

Herald 701

Chapter 701 Reaction of Tibias's Court (Part-1)

If Lord Ponticus was asked to answer truthfully whether he really believed they could hold on for two months, he would have answered- 'Unlikely'.

He had far exaggerated the problems facing Alexander and knew the enemy might be ready to launch a full fledged attack before the end of next month.

This accelerated pace even surprised Alexander himself as he was able to make far quicker progress on the siege than he had originally thought.

The walls were built quicker, the ditch was filled faster and Tibias's resistance seemed far smaller than originally anticipated, possibly due to the effective use of his artillery.

And thus, Lord Ponticus could only urge Lapitus to not panic and train the men as quickly as possible.

While Alexander prepared himself with baited anticipation for the last phase of his plan to begin- the actual attack on the city.

As Alexander waited, the lord of Zanzan also received a very special letter from Zanzan.

It was from Cambyses and it was good news.

Very good news.

It informed him that both Ophenia and Mean had successful deliveries and that he had two more children - a girl for Ophenia, and a boy for Mean.

This put a smile on Alexander's face for the rest of the day.

He had originally promised to be there during their births but found it difficult to make the time.

The siege was progressing much better than he had expected and the things he thought would have been possible only in the fifth or even sixth month of the campaign were about to occur imminently.

It would be unwise to have a change in command at this critical moment.

Thus he wrote back a passage of hearty congratulations, as well as informing them of the progress of the siege, and then promising to return very soon.

And while he was writing it, he even regretted a tiny, tiny bit that the siege was not a tad bit later.

Because up until very recently, he had mostly spent his time idly in the camp.

In the morning he would stay in his tent listening to the daily reports regarding the war and giving orders as needed.

Then he would take a stroll to the administrative building to have a chat with the men running the whole show, listening to how everything was running.

After that came lunch at around midday, following which he could either tour the barracks or if he was feeling like it, go visit the frontlines which was a few kilometers from his main camp.

There he would meet the soldiers and personally talk to the officers, boosting morale.

And lastly, just around dusk, he would take a visit to the camp clinic to visit and say soothing words to the injured men.

Of course, this final part was done not out of total altruism, but as a way to boost his image among the soldiers and make himself present himself as a man of the people.

After all, how many common soldiers could have ever imagined having a noble ask of their well-being like Alexander was doing?

And that was it for a typical day for Alexander.

And as it could be seen from his schedule, Alexander mostly spent his time just looking after things rather than doing anything.

He was not even 'doing' any girl like many of the nobles, who many times took the more beautiful working girls offering their services to bed.

Sometimes they even took the regular women working there.

Not by force of course.

They did not need to, as most peasant women were more than happy to lay with a noble.

They were usually offered quite some coin and if they could get really, really, lucky to earn one of their favor, they might even have their fortunes completely reversed.

So why would they refuse?

It was also because of that greed many such flies would regularly buzz around Alexander, him being without a doubt the juiciest target in there, as he was both the highest ranking noble and one of the youngest.

A more perfect candidate to latch oneself onto simply did not exist.

Not here, perhaps not even in the whole of Adhania.

Though of course, even as they tried, they were bound to be disappointed.

For no other simple fact than Alexander did not like doing that during campaigns.

He thought it distracted him and felt such pleasures should be reserved for after the war.

And though not a military law, he also tried his other officers to follow the same, though up until now it seemed to have given little result.

So for now Alexander spent the following days with a pleased heart over the birth of his new children while waiting patiently for the day he could launch his attack on the walls.

As for the opposing side, well Lord Ponticus's messenger, by switching horses multiple times, rode without rest to reach the Tibian capital as quickly as possible.

And when he delivered the note, it did start quite a significant commotion in the courts.

"...is...is it real? Did Lord Ponticus really write this?"

"Impossible! How...can this be?"

"What is he doing! How did he allow things to turn so dire!"

"20,000 men! Ridiculous! What are we... magicians? We don't have so many!"

