly, beside it was the armory, storing all the weapons, but more importantly the huge stocks of arrows.

It of course went without saying this entire section was very heavily guarded.

Adjacent to the central section were the front and back sections of the camp, both of which were mostly the same.

It was mostly filled with barracks for the soldiers to live in, and stables to house the animals.

Each squad of ten men shared one tent, while officers like sergeants (100 men leader) got a tent to share with the three other lesser officers of his unit.

While the close to 10,000 draft animals lived in large, wooden stables scattered throughout the camp, looked after by a small army of men.

In addition to just the tents were a few essential structures too, such as a few large public latrines to service the soldiers' bodily needs and numerous wells dug to meet the freshwater needs.

Furthermore there were also a few other utilitarian structures in the two sections, such as a smithy used to maintain the weapons, a barber shop, a leather armorer shop, various small depots that handed out rations to the soldiers, and even a large courtyard in the center for the soldiers to stretch their legs.

The construction of all this only took a week which might seem scarily fast, but Alexander had actually come here with all the plans already prepared.

All the blueprints were drawn up beforehand, and even the units responsible for each structure were already decided.

So as soon as the camp's outer perimeter was established, everyone could use the perimeter as a reference to start on their own work without waiting for others to finish theirs.

In that way, as the camp's walls were being built, the buildings meant to be inside were also being completed.

This type of camp building was something completely new, as Alexander had only come up with this tactic this time.

And seeing the speed at which this was done, the nobles really felt their eyes being opened, and they very vividly praised Alexander's organizational ability.

So in this way, after only a week the army was ready to strike Thesalie with all its might.

As for what the Tibias's reaction was to this imminent attack, well when Alexander's army had all of a sudden manifested itself in front of them, they did panic a bit.

"That...this....this...Quick! Inform the commander quickly!" The bored defenders had suddenly felt jolted awake upon seeing a literal army show themselves right at their doorsteps.

How could they have imagined the shift they thought would have nothing more interesting to see than a few deers scuttling about would have such a surprise in store?

Such a nasty surprise!

They had gotten no prior warning.

Normally when armies moved anywhere, the nearby travelling merchants would leak this information.

But Alexander had come here with such speed that the other side did not even get the slightest chance to detect him.

Thus facing the unexpected 50,000 army, the garrison was initially very jittery.

"What's all the commotion? Calm down!"

But this wave of unease did not last too long, as a pristine-looking, tall middle-aged man gruffly barked out while entering the scene.

He had silver white hair but a jet black beard, and his chiseled face had a large scar going over his left eye.

He walked with a strong confident gait, and his eyes blazed with strength, showing clearly he was a strong man with much fight left in him.

This was the overall commander of Thesalie's entire garrison, as well as the city's governor - Lord Commander Ponticus,

Com...commander!" The arrival of the general was like a giant stone had been placed over a raging river, calming it down, as the soldiers quickly got up to salute the highest authority around here.

Seeing the man himself be here made their hearts soothe themselves.

"How many are there? When did they come? Did they send any messengers?"

The strong military man skipped past the formalities as he asked the soldiers the real questions, while at the same time, he approached the walls to see the enemy for himself.

Being the city lord, of course he had gotten the report that a huge army was knocking on his doors as soon as possible and came as fast as he could.

"Our scouts are still trying to find the exact number. But we think at least 60,000 to 70,000 my lord."

Regarding his question, the answer came from a slightly younger looking man, who was in charge of the everyday operations of the walls.

Named Lapitus, he stepped forward as soon as he could to answer the highest level of authority in the city.

"Bah! You imbecile....what 70,000! They don't even have enough 50,000! You made me come all the here just to see this!"

But hearing the answer, the city lord very quickly chided the man as such.

And then turning to face the soldiers he proclaimed, "The enemy is too few to pose any threat to us."

"This is probably that new lord of Zanzan attacking us without knowing the immensity of it."

"So keep calm and do as you are told and nothing will happen."

"Like nothing has happened for hundreds of years!"

And this was Tibias's response, to simply use the men at hand to repel off the attackers.

Chapter 694 The Siege of Thesalie (Part-1)

The commander of Thesalie's garrison, Lord Ponticus was a man of great military prestige.

He had been in countless campaigns both against Adhania and against other powers across the sea and knew the battlefield like the back of his hand.

A fact that was perhaps best demonstrated most recently when he had so accurately judged the number of Alexander's force from such a distance away so clearly.

That took a keen eye and loads of experience.

And it was not as if he was just a good soldier.

He was very well connected too, for he was Perseus's uncle and greatly trusted by the king.

In fact when he had come to attack Zanzan, it was Ponticus who was left in charge of the defense of Tibias.

And the fact that he was now given the prestigious role of defending a fortress like Thesalie against Adhania just went to show the trust Perseus had in him.

It was because of all this, both his identity and military pedigree, that when he spoke so lightly of the threat, the soldiers around too felt their nervousness fade away.

'If the general speaks so, then that must be true,' They said to themselves.

And Ponticus really did think what he said.

If the force in front of him was all the enemy had managed to muster then it was really too low to pose any serious threat to him.

But though the scales heavily favored him, that did not mean Ponticus would be careless in his defense.

So turning to Lapitus he instructed,

"Take all the precautions we do when under a siege."

"Alert all the garrisoned men I want triple the men on the walls and doubled shifts."

"All the watchtowers must be manned at all times, and patrols on the walls must be present day and night."

"Then reinforce the barricades on the main gates."

"From today, all gates except the southern gate remain closed."

"The enemy may not be large but do not slack. Defend the walls properly and repel all attacks!"

Lord Ponticus gave a brief summary of the precautions while leaving Lapitus to work out the details on his own.

The man had been trained to do.

"Yes, my lord. I will see to everything. Rest assured!" So he bowed respectfully.

Having calmed the situation at the walls, Ponticus left it as quickly as he had appeared, choosing to turn his attention to then other secondary matters.

He then met up with the head of the city guards, telling him

"Calm the people down."

"Say there is nothing to worry about and that they should carry on with their life as usual. The enemy cannot pose any threat to us."

"Then close the gates. Do not let anyone in."

"Seeing the army, people from every village in a 10 mile radius will start flocking here. We cannot take so much. Leave them outside."

"Do not let even merchants in."

"Only people sent from the capital carrying supplies and possessing special seals are to be the exceptions."

"Got it"

Following this instruction, the city lord went to check his granaries, taking note of his food stocks to ensure he had enough, and his armory, ensuring he had enough armaments to defend himself.

And lastly, he went back to his home to write a letter to the capital letting them know of the new development.

The main passage of the letter read such.

'Zanzan has launched an attack on our city of Thesalie with a force of 50,000.

I believe this is retaliation against our previous attack.