All such surprised exclamations of disbelief and incredulation were uttered by the nobles present there, with some even criticizing the man, though the latter were really in the minority as Lord Ponticus's military career really left very few people doubting his competency.

So most understood that things must have turned pretty bad.

As for the man to whom this letter was addressed, the one sitting on the throne, Perseus read and re-read the parchment over and over again.

Lord Ponticus had been quite detailed in his recount of how the enemy had pushed him to such dire straits, and as Perseus read it, a part of him could not help but feel very impressed by all of it.

But impressed or not, the fact still remained that his youngest uncle needed reinforcement.

"How many men can we muster by the month?" Hence putting down the parchment, Perseus very directly posed.

"....." And it was followed by a long silence.

Every single noble knew how much they could contribute, but no one knew the total.

At least not at the top of their head.

Also after their large loss from two years ago, many nobles were reluctant to give out their precious men, much preferring to hoard it for themselves.

Thus they opted to remain silent.

Until one noble betrayed the collective.

"Your Majesty! My family can give five thousand!" The man stepped forward to loudly claim, the large 'donation' instantly causing no small upheaval in the court.

Five thousand might not sound like a lot, but in Tibias's context, it very definitely was.

It was equivalent to an entire legion.

But who was this man capable of single handedly offering so much?

Well he was Lord Theony- a very prominent member of Tibian nobility and the father of Theony, who was the king's adjutant.

Also, yes, Theony's (the king's adjutant) father was also called Theony, with the only distinction between the two being the prefix 'lord' added to the senior man.

"Mmm, very good. Lord Theony is truly one of a kind, a true son of Tibias." Hearing the very large donation, Perseus was naturally very pleased.

Though it would also have to be pointed out that the reason Lord Theony had done this was also as a way to buy more power in the court, as after Leosydas's death, there was a power struggle currently going on over who would get to take over the former's responsibilities.

But regardless of Lord Theony's interests, he did promise such a large number of troops, and this of course caused Perseus to break out a smile.

"Me too! I too can get five thousand men."

And as soon as Perseus finished praising Lord Theony, Mithriditus from the side too loudly claimed this, though it sounded a bit forced, as evidenced by his slightly clenched fists and clenched teeth.

Because for him, sparing five thousand young, good, working men would be pushing his limit.

But he promised nevertheless.

Because remember the current power struggle regarding taking over Leosydas's influence?

Well he was one of the big players there and his biggest rival was, as you could have guessed it, Lord Theony.

And how could he let his rival get one step ahead?

So even though Mithriditus's family was not as rich as Lord Theony's, he bit the bullet and matched him anyway.

"Excellent! Here is another true son of Tibias, haha" And the moment Mithriditus declared such, Perseus immediately loudly praised, as his mouth could not help but form a knowing smile.

Perseus had certainly acted as he had calculatively, pitting one man against the other to extract the maximum benefit from both of them.

And as evidenced it had worked out fantastically.

Then to squeeze out even more of the juice, he immediately declared, "Good! Then I will count on both of you to get all the men ready as soon as possible."

"Though Uncle did not say it expressively, I believe he is in a lot more trouble than he's letting on."

"He is just too proud to say."

"So I want you to be ready by the end of this month."

Perseus casually set the timeline.

'Didn't the letter say Lord Ponticus could hold on for two months! Why do we get only one?' While both men shouted so in their hearts.

Chapter 702 Reaction of Tibias's Court (Part-2)

Perseus's target of one month to gather all those men was really pushing what was possible.

It usually took much longer than that to gather so many men as time was needed to get the order down the chain of command.

But none of the two men dared to dispute this in fear of the other using it against him to make him appear incompetent.

While Perseus after setting the time frame continued,

"After you have gathered your men, have them use the river Diannu to ride upstream."

"That way you can directly enter Thesalie. This will be much faster than marching."

Perseus's plan to use the navigable waterways for troop transport was very good.

But this little detail somehow also gave the two the opportunity to quibble and try and wriggle out some more time.

So being the quicker witted of the two, Mithriditus tried to go around the problem another way.