They have decided to set up camp a few kilometers from such and seem to want to lay siege to us.

However, such a small force can never hope to overcome our walls.

I am certain of that.

The current situation here hence is stable.

I have all the confidence to hold off against all attacks indefinitely.

Thus I humbly pray to His Majesty to send me the following supplies so the soldiers are not cut off and are able to carry out their task without hindrances.'

After that the letter listed the various quantities of supplies needed, but this was the gist of how the Tibians saw the attack.

As a futile attempt by an enemy blinded by rage using insufficient forces.

And all they would have to do was sit back and let the walls do all the work and they could not lose.

All the officers chose to use this tactic to stave off the offense, with nobody ever even thinking of bringing the fight to Alexander.

Following Alexander's arrival, the Tibians expected an attack immediately, or the next day at the very latest.

So seeing the enemy make no move and concentrate on getting their camp up and running confused most of them.

Traditional warfare doctrine dictated that when you were able to catch the enemy so off guard like Alexander had, it was vital to attack the enemy as soon as possible to take full advantage of the confusion.

But it seemed Alexander was happy to take his sweet time.

Which of course pleased Lapitus as it gave him much needed to bolster his defense.

He even thanked Alexander for his 'benevolence' in his heart.

But in the case of Alexander, there was no need to be hasty in his attack.

After all, the siege was scheduled to last months or days.

Thus the attacks finally started after a week, after Alexander had sent them a messenger towards the wall urging them to stand down, which was of course turned down by Tibias as demonstrated by them shooting arrows at the rider.

Thus one glorious early morning, just after dawn Alexander's army was given the order to march towards the wall, and upon getting close enough to the wall, the crossbowmen were instructed to set up their pavises, the artillery men brought up their catapults, the huge scorpions were set.

"So it has finally begun;" And seeing the nearly fifteen thousand men ready to let loose their projectiles, Lapitus from atop the wall grimly muttered.

"Shoot! Shoot them! Shoot at will!" And then quickly gave the order to engage the enemy to the thousands of wall defenders.

Shoo, *Shoo*, *Shoo*

And thus the first day of the battle began, with each side exchanging deadly volleys for hours on end.

The Zanzan soldiers were able to use their huge 1,000 lb crossbows to launch deadly accurate fire toward the wall defenders claiming many lives, while they themselves were protected by their huge heavy pavises, all of which soaked up an uncountable number of enemy arrows.

In fact there were some pavises, particularly on the very frontlines that took so many arrows that they literally snapped in two, unable to withstand their own weight any longer.

But it was not as if only Alexander's side could seek cover.

The Tibians too could use the wall's battlements and crenelations on the walls to stave off Alexander's projectiles, remaining behind them most of the time and only peeking out to shoot a sudden volley now and then.

The entire showdown between the two sides seemed like a game of hide and seek.

A game where both sides seemed to be equally matched, with both sides possessing unique advantages of their own.

Alexander's side of course possessed the crossbow, a weapon that was very accurate and with a great range.

While Tibians, though mostly used weaker bows, were able to compete in range due to their higher elevation.

And it was not like they did not have crossbows of their own.

No, the weapon had left too much of a striking impression in Perseus's mind to be so.

Hence, remembering how thorny the enemy's weapon had proved during the siege, Perseus immediately ordered its manufacture as soon as he returned to his capital, intending to use it in his own battles.

And so the blacksmiths getting the king's order set about trying to do exactly that.

It took them over two years and countless tries to finally get there, with them particularly struggling to master the technique of shaping such a large piece of iron into a curve without cracking it.

But ultimately, overcoming all the daunting challenges, they did at last manage to create a working piece, able to be deployed on the battlefield, though with a number of drawbacks.

Its quality ranged from bad to worse, with the metal piece being prone to snapping at any time as the metal was still of quite poor quality.

Also, both its range and draw weight were significantly less than Alexander's, with the reason being the same- low quality steel.

And lastly, the cost of each one was ridiculous, due to the enormous time and difficulties involved.

The failure rate of the product was around fifty percent, meaning one of every two crossbows made did not meet the requirements and had to be scrapped.

All of which meant that none but the most wealthy member of the general public would have the coin to buy the product.

As for using it, well it had to be remembered that crossbow bolts were not cheap either.

All this meant that equipping one's army with crossbows like Alexander did was simply not possible for Perseus, for he was much too poor.

But still, despite all the issues, it was still quite the achievement given the blacksmiths were never ordered to make anything similar before.

And there was no doubt over the years they could certainly be able to refine their technique and make crossbows similar in quality to Alexander's.

Chapter 695 The Siege of Thesalie (Part-2)

Regarding the creation of the crossbow, its inception marked the advancement of Tibias's metallurgy by at least a few hundred years.

This is because before that, most blacksmiths had no incentive to work with iron beyond a few very specific applications, and mostly contented themselves with bronze working.

But this time, with the influx of capital and will from the ruling class above, the blacksmiths finally got the environment to work with iron and figure out various different forging techniques.

Techniques they might have figured out in at least a few hundred years.

And they all had Alexander to thank for that.

Now, though the weapons they had created were very inferior versions of Alexander, and provisions of these among the city garrison very, very sparsely due to its cost and difficulty in manufacturing, they still appeared in the fight, wielded by a very few, very well trained defenders.

And its appearance did cause a physiological effect, causing the opposing Zanzan soldiers to curse out loud when they finally saw what they were being shot at with.

"Thieves"

"Scoundrel!"

"Swindlers!"

All such and many more colorful words were used to describe them as Alexander's men rightfully accused Tibias of intellectual theft, while each risking tempo to try and break the other.

Now, the Zanzan crossbowmen and Tibian archers were not the only ones who were duking it out in the battlefield.

There were the scorpions shooting huge darts trying to skewer the defenders too.

While the newly developed catapults also tried to score a hit on them.

But that was not their main purpose.

No, for their main task was to target the towers built along the walls, which had numerous arrow loops in them.

These arrow loops were basically slots cut into the wall from where defenders could shoot at the exposed enemy, while the chances of the enemy retaliating through that narrow gap was basically nil.

And Alexander wanted to try and neutralize them as otherwise, these towers would give the Tibians overlapping areas of fire, allowing them to concentrate their firepower on anyone trying to approach the walls from all three sides.

Hence he tasked the catapults with destroying these towers by trying to collapse the upper parts.

That part was much weaker than the walls themselves as it was hollow inside and Alexander hoped by punching a hole in one side, the whole thing would collapse on its own weight.

And to do exactly so Alexander went all out, issuing his artillerymen not round stones as ammunition, but the much denser cast iron balls!

He had at first thought of using lead balls which was denser, regardless of the huge costs involved.

After all, he did not have a lead blast furnace like he had for iron.

But that consideration had long gone out the window as Alexander was willing to bankrupt himself if it meant getting the city.

But before he went through with it, he quickly found the flaw in his thinking.

And that was though lead was much denser than iron, it was much softer too.

So upon impact, the ball would deform and absorb some of the kinetic energy itself, rather than transferring everything to the wall and causing it to break down.

So when that was taken into consideration, shooting cast iron balls made the most sense.

Thus that was what Alexander used, setting ten catapults each against the two closest towers and ordering his men to hammer away at them till they broke.

And within just one week of continuous fighting the men made quite a bit of headway in that front, as the outer surface on both towers had been completely chipped away to reveal the inner wooden and stone structure.

It seemed these towers' days were numbered, for along some points there were even holes giving one a clear view of the insides.

Those twenty kilogram 'shells' were no joke.

And those inside the towers had clearly felt the strikes, as those ten catapults combined were able to hit them nearly every single minute of the day for weeks on end.

Thud *Thud* *Thud* Thud*

At first this noise meant nothing to them.

Then after a few days, it started to get annoying, as if the constant low droning irritated them.

And over the last few days, the incessant noise felt like it was giving the men a splitting headache, as they felt simply unable to withstand that cursed sound.

The noise and the ever present vibration caused by the strikes felt like an omnipresent phantom residing inside the men's heads, and they even started having dreams where they would be tormented by this sound, tossing and turning restlessly in their bed.

The men were clearly suffering from shell shock, and any modern military would have regularly rotated them out to mitigate the effects.

But clearly such doctrines did not exist and so the men were left to fend for themselves.

'Just what is the enemy using to hit us so hard!' Hence they asked among themselves, feeling it could not be stone as stone did not sound so 'heavy' and 'dense'.

And the answer could be found just at the feet of the towers, which by now were inundated with thousands and thousands of rock solid lumps of iron.

A collection that seemed to be increasing every day as Alexander's weapons would pound away at the towers from sunrise to sundown, the amount of ammunition available to them seemingly endless.

Alexander would later calculate that each of his catapults ate through almost 2 tons of iron every day at their peak.

Or a total of 40 tons when all the catapults were counted.

This was a ridiculous amount in every sense of the word.

For instance, Alexander only produced 30 tons of iron every day.

And if he did not have his blast furnace, it would have cost Alexander tens of millions of ropals per day just for this.

So it was only with Alexander's current circumstance that he was able to employ this strategy and it seemed to be delivering results, given the towers seemed to be on their last legs.

Now these torsion catapults did not only strike the towers of course.

Some were also targeted toward the walls too.

Particularly Alexander instructed the artillerymen to try and hit the battlements and crenulations and destroy them so that the wall defenders could not hide behind them.

These catapults though were not supplied with iron balls, but instead, they used the more conventional rocks and stones to try and do damage.

This was because given the nature of the target, most volleys were guaranteed to miss and shoot past the walls, landing inside the city.

Meaning if Alexander used iron balls, he would be just gifting many of these expensive lumps of high quality steel to his enemy, who could then use them to either make weapons or even just throw them back at the soldiers trying to scale the walls.

Now that would be a tragic way to go, killed by ammunition from one's own side.

Hence the prudent decision.

As the Tibians faced these attacks, it had to be noted that it was not as if they were completely helpless against it.

Because they had catapults of their own.

And though their range failed to match Alexander's, they did not need to.

Because set atop the wall, just like their arrows, the higher elevation allowed them to bridge that gap.

Hence as Alexander commenced his attack, the enemy too quickly returned counterfire, thus making both sides engage in perhaps the world's first artillery duel.

But here the Tibians seemed to have a slight advantage.

Because Alexander had very little chance of actually hitting those catapults perched atop the walls, as the artillery crew had trouble even locating them clearly.

While the Tibians at least had a clear view of the enemy's ones.

And though hitting them proved very challenging given the range and the rudimentary design of the weapon, challenging did not mean impossible.

Although each individual shot had a very small, minuscule chance of hitting when they were shot in the huge numbers they were, and from multiple platforms at that, the possibility suddenly became all too real.

And this theoretical possibility did manifest itself on the battlefield, with multiple of Alexander's catapults being hit with the week of fighting, each suffering varying degrees of damage, with a few even being outright destroyed.

A result that quickly caused Alexander to issue a directive that said once the enemy fire started to land within five meters of the weapons, the crew ought to immediately move their siege weapon and change location.

It was reasoned that in that way the enemy would be never able to get a proper range estimate on them or be never able to slowly correct their aim by repeated test fires.

Thus the enemy would have to rely a lot more on luck to hit their target.

And in the following days the order went out, that was exactly what happened, as Alexander's loss drastically decreased, reaching practically zero.

While it also gave rise to a weird sight on the battlefield, which was that each catapult would have a white circle around them, that was as one could guess 5 meters in radius.

Clearly this was done to give an easier visual confirmation of whether the enemy was getting close to hitting them.

It was in such a way that the deadly exchange of arrows and stones continued for a month, and by then the battlefield had drastically changed both in sight and intensity of combat.

Chapter 696 The Siege of Thesalie (Part-3)

During the first week, Alexander had launched his attack with the greatest amount of force at his disposal, deploying close to fifteen thousand men as missile troops, intending to shock and awe the enemy.

But such high intensity fight was of course unsustainable over a long period of time.

So over the following weeks, that number of troops participating was almost cut to a third, to about six thousand men per day.

This was roughly about one legion worth of men, with five thousand of them being archers, while the other thousand manned the scorpion and catapults.

In this way, the men could rotate each day so that each man had to fight only once every eight to nine days.

This greatly improved morale and kept the army alert but never exhausted or tired.

Now, although this low intensity conflict was good for soldier survivability, such a small force attacking the walls would be nowhere enough to strain the defenders.

The Tibians were able to comfortably take the attacks by simply keeping their heads down and taking the occasional potshots to prevent any advance.

It was not the easiest job in the world but it was neither the most difficult.

The only real headway Alexander was able to make here was the destruction of the towers, which after a month of constant bombardment, finally had enough and its front section collapsed.

Now, the structure of the towers still stood, make no mistake, but the front part was completely destroyed, thus opening its inwards for all to see.

Which meant Alexander could freely target those inside who had no cover.

Hence, facing this predicament, the soldiers were ordered to evacuate, which they promptly did.

Though not before barring the door with heavy stones and all sorts of other heavy junk so that Alexander could not simply climb the now open, undefended tower and use its access route to infiltrate the castle.

And though the loss of the two towers was certainly a setback for Tibias it was nothing game changing.

They now simply lacked one of the directions through which they could attack.

But their main avenue of attack which was from the walls still remained intact and unobstructed.

"What are they planning?"

Thus Lord Ponticus found himself muttering as such to him.