"But...but Your Grace, we do not have enough boats to carry all the ten thousand men and supplies. And it will take time to gather so many, even if we take them from the merchants and trade guilds."

Clearly he was hinting for the king to extend the timeline.

And Lord Theony also quickly joined Mithriditus this time, adding with large nods,

"Yes. yes And although we can gather the men, ...but the supplies....that will take much...."

But he did not get to finish his piece as Perseus flashed his palms and curtly interjected,

"No need to worry. You will only have to carry the supplies required to make the journey."

"As Thesalie is not too far from here, you can make it in only five days if you go by river."

"That will solve both the boat and supplies problems, right?" He smirked with a knowing curl to the lips.

Perseus was not a king who could be hoodwinked so easily.

Especially when it came to military matters.

He was unusually sharp about this stuff.

"..." And hearing Perseus's plan, the two men found their tongues tied.

They found it hard to nitpick here but also found the task too daunting.

They did not want to promise this and then fail to deliver.

But they also did not want to outright claim they were unable to do so as it would lose them a lot of face.

Hence for a while there was a stifling, uncomfortable silence swirling around the court.

"Ahem!" Until it was broken by a gruff from a noble relatively in the back, who, succeeding in drawing attention to him, the relatively influential noble slowly stepped forward with a bit of an unsure stagger and turned to face Perseus before speaking out in a shaky voice,

"You...Your Majesty...but if the ten thousand men are sent without supplies, how will they survive once they get to the city?"

"Lord Ponticus has already written in his letter that one of his granaries has burnt down and asked for more supplies."

"Wouldn't ten thousand new mouths put too much strain on him?"

This man was part of Mithriditus's faction and felt he needed to step up to help his boss.

And as he said that, not to be outdone, another noble, this time from Lord Theony's faction quickly added,

"I too agree, Your Highness. The soldiers will not be even able to forage due to the siege."

"Perhaps it will be better to wait and better prepare ourselves so that we can properly help Lord Ponticus."

And being convinced by the duo's argument, another more neutral noble nodded and commented,

"Mmm, if we wait two months, we can also send the entire twenty thousand Lord Ponticus wanted together, rather than in small groups bit by bit."

"That should be a more effective force."

Judging by the nobles' attitude, it seemed a lot of the nobles were in favor of delaying the reinforcements.

It was both due to actual logistical difficulties and also because by dragging one's feet, they figured they would not have to commit so much of their own men.

And who knows, perhaps Lord Ponticus was really exaggerating and within this time the Zanzan threat will extinguish by itself?

In fact, there were many nobles who felt that way, who felt Thesalie would, or better yet could never fall

And it was not difficult to understand why after reading Tibias's history, where the city had withstood up until now nine great sieges and numerous small ones.

That came to one siege about every forty to fifty years on average, and every noble learned in detail about each and every one of these great sieges by heart.

And Thesalie had withstood them all.

It was because of its legendary defenses that Thesalie was called by so many other names.

The Fortress of Fortress, Bastion of the Gods, and The Impregnable Bulwark, all such were only some of the many impressive names it went by.

So the fact that the city would stand forever was almost etched into the noble's heart like it was a natural part of the world, a fact as true as the very laws of nature itself, an inevitability, like rain always falling downward, or fire always being hot, or the sun being always bright.

So to them, hearing Thesalie was in danger of falling was the same as hearing the sun might not rise tomorrow.

Sure tomorrow might be cloudy, and one might not be able to see the sun, but the sun would definitely be there, no doubt.

Hence many did not take Lord Ponticus's claim seriously, thinking either he was exaggerating, or he had lost his nerve, or simply plain old had made a mistake.

But one person who did not think so.

And that was Perseus.

He knew his young uncle very well and knew he would never lie about such things.

If he said things were dire, it definitely was dire.

And fortunately for Tibias, and unfortunately for Alexander, it was his opinion that truly mattered.

Another man whose opinion also mattered almost equally was Philips- the crown prince.

And just like the rumors said about how sharp he was, he both understood what his father was thinking and what the nobles were trying to get at.

So interjecting on the former's behalf, Philips turned to address the crowd,

"My lords," He started, "if Grandpa...if Lord Ponticus wrote this letter, knowing him, his situation might be direr than he is making it to be so."

"That is why Royal father is so eager to send aid as soon as soon."

"That is why he wants those ten thousand men there as soon as possible."

Saying this he paused, his gaze scanning the line of nobles standing opposite of each other.

And for their part, the nobles also gazed back, as they then heard Philips say with an understanding nod,

"I know many in your hearts think that since Thesalie has stood for the last hundreds of years, it will not fall for the following hundred years."

"But I want to remind you, the past does not guarantee the future."

"The enemy we face this time is nothing like the past. He is way more cunning, and he has so many strange tactics."

"So we must not grow complacent."

"We must not let the glory and success of our ancestors make us think future success is guaranteed."

"No! Instead, like our ancestors had done in the past, we must strive to our utmost."

"We must never forget Adhania, our most hated enemy, is much bigger than us."

"And so we must always take every move they make very seriously."

"I hope all my lords will remember this!"

As Philips finished his speech, the nobles could not help but produce a glow of appreciation on their face.

It was truly a moving set of words, and it really worked to make the nobles see a new perspective.

'Yes, if Thesalie falls, what is the point of keeping the men all to myself,' Many nobles thought.

While other nobles who were shrewder and could see much more into the distance commented in their heart,

'With him as successor, Tibias is sure to have a bright future.'

These nobles were both glad to have a competent king who could provide stability to the realm, but also a bit bitter because it meant they were unlikely to be able to trick or coerce him into giving them more influence.

It was both a great boon and a minor curse.

But most nobles agreed it was more a boon than a curse given the challenges their country was facing currently.

Especially that new lord of Zanzan.

Though most nobles were yet to wake up to the nightmare called Alexander, a few of the most sharp ones were.

Like Mithriditus, who upon hearing Philips's great speech, stepped forward to say in a very appreciative voice,

"Excellent! What The Crown Highness has said is really excellent. I could not have said it better by myself."

"Now is not the time for division."

"Now is the time for us to unite."

"Lord Ponticus has asked for help, and we should provide it to him even before he actually needs it."

"Defending Thesalie is a duty of all of us nobles!"

While Lord Theony, not wanting to let his rival get a step ahead, too quickly joined in, nodding vigorously and saying,

"That's right, that's right. We have to send the men as fast as possible."

"As it said in the letter, the men are the most important."

"The supplies can be sent by boat later."

It seemed things were about to get harder for Alexander.

Chapter 703 Fourth Month Against Thesalie

After Philips managed to inveigle and gain the support of two of the strongest nobles, the rest of the things were easy.

The decision was very quickly made to send the ten thousand men as soon as possible to aid Lord Ponticus.

And then to speed up the process even more, the plan was modified slightly in regards to the type of the men sent.

Meaning the force would also have men from other nobles to make the numbers, rather than the previous decision to send from only Mithriditus's and Lord Theony's numbers.

With so many nobles giving each of the men they had right on hand, reaching the ten thousand number would certainly be much faster.

As for the problem of supplies- well that was easy, once the boats dropped the soldiers off, they could return to the capital to pick up the goods and then make the trip again.

It was not like Lord Ponticus needed those boats for anything.

The whole thing would at most three to four weeks.

And Lord Ponticus certainly had enough food to feed an extra ten thousand mouths for a month.

"Your Majesty. We will see it within the month done as instructed," Hence the court unanimously declared

While Perseus, seeing how his son was able to subdue and convince the nobles, felt a surge of pride.

It was the pride of a successful father.

He felt he was really blessed with a good son.

And was convinced that it was the correct decision to hand over much of the realm's everyday ruling to his successor.

Philips was like a fish in the water here.

So with the courts all agreed, Perseus announced this,

"Good. Then I will name Lord Theony commander of the lead ten thousand men."

"While Philips can go with the supplies and the rest of the men!"

Perseus had favored Mithriditus by taking the man with him to Zanzan.