For though the average Tibian was very happy facing this lackluster attack, their highest commander, Lord Lord Ponticus muttered this in an unsure voice.

To a veteran like him, the enemy's actions seemed to make no sense.

They were attacking but seemed not to be putting any real pressure.

Because if they were serious about taking the wall, they should have been trying to attack along multiple fronts of the wall in an attempt to scatter the defenders and make them defend all the places at once, during which a ladder rush could have been launched to try and exploit the temporarily thinned lines.

But this was not happening, as the enemy seemed content to just play this game of exchanging arrows and stones, causing some structural damages and claiming some lives, but nothing too serious.

Lord Ponticus had even noticed the number of enemy archers decrease drastically over the past weeks, meaning they were not even fully using their archers to try and clear the walls of defenders.

And Lord Ponticus said this because at the current rate the enemy was damaging his forces, it would take them literal years to whittle his men down to anything even remotely approaching a casualty number required to initiate a rout.

And Lord Ponticus was not speaking in hyperbolics, but in literal terms, judged after seeing the losses from this month's fighting.

With a full month of fighting behind him, Lord Ponticus found that he had suffered only forty-nine (49) dead and eighty-two (82) wounded.

So given that Thesalie had a garrison of thirty thousand (30,00) and assuming their breaking point was at 10% casualty, which was on the low side given they were defending, even then Lord Ponticus could hold out for two years, no problem.

There was also no fear of them starving because the enemy had not besieged the city from all sides, and transports via land and river continued unimpeded.

So given all these good news, one would think the commander of the city would be very pleased.

And Lord Ponticus would have if that all to this madness, simply handwaving the strange attacking patterns as being the enemy finally coming to the senses after finally realizing the challenges and deciding to try this low cost approach.

But that explanation hit against the reality on the battlefield.

And that was how the enemy seemed to be changing the battlefield in the preceding month, in a way that did not at all seem normal to the experienced military general.

Because Alexander in preparation for building his wall had been busy digging up the earth just behind the crossbowmen, to be used for the wall's foundation.

Seeing this Lord Ponticus at first thought Alexander was planning to build a tunnel underneath the wall and start sapping it, thus making the wall crumble under its own weight.

But Lord Ponticus was actually not worried about that possibility.

One was because their walls' foundation had been strengthened to prevent exactly that.

And two because it would take Alexander a very long time to complete such a long tunnel, so there was no immediate danger.

And given this entire thing was already revealed so long ago, this long time would give Lord Ponticus ample opportunities to try and locate any such sabotages and send his own soldiers down these tunnels to shut it down.

And though such tunnel fights in the dark meandering underground were always a bloody affair, Lord Ponticus was confident he could pull it off.

After all, this was not his first rodeo.

But although Lord Ponticus thought he understood the reason for digging the ditch, he was unable to fathom the huge amount of deforestation that was going on around him.

By now, nearly every tree he once was able to see from atop the wall had been chopped down, turning the once lush hill into an entirely barren land that seemed to be eliciting a mournful cry at this unjust act.

Or perhaps it was Lord Ponticus's own soul that was crying.

Beacaeu one of the favorite things for the middle aged lord to do when he was stressed was to pace about the stone ramparts while gazing at the surrounding greenery.

That sight helped to soothe his nerves.

But given Alexander's destruction of that foliage, that would certainly not be an option for quite some time, perhaps even decades.

So at this needless destruction of nature, the city lord felt quite vexed.

At first, he had thought Alexander was doing this due to necessity.

After all the nearly 100,000 people spent consumed timber at a prodigious rate, both in the use of firewood and as building material.

Furthermore each of the close to 15,000 animals belonging to both the army and camp followers required around 10 to 15 kg of pasture such as grass or green leaves.

So it was understandable to want to cut down some trees to cover one's daily needs and even stock some for a later time.

But though Lord Ponticus initially thought that, that thought quickly fled his mind.

Beucaeu Alexander clearly was not cutting the trees to do that.

The numbers were too high.

So Lord Ponticus, unable to think of any good reason, felt like Alexander had realized that he would not be able to city and was trying to exact some petty revenge on him by doing this.

Of course Alexander was not doing any of it out of spite.

He simply wanted to clear the hills of any tress to make troop movement along the slopes much easier, as well as to make space for his huge wall.

And to do so he employed both soldiers and civilians.

Alexander left about twenty thousand soldiers behind the crossbowmen to act as the rear guard in case Tibias decided to launch a sudden attack.

And left another two thousand in the camp as guards.

This left him with twenty thousand free men who could do any and all of his bidding.

Thus ten thousand (10,000) of them were asked to build the wall, while the other ten thousand (10,000) were handed an axe and told to cut down every tree in sight.

And it was not only the soldiers who were tasked with this act of deforestation.

Alexander also decided to use the camp followers in this endeavor, with his men half forcing, and half coercing twenty thousand (20,000) of them to either work making the walls or go cut down trees, them being offered a wage of 6 ropals a day.

So with twenty thousand men being dedicated to each project simultaneously, the results soon began to manifest themselves.

Because few could imagine what the combined effort of such a huge number of people could have.

But to give one an idea, an average man could cut 10 trees a day.

So with each acre of the hill being home to 500 trees, that came to 400 acres or about one and a half square kilometers (1.5 sq km) of land being cleared of trees each day!

Hence it was little wonder the lush hill was turned into the wet dream of a lumberjack.

Chapter 697 The Siege Of Thesalie (Part-4)

The math Alexander did for the number of cut trees was of course done considering idealized conditions, whereas in reality the felled trees could not simply be cut down and left there on the ground.

They needed to be moved and processed.

But even still, the thick woods that served as a rudimentary defense for Tibias were soon gone under Alexander's directive, making the thick lush green hill soon look like the head of a bald headed eagle.

And as with the speed the trees were cut, the speed of construction of the wall too took a similar pace, with the foundations for it being very quickly completed.

After all, a single man would dig several tons of dirt a day.

And when you multiply that figure by twenty thousand hard working men, all laboring from dawn to dusk, it very quickly ended up being a very big and wide ditch.

Then soon after that ditch began to get filled up with the thick logs obtained from the chopped trees, laying the first groundwork for Alexander's wall.

In this way, as the crossbowmen kept the walled defenders busy, the foundation of the walls began to be laid.

After that, Alexander began to quickly transfer copious amounts of bricks, stone, and cement already in his warehouse to the effort, trying to build the wall as soon as possible, so that the enemy would not have any time to retaliate

And the speed of the construction did work to catch Lord Ponticus off guard as he even before he could begin to understand what was going on, within a week, he was faced with a long stone wall reaching half a meter.

"Wha...What! What is that!" He had reportedly cried out flabbergasted the first time he looked at the huge structure being built in front of him.

To him it seemed the thing had apparated out of nowhere.

And as he looked at that sturdy thing being built, he even wondered if the enemy knew magic.

Because other than that, he could not think of any way anyone who could build such a huge structure so quickly.

At least not one which was so sturdy.

A fact he found out when he had ordered his catapults to concentrate fire on the still being built wall.

"Fire. Shoot it with stones! Do not let the enemy finish making it!" He had given the order in a slightly, pitched anxious voice.

Lord Ponticus did not know why, but somehow his years of experience told him that letting the enemy complete this wall would be a very bad thing.

But though he took the correct course of action, the wall made from the combination of wood, stone, and concrete simply proved too strong an adversary for the relatively small stones to overcome when shot with such low speed.

They pinged right off the currently one meter high wall, and so the work continued unimpeded, the occasional barrages simply shrugged off.

Furthermore when Tibians had their catapults directed at somewhere else, Alexander's own catapults were free to fire without any fear of retaliation.

And as anyone could guess, they started targeting the positions they roughly suspected of housing Tibias's siege weapons, trying to land a lucky strike.

So soon many of the Tibian catapults had to be redirected to counter Alexander's return fire.

And so it was amidst this lobbing of sticks and stones at each other that the construction continued as scheduled, and as the second month of the siege came to a close, the huge wall was finally completed!

And the finished product was truly a beauty to behold,

Spanning the entire length of the opposing city's walls, it was five meters wide, with passageways at the back to allow access to the top.

The wall was able to hold thousands of active bowmen at the same time and was even wide enough to deploy the catapults.

The first part of Alexander's siege plan was done!

And it had gone surprisingly smoothly concerning everything.

Tibias had tried to knock it down by using their artillery but were suppressed by Alexander's own archers and artillery, the men doing their job flawlessly.

Also the Tibians simply lacked the firepower to harm the wall, though it could be argued that it was not fair to blame them for that, for if they had faced anyone else, they could have indeed knocked down the wall even facing the counter fire.

After all others would not have had a binding agent like cement at their disposal, which would have meant that they could have only made the wall out of wood and not stone.

That would have made it vulnerable to even those small projectiles.

It was also because of this limitation that no one else had thought of using this technique.

Because it would not have worked.

Now it was worth pointing out that Tibias had not simply resigned itself to shooting at the walls and praying it crumbled.

No, some of Lord Ponticus's more energetic officers had wanted to charge out of the city and manually destroy the walls as it was being built.

"Lord Commander, the enemy is busy building his walls. He is distracted playing house! Give us the order and we will be able to smash everything he has built to bits with just one strike!" One of the more eager ones claimed, wanting to catch Alexander off guard. I think you should take a look at

"Yes! Lord Lord Ponticus. With 30,000 of us here, our mighty phalanx will be able to chase the enemy away with ease." While another buttressed him, drawing acknowledging nods from many in the group closely at these gathered men, they would find nearly all of them to be of the younger generations.

And in Lord Ponticus's eyes, they seemed to simply lack the patience required to win a siege.

'These young brats!' He tsked in his heart.

Though he could also understand where they were coming from.

The two mouths of constant fighting seemed to be making some of them restless.

So recognizing that Lord Ponticus did not scold or chide them, but instead in a deep, authoritative voice replied,

"The enemy constructing that wall might certainly seem impressive. But it serves no prupose."

"He cannot surround the city from all sides. The Diannu rive is too wide to blockade"

"And if he tried to do even then, we will not let him."

"So there is no need to panic just now."

"We can have this talk if he continues to build those walls."

Lord Ponticus's diplomatic approach to keeping the option to preemptively strike open placated many of the officers who were nervous about their prospects on the inside but refused to show it on the surface.

While his reasonable assessment of the situation also brought their focus back to reality.

'The commander is right. While it is true the wall is certainly impressive, it cannot do anything to us.'

They said to themselves feeling relieved.

Many of the officers were at first scared by the sheer scale and speed of the constructed wall.

But that just by itself seemed to pose too little of a threat.

Hence they quickly started to calm down.

And seeing this Lapitus too joined the converting interjecting on behalf of Lord Ponticus and further saying,

"Lord Ponticus is right. Our ancestors always told us we should never go out to meet Adhania in an open field but to use these walls to repel the,"

"So if we go on the offensive it would be us betraying their advice."

"We mustn't do that!" He urged and then finished by saying,

"Furthermore I would like to remind everyone that although we have 30,000 men, most of these are untrained and ill equipped."

"Using them to attack would not be wise."

"Our best chance of victory is to stay within the city and kill as many of the enemy as possible."

Facing this reasoning and encountering the strong opposition of both the city lord and his lieutenant, the belligerent officers all quickly cooled down and went back to concentrating on their own tasks, which keeping a watchful eye over the walls and making sure the enemy could not pull off any cheeky tactics.

But what they did not realize was that the enemy did not need to pull off any cheeky tactic.

Their cheeky tactic was right in front of them, in the form of the huge wall.

And though Lord Ponticus said this could do no harm to them, Alexander was about to prove all of them oh so wrong.

Beauce soon the horrors of the walls began to manifest themselves, as casualties on Tibian's side began to shoot through the roof

This happened because as the wall finally reached its maximum height of 10 meters, the thousands of crossbowmen finally got to play on an even playing field.

Meaning they no longer had to play the uphill battle to having to aim up toward the walls.

Instead now they could shoot straight forward or even down below if they were targeting those on the first wall.

It was a game changer and Alexander's men rejoiced at the increased range, accuracy and convenience it bought them while Lord Ponticus's men shuddered at the new threat.

And the immediate effect of such a change in the power dynamic was soon felt, as Tibias's casualties skyrocketed to almost triple the times.

And the bad news did not stop there.

No, soon another horror emerged, which were the catapults, a weapon that had suddenly turned very, very different, and much, much more 'fiery'!

Chapter 698 The Siege of Thesalie (Part-5)

As the construction of the wall finished, and the second phase of Alexander's siege began, he transferred all his soldiers and artillery onto the wall to give them a better advantage.

This helped the crossbowmen and the ones manning the scorpions as now their shots did not need to fight gravity to reach their target.

Meaning many of the bolts that previously would have lost all kinetic energy by the time they had reached their target and simply fell from the sky, pinging off the defender's armor could now have enough force in them to penetrate and wound or kill them.

Along with these, Alexander also employed his catapults, which he actually saw to be the main star of the show, for he had invented quite the nefarious ammo to be used with this missile delivery mechanism.

A taste of which the Tibians got late one night, when Lord Ponticus, staying late in his office suddenly noticed through his window what to him seemed like fiery stars streaking across the sky and crashing into his city!

It was a paralyzing moment for him, as he noticed volley after volley of such infernal balls land inside the walled perimeter.