And now he had favored Lord Theony to do this, thus balancing the playing field.

While Crown Prince Philips was given the relatively safe task of delivering supplies, as well as the chance to rake up some military credit from inside the best fort Tibias had to offer.

The seriousness and speed with which Tibias responded was very good news for Lord Ponticus and quite bad news for Alexander.

If the garrison was allowed to rise from thirty to fifty thousand, then even with all the walls, the catapults, the fires, and siege towers, the soldiers might still not be able to take the walls, being either blockaded at all the choke points with too many enemy soldiers to break through, or worse, simply being annihilated on the walls through sheer number and unable to make even a beach head there.

So the name of the game was speed.

And it was a game that had started ticking without Alexander even being aware.

He was still leisurely waiting for his ramp to be completed, and his military engineers to finish the three siege towers he would be using during the assault.

The fourth month of the siege hence rolled over just like that, with both sides practicing the same tactic, but each side fully aware that a conclusion was nearing soon, and very soon.

And as July ended and August entered its first day, Alexander was finally invited to come to see the completed second phase of his siege.

The ditch which was an ever present fixture of the city was by now gone, replaced by a smooth, almost flat like terrace.

The tens of thousands of men and even women really did a good job.

Then there were three huge ramps, or more appropriately reverse ramps leading right next to the walls, built using stone, timber, and the earth that was dug up during the construction of the new wall that stood in front of the city.

And lastly, there was the centerpiece of it all, the pièce de résistance- The Siege Towers.

Made of a combination of wood and iron, each of these behemoths were more than 12 meters tall and almost as wide, thus weighing several tons.

It stood on solid cast iron wheels that were manufactured in Zanzan and transported here by six strong oxen on a special cart because regular wooden ones were simply too weak to carry such heavy loads.

These wheels were also wrapped in a mesh of rubber and line fabric, making this certainly the world's first known use of rubber tyred wheels.

Which also meant that the tower could go over the inherently rough, hilly terrain a lot smoother.

But then the question arose who would make it go?

And the answer was each of these behemoths required more than a hundred men to pull it.

As to why animals like horses or oxen were not used, well, they were certainly an option.

But Alexander preferred to use men for he knew as the siege towers would be pulled closer and closer to the walls, they would be increasingly attacked by the defenders.

And it was much easier to maintain discipline among men than beasts when placed under such a hostile environment

The chances of animals refusing to obey commanders when struck by arrows, hit by stones, or burned by scalding oil and then simply breaking free of their bonds and causing a stampede were too high to risk using them.

And speaking of burning, Alexander also made sure to coat his siege towers with thick sheets of rubber to prevent the defenders from using burning oil and fire arrows to set the entire thing on fire. as so many times it had been done before, like when the Byzantines did it to the Ottoman siege towers during the battle of Constantinople.

Now, to prevent that unfortunate reality from occurring and dying by being burned to death, the attackers would usually cover their towers with thick, wet, animal hide, and iron or bronze plates to hide the flammable wood underneath.

But the natural rubber which Alexander was using, consisted of latex and was much more fire retardant than the primitively processed rubber regularly used, as the latter was made of organic compounds such as long chains of collagen fibers and proteins.

Hence Alexander's choice of the material, and when he tested it back home, he found the stuff to be indeed so much more difficult to get burning.

And even if it did, it had great trouble spreading, as rubber was just a bad source of fuel for the fire and really did not want the flames to propagate.

Hence naturally, it was used to cover every possible part of the tower.

But then the question rose, who was all this 'armor' supposed to protect?

Or more specifically, how many?

Well each one of these gigantic structures could carry around one hundred men, so three towers combined were supposed to place three hundred men directly onto the first wall, who could then work to make a beachhead on the walls, thus allowing reinforcements to get up through these safe points, using either ladders or even the siege towers themselves.

And as Alexander reviewed these magnificent beasts, built on the ramp themselves, he certainly felt confident of his chances to take the city.