And though most of these glowing stars extinguished themselves harmlessly after a few minutes, a few lucky ones did manage to catch hold of one or two unlucky houses, thus setting them on fire.

The blaze from these flames appeared not insignificant either, as Lord Ponticus feared if these fires were not quickly taken care of but given the time to grow, the entire city ran the risk of being turned to ash.

"Quick! Go get Lapitus quick! Have him douch those flames immediately," Hence the ruler of the city exclaimed such in terror, commanding the leader of his bodyguard to get the message out.

Something the man bolted out to perform, as he too knew perfectly well what all of this meant.

"Dammit! What is going on! How is the enemy throwing so big fires!" And as he ran, the military man repeatedly asked himself this and only this.

And indeed!

What could it be?

To know that one had to turn their gaze to Alexander's side, where this flammable ammunition was being prepared.

And as luck would have it, Alexander was actually giving some of his nobles and military officers a tour of the process right at this moment.

Alexander said,

"The flaming stars that the Tibians have seen heezing past them are actually just finely crushed coal mixed with sawdust," as he showed his entourage how the soldiers were preparing the mixture, first crushing the coal with a mortar and pestle with smooth dust and then adding a proportional amount of sawdust to it.

Following this Alexander pointed to the next process,

"This combustible mixture is then put inside a linen cloth bag."

"This linen bag is also special because it actually coated with a mixture of tar and animal fat."

"This is done to make sure the whole thing is even more flammable."

"And lastly, a few lumps of stones are added to give the whole thing a bit of mass and weight."

"Or else it would not be able to travel smoothly over the air."

As Alexander said, he then moved on to the last part of the process, which he described as,

"Once all this is ready, the soldiers then take this ten to twenty kilogram load and place it on the catapults, before lighting it on fire using a torch moments before it was released."

Twank

And as soon as Alexander finished saying so, the taut catapult was let go and

Shooo!

The burning mass could be seen shooting across the dark night sky like a meteor, burning brightly as if it were an instrument of the gods carrying out their vengeance, as it went past the walls and disappeared into the background.

And as the small crowd watched with an enraptured awe at the sight of multiple such shots being fired from all the available catapults, over and over again, they were left speechless.

While Alexander provided the following commentary,

"I used the tar and animal fat as the coating to make sure the fire was much more resilient. This way each of the shots will burn throughout its flight and not simply extinguish itself mid way due to strong winds."

"This way most of the fired shots will still be burning even as they land."

"And if a few lucky ones manage to find a thatched straw roof to make its abode....hehehe, well we will be in luck!"

It certainly sounded very morbid but it seemed Alexander was quite happy to burn the entire city down as long as it meant he could conquer it.

Though to be fair Alexander had no intention of actually seeing that happen.

After all, then he would have to pay for all of its reconstitution.

And it would also result in the death of thousands if not tens of thousands.

Meaning he would lose that many able bodied working men.

There was no way he wanted to see that happen.

So his actual purpose in shooting these fireballs was to exhaust the defenders by making them work day and night.

While the sun was up, Alexander would make the Tibians defend against his volleys of arrows, sometimes mixed with small scale ladder luses just to keep them on the edge.

While as soon as night fell, the true terror would begin, as people would be forced to live with one eye open in fear that it could be their house which might catch fire this time.

Of course the chances of that happening were actually miniscule.

Most of Alexander's shots would get unlucky and land on wood or even worse stone.

Also, not even every thacked roof landing resulted in a fire.

Sometimes the fire simply failed to spread and died out.

But not all.

There were some that did manage to get lucky.

So once in a while, that flammable mass would manage to find itself landing around a suitable environment, and as the outer linen clothes were burnt away to spill the high quality coal and sawdust,

Flash!

Soon a roaring inferno would birth itself, initially using the mixture inside it to get going, and then once grown sufficiently big enough, being able to start devouring the surrounding, be it hay or wood.

The occurrence of such a disaster would necessitate men to be deployed to mitigate it, meaning manpower had to be expended to have a group of men on stand by at all times, alert and ready to respond to such emergencies.

So it was surely something that would eat away at the city's endurance, especially as people would be unable to get a good night's sleep.

And though it might have been able to be shrugged off if it was only a few days, the repeated and continuous pressure from Alexander's side soon began to take its toll, which was why the end of the month, many of the defenders looked more like zombies and actual humans, with sluggish paces, their words being occasionally jumbled and their eyes ringed with ink.

So what Alexander was doing and what he was using was clearly working.

The ammunition was of course the brainchild of Alexander, who invented it while trying to think of a way to make life as miserable as possible for the Tibians.

And he came up with the idea of using fire as his mind suddenly drifted to remembering how Hollywood loves to use it in fights.

"My lord, you truly are a genius! We could have never thought of anything like this!" Talukder (Viscount) Prantik exclaimed as the tour came to an end.

And was quickly joined by another noble,

"Yes, yes! Previously he used fire arrows. But most of those burned out even before they landed. This is much better!"

Then a third noble added,

"My lord, I would also advise adding a bit of palm oil to the mixture. That thing is sticky and is very difficult to put out by water."

"Our fireballs will be much more difficult to put out that way."

And lastly, Jamider (Earl) Tikba proposed to Alexander,

"Also we should try to attack the city from different parts. That will keep the enemy guessing, and if lucky, we could even start multiple fires all throughout the city."

"That will give us a much better chance of succeeding."

It could be clearly seen that though these noblemen might not be the most creative inventors, but when presented with a new thing, they were very quickly able to figure out new uses of them.

Alexander was frankly impressed by this.

"Haha, then let us try all these and see how well they work," So he decided to experiment on all of them, which yielded varying degrees of result.

The palm oil idea was a bust, but targeting the city from different sides proved very popular.

Although the absence of the walls on the other two sides meant Alexander had to move his catapults very close and put them at risk of counter artillery fire, he still felt the trade off was worth it.

And so as the month went on, Tibias was made to deal with almost constant fires, sometimes multiples at a single night straining both their manpower and logistical resources.

While in the morning they had to try and stop Alexander's soldiers, camp followers, and even the people recruited from nearby villages from filling up the ditch surrounding the city and building a ramp towards it.

Chapter 699 The Siege of Thesalie (Part-6)

As the siege entered its third month, it entered a brand new phase for both sides.

For Tibias it meant constant nightly fires and incessant arrow fire from the enemy, resulting in large casualties.

A situation that turned harder when the enemy started to launch these fireballs from all three directions.

With their only saving grace being that those from the sides were much easier to deal with.

While on Alexander's side, the main challenge was completing the most difficult part of the siege.

Which was the part where the ditch around the city was to be filled with earth and a ramp up to the wall was to be built.

The reason a ramp was needed to be built was because with Thesalie being on a hill, its slope proved too steep for the men to pull the heavy towers into place.

Hence an upper layer of dirt with less hostile of a gradient had to be built, along which the siege towers that were currently being built could be more easily pulled along so that the soldiers could be directly deposited into the walls.

And for this endeavor, as Alexander had requisitioned before for his forest clearing, here too were soldiers and camp followers employed.

Though this time the latter proved much more reluctant to be employed.

And who would not?

It was nowhere as cushy as simply cutting down some trees.

Here they were being asked to go to the foot of the enemy's walls carrying a bucket to earth to fill up the ditch.

All while the enemy would be trying their best to stop them by launching a constant withering fire of arrows, stones, and hot oil or water from above.

And even though Alexander's archers tried their best to neutralize these defenders and punish them for stepping out of their cover, and even though the two towers that would have made the whole attempt a complete death trap if they still worked were neutralized using the catapults, the work still proved to be quite dangerous.

After all, no matter how much Alexander tried, some Tibians were always able to launch arrows or throw stones at these hard working people.

So it took quite a bit of 'persuading' to get these camp followers to take this job.

Which of course meant the soldiers threatening these civilians at the tip of their swords.

And these armed men were unusually eager to use this intimidation card as their commanders very clearly let them know that if they could get enough camp followers to do this work, then it would fall upon them.

So faced with the choice between running to the foot of the enemy's wall while being shot at oneself, or making someone else run to the foot of the enemy's wall while being shot at, every sane man chose the same option.

Of course, Alexander did not only show the stick.

He offered these civilians the carrot too, in the shape of a 33% pay rise as compared to their previous job, promising them 8 ropals a day for their work.

This ended up costing Alexander an extra 160,000 ropals a day, or almost 5 million a month, but he would have been glad to pay double that if it meant getting the job done.

Furthermore, to make the deal even sweeter, he even promised them medical coverage, meaning if they got injured, Alexander would cover their bills by letting them get treated in his clinic at the camp.

And lastly, like the considerate employer he was, he even created a special vehicle for them to use, one that could shield them from strikes of above.

At its heart, this special utility vehicle was just a cart that had its body thrown away leaving only the wheel while it was given a large sturdy roof and protected skirts on the sides.

The large 'thing' could be pulled by men from the inside, thus letting them stay under the protected cover of the armored cart, and it was able to safely shelter ten people at a time.

All these men would be carrying buckets of dirt with them, which they would deposit into the ditch upon reaching their target and then quickly pull back as fast as possible.

This new armored cart too was a new innovation, one which Alexander made after taking inspiration from a battering ram, and Alexander made it to be as durable as possible.

For instance the roofs and sides were not just made of plain wood but reinforced with iron fastening too, in order to prevent the wood from splitting when struck by large objects like falling stones.

Also, solid iron rods were used as supports on the roofs and as beams, all to prevent the whole structure from breaking when hit.

All of which worked to make the entire thing very durable,

Now, all of these 'improvements' did end up adding a lot of weight, but the people using it seemed to not mind much, much preferring to lug the heavy thing around rather than run through the field of arrow fire naked.

And they all only regretted that there was not enough of these armored carts to go around.

After all, given twenty thousand men were involved in the endeavor, Alexander would have needed to make 2,000 of them.

And that would have taken frighteningly long to produce, prohibitively expensive, and logistically impossible to transport.

So he made around a hundred of them and issued them to the more obedient camp followers as a form reward.

Which also worked to suppress any reluctance among the workers as each man tried to work as flawlessly as possible to get a chance to get inside those.

And around two weeks into this effort, as the ditch kept getting filled up, these camp followers were joined by another group.

And they were not the soldiers.

After all, Alexander very much preferred not to use up his precious fighting force in such attritional fighting.

No, it was all the native villagers from nearby that came to the aid!

Just as Lord Ponticus had predicted, these peasants quickly got news that an enemy army was nearby and fearing for their lives and modesty, had sensibly chosen to move toward the city in hopes of taking shelter inside its walls.

But again, just as Ponticus had instructed, they found the large wooden oak door closed to them.

Thus they had no choice but to return.

Though some chose to linger and loiter around in the hopes that a chance to go inside would miraculously manifest itself.

And it was then that Alexander noticed this happy coincidence.

So not being polite, he then had all these free labor just whirling their time away promptly gathered with the promise of a free meal, and then employed them for 2 ropals a day and two hot meals.

A deal that these dirt poor men were happy to accept, betraying their lord in a heartbeat.

Though it could be also argued that it was Ponticus who had clearly betrayed them first, as he had sworn to protect them in exchange for them paying their taxes.

But though they had certainly paid their dues, as peasants who did not pay their taxes did not tend to live very long, they were clearly being denied their protection.

A vulnerability that Alexander chose to take full advantage of.

So with these extra hands, as the third month of the siege neared its end, the ditch along the front of the city soon began to disappear, replaced by a flat, smooth piece of ground, a ground ideal for rolling something like a siege tower over.

It seemed that try as they might, the Tibians had been simply unable to stop this crucial gap from being filled.

And speaking of siege towers, their constructions were also no secret to the Tibians.

After all these were huge structures and were being built right in front of them.

And judging by the rate of their production, it seemed they would soon be ready to hit the ramp that too was under construction.

Hence, aware of all this, a very heated debate was currently taking place inside the most iconic building of Thesalie- The lord's mansion.

"My lord, what should we do!" Asked a slightly panicking soldier.

"Attack! We must charge out and attack!" And even before Lord Ponticus could answer, one of the officers loudly claimed as such.

He was the same man who had led the group of eager officers previously.

"I too agree. If we let them finish their siege towers we are finished!" And this time, he was joined by another officer who ominously chimed such.

"Yes. We thought we were safe from siege towers given we are atop a hill."

"But who would have thought the enemy would build an earthen ramp to try and flatten it! Ridiculous!" A fourth, much older man's voice pronounced so loudly.

He was of the same generation as Lord Ponticus and held much respect among the soldiers and officers due to his age and experience.

And if it had been any other time, he might have been very impressed and appreciative of seeing this novel approach to warfare.

But not so much when it was being deployed against him.

He was very concerned.

And with even a decorated officer like him expressing concern, Lord Ponticus knew he could not simply push the request down.

Chapter 700 Troubles Inside Thesalie

The old man who expressed his concerns over the evolving situation was called Kalidus and in his younger years, he had worked as Lord Ponticus's adjutant, thus giving his current words a lot of weight.

And his concerns were further justified when supported by the next man, who was interestingly Lapitus himself, as this time he sided against his boss, stepping forward and saying,

"I too agree that we should do something."

"Just sitting behind the wall and hoping the enemy will give up like our ancestors said seems to be no longer working."

"And whatever we do, it should be done as soon as possible."