Because as Alexander had observed in the last four months, though Thesalies was indeed a double walled city, it was not the concentric circle kind of city he envisioned, where each of the walls had its own towers, gates, and defense mechanism.

No, Thesalie's defensive walls were more suited to be called one gigantic wall with two parts.

There was the outer part, which was much thicker, and stronger, but also shorter.

While right behind it, with around 10 to 15 meters of gap, stood a much higher, but thinner and weaker wall.

These two walls were connected via a series of passages, able to reinforce each other, as well as retreat to the other if the need arose.

The intention behind the design seemed to be that the melee troops would be on the first, outer wall, engaging in close quarters hand to and physically repelling the enemy, while archers shot arrows and threw stones from the higher secondary wall to assist them.

And if the first defense fell, the soldiers could use the interconnected passages to take new positions on the second walls.

And while they retreated, they could block off the many built in choke points with either men to hold those points, or close the doors, or simply jam it with junk like large, heavy, furniture, stone, wagons, whatever they had at hand, so that the enemy could not easily pursue them.

All while from above the defenders could rail down incessant arrow fire to prevent the enemy from setting up a foothold there.

It was quite a good design.

A very good design in fact.

But it might not be good enough to stop Alexander.

Because he did not plan to pursue the men up the second wall and consequently be stuck on the first wall enduring arrow fire.

No, after driving off the defenders from the first wall, Alexander wished to tear a section of the first wall down, possibly by digging underneath its foundation and then setting it on fire.

And then have his siege towers roll down to the second wall just as the first wall to repeat the process.

Simple, but certainly effective.

"We will attack tomorrow!" Hence as soon as the inspection was finished, Alexander declared so loudly.

He did not want to waste an hour more than it was necessary.

Chapter 704 Lord Ponticus's Counter-Attack (Part-1)

With everything about the siege ready on Alexander's side, he called a war council that very afternoon and let his commanders know of the decision, asking them to prepare the men to finally attack the city tomorrow.

And by the evening, the news of the planned attack had spread to almost every soldier in the camp, causing various reactions.

Some were very excited thinking of the riches and booty that lay ahead, some were relieved that this campaign was going to soon end, while many others were afraid of the deaths that would inevitably follow.

But they knew what they signed up for.

So after the initial surprise, they all quieted down, and getting their thoughts together, ate the special meal that was given the day before the battle.

This meal's portions were usually one and a half times the regular one, and always served with two to three cuts of meat on them, designed to boost morale and have the men at their best possible physical condition for the fateful battle ahead.

As dusk fell and night slowly crept in, the soldiers all quickly finished their meal, and now stuffed with a satisfied full belly, they felt sleep grip them tightly in its claws, eagerly urging them to go rest after the long day of hard work.

And most soldiers, other than the ones on guard duties or in special deployments, like those using the catapults, prepared to do just that, yearning to hit the soft, fluffy mattress and get a solid eight to ten hours of good night's sleep before the inevitable bloodbath inside a fiery crucible tomorrow.

While Alexander's soldiers prepared themselves for the imminent attack, on the other side, on Tibias's the one main question that began to arise was:

Did Lord Ponticus get his reinforcement and how useful they would be during Alexander's assault?

And the answer to that was he did, and the commander was of the opinion that they would be very useful indeed.

The ten thousand men (10,000) had arrived about three days ago, meaning Tibias was able to gather the requisite men in about only three weeks, as opposed to the scheduled four, truly showing what the court was capable of doing when they put aside their differences.

And they even brought presents!

These came in the form of huge elephants and they bought seventeen of those.

Perseus had managed to keep these huge beasts after a series of successful negotiations with the Kaiser Family, agreeing to let go of some of the funds that were given to him in exchange.

He did this because the man had fallen in love with how effective the beasts showed themselves at destroying cavalry and knew these could be one of his trump cards.

And as evidence of his prudence, he also sent every one of the beasts he had to aid in the defense of Thesalie.

And to do that of course meant that they would have to be transported by boats just like the soldiers.

Which was not an easy thing to do, as elephants really did not like getting into a small floating wooden box that tilted if the animal so much as moved its head, much less its body.