"Because every day we take more and more casualties. And every day our numbers dwindle that little bit."

"Just today we had 39 dead and 53 wounded. We cannot sustain this forever."

"If we do not stem the bleeding, or take action soon, then we might even lose the ability to do anything about it in the future even if we wanted to!"

Lapitus sounded very pessimistic about the situation by the end of it.

"Hmmm," And facing all these officers' petitions, Lord Ponticus first and foremost let out a long drawn out sigh.

To be honest, even with the situation evolving to such, he still felt that leaving the safety of his wall would be a great mistake.

He had no basis for this, but gut feelings did not need any basis.

But he also knew gut feelings would not be enough to convince these men to stay put.

If he directly suggested such, he risked being seen as an old timer who lost his courage.

"I heard there was a fire recently that burnt some of our food. How much was it..... I forgot." And at some point during his rumination, Lord Ponticus suddenly brought this up.

And Lapitus hastily confirmed,

"Yes, one of the fireballs fired from the east side somehow managed to land on top of one of the granaries."

"What was unlucky was the fireball burnt through a part of the roof and drooped down into the actual grains inside, directly lighting those on fire."

"By the time we managed to get it under control....there was nothing left to rescue." The man sounded genuinely sad and bitter at the loss of all the precious produce.

And he was then joined by Kalidus too, who added,

"*Sigh*, shots from the sides never reached that far. The enemy lacks the high elevation there after all. So our patrols around those parts were less."

"But it seems one strike managed to somehow make it through!"

"What luck!"

The old man sounded equally sad and bitter.

While Lord Ponticus could understand the context for the decreased patrol.

Given the enemy's cruel tactic, many of the men were sleep deprived, he included, and so it seemed that lowering the number of patrols was a type of necessary measure the garrison had been forced to take.

They had been able to get away with it for most of the time as Alexander did not have enough resources, particularly the cement to build more walls like he had done in the front, so the attacks from the side were less dangerous.

But it seemed their luck had finally run out.

And Alexander was able to recoup all this bad luck with this one shot.

"So how much grain was there?" Lord Ponticus repeated the latter part of his question, this time while massaging his forehead.

He felt a slight migraine coming.

"About one fifth...a bit less than that." Came the straightforward answer.

And it made Lord Ponticus feel like a small stake had gone through his heart.

That was certainly not insignificant, and it did hurt his ability to last against this siege.

'We might need to start rationing,' The experienced general muttered to himself.

Though the food situation was not yet so dire, it certainly had the chance to be.

Hence facing so many threats both from the outside and inside his own deteriorating domestic situation, Lord Ponticus knew he could not stave off the pressure from his officers.

So bringing his hand up and clasping them in front of him, this member of the royal family announced in a heavy voice,

"Okay. Given the current development of the situation, I believe it is indeed imperative that we strike."

And no sooner had he said this that a wave of delighted murmur buzzed across the room, as the officers rejoiced at having had wished come true.

But Lord Ponticus was not done yet.

So he continued unimpeded, raising his octaves a bit in order to drown out the muffled voices,

"But not right now!"

"Now is not the time."

"We will attack two months from now."

"We will need this time to train the garrisons."

"And I will also personally write to His Majesty in the hopes some reinforcement can get here in time."

Lord Ponticus revealed this plan, which worked dashing some of the more cheerful spirits.

They were hoping to attack within the week.

But Lord Ponticus was of the mind to bolster his forces as much as he could before initiating an attack.

Now ideally, he should have asked this at least a month ago, just when the night terrors had started.

But he simply could not think things would have gotten so bad so quickly.

So he tried to fix his mistake now.

Better late than never I guess.

"Two months! That's too long my lord!"

But predictably the timeline proposed by Lord Ponticus was too long for Kalidus's liking.

And he was supported by all the other officers too.

"One month! I think it would be a grave mistake to wait any more than one month." Lapitus quickly claimed.

"Yes! The enemy has already finished filling up the ditch. And the siege towers should not take more than one month to build. Certainly not two!" The very eager officer quickly joined, clutching his fist.

"We can train our troops within one month. Let us not any longer than that!" Another urged Lord Ponticus.

"...." And facing this combined pressure Lord Ponticus once again found himself on the back foot, as he struggled to get back control.

He could shout and use his authority and peerage to forcibly suppress it.

But he doubted that would be a long term solution

Using force against one's army was usually a bad idea.

The men might even charge out of the gates when push came to shove.

Or the alternative was that he could acquiesce to the officers.

But he really did not attack without any reinforcements from the capital.

He had a gut feeling he would lose if he did.

So thinking a bit, he decided to play his trump card, his one time use ace in the hole.

Stating in a heavy, boisterous manner, Lord Ponticus threw away these concerns officers had forcefully,

"The enemy will not be able to launch an attack within the next month. I have lived through more sieges than all of combined, and I'm sure of it."

"He has not set the necessary conditions."

"You talk about the siege towers being completed but you forget about the ramp."

"That ramp is yet to be anywhere close to being finished."

"And without that, he cannot move his siege towers."

"So we actually have time."

"We will attack when the time is right. Just as the enemy has finished his siege towers. We can then burn it after all the hard work he has done, hehehe," Lord Ponticus cunningly smirked, as if the enemy was dancing to his tunes, and finished by turning to the men and loudly announcing,

"Do not panic men! A panicking soldier is a weak soldier!"

"This city has stood for hundreds of years, it will stand for hundreds more!"

Lord Ponticus's heavy words and the enormous belt of experience he carried worked to convince the officers, and though reluctant, it seemed nobody was willing to challenge this authoritative figure of the royal family.

So they retreated for the second time.

But Lord Ponticus knew he would not be so lucky the third time.

He had managed to bluff his way out of his this time, but this ace could be done only one time.

There would be no pushing them back next time.

Thus as soon as his study was emptied, he immediately started writing a letter to PR, describing the present situation, as well as the enemy's new tactic and the imminent possibility of a dire predicament.

Lord Ponticus then described his intended attack and ended the letter as such,

"The planned counterattack requires more men than I have at my disposal. Thus I urge His Majesty with the utmost urgency to send me at least 20,000 men within the next month."

"Or else though this subject is not afraid to give his life defending the Fortress of Fortresses, I fear it might be all for naught!"

Lord Ponticus put the sealed parchment at the hand of a skilled rider within an hour of adjourning the meeting and urged him to 'ride like the wind', instructing him to see the king as soon as he got there without any delay.

"Rest assured my lord. I will not fail you," And this man, though did not know the entire story, could immediately feel things were not going well with the city.

Thus he promised such.

And as Lord Ponticus watched the horse gallop away, all the way until it was no longer visible over the horizon, he really hoped some significant reinforcements would be headed towards his way as soon as possible.