Even a human would not have liked getting on to something so small relative to his size.

But unfortunately for Tibias, it also did not make large enough boats suitable for transporting elephants.

And there was no time to build them in numbers either.

So instead, the trainers really had their work cut out to try and coax these powerful beasts to get into these small vessels, each boat able to carry only one, and then make them stay still during the entire, five day span of the journey.

It was a tall order, and two elephants actually drowned after they got spooked by something on their boats and in their unrestrained panic, bolted straight into the water.

And even more tragically, their heavy weight caused the boats to capsize, while their chaotic thrashing hit many of the people thrown into the water, with the heavy smacks killing three more, one of them even being one of the trainers.

While a third boat simply snapped in the middle of their journey, the thin wooden planks unable to take the massive weight of its occupant, thus sending the magnificent beast into the depths of the river.

The river Diannu had an average depth of 20 meters, so there was no way the elephant could wade through it and get to the shore.

Thus Lord Ponticus got that odd number of seventeen war elephants.

And though not it was not as large as twenty, seventeen of these huge, African war elephants were still a huge boon, and Lord Ponticus was certainly over the moon seeing it, as too he was seeing so many men come to reinforce him, and so quickly at that.

In the last few days, he had been scratching his head to near baldness over trying to think of a way to convince his officers to hold off on attacking on their own.

These men had been growing ever more anxious with each passing day, as they could clearly see the ramp being completed one dirt basket at a time, and the siege towers nearing their completion each wooden piece at a time.

And this regular visual update of their impending doom played great havoc on their psyche, as they repeatedly, almost daily, urged Lord Ponticus to launch a breakout as soon as possible.

And when the ramp was completed at last, with the three, huge imposing siege towers finally standing tall and finished, ready to crash into them any day now, these men grew so restless that they acted like ants on a hot pan.

They first wished nothing more than to have an open battle on the field and decisively destroy Alexander's forces, thus forcing him to retreat.

And if that was not possible, they at least wanted to mount a rapid, sneak attack on the siege towers, charging out and smashing into these siege machines and burning them to ashes before retreating to the castle without giving the enemy even a chance to realize that their month's long hard work was destroyed.

But of course, how could either of the two plans be so easy?

If they were strong enough to defeat Alexander on the open field, then why did they both hold themselves up inside the wall for four months and endure Alexander's relentless torture?

Or why did they then ask for reinforcements?

If they were able, they should have been able to solve the problem themselves.

As for the sneaking out of the gates and destroying the siege towers like that, well even a child could foresee the enemy using such a technique.

It was a time tested, favorite tactic of any defenders and so of course Alexander had taken precautions, He had a battalion of 500 soldiers protecting each of these towers at all times, day and especially night, ready to foil any such attempt.

And though 500 soldiers might not sound like a lot when the other side had 30,000 men, but they were really not there to stop these men head on.

Their job was to simply act as a stopgap force and hold off the enemy until Alexander could become aware of the attack and arrange a proper response from his main camp nearby.

After all, they would be able to see the enemy approach from miles away, as the enemy would have to at least number a hundred men to destroy such huge structures quickly.

And they would have to be also on horseback to maximize their speed and surprise.

And one hundred riders launching an attack over such an open ground stripped of all vegetation was very, very hard to hide.

And for all those reasons, these 500 men were more than adequate.

It was also using these reasons that Lord Ponticus was able to hold these hot blooded men back till now.

But he also knew they were soon reaching their limit.

He feared that any day they might disobey his orders and take matters into their own hands.

So his pleasure at seeing the reinforcement truly could not be overstated.

And this pleasure increased far, far more when Lord Theony told him that this was only half of the contingent and many more men and material were on the way.

"Hahaha! Worthily of my nephew," Lord Ponticus had thus said in delight as he went to meet the reinforcements at the river docks.

This was also because when he had asked for 20,000 men, he was really shooting for the moon, writing any number that came to his mind and hoping Perseus would send as many as he could.

But even he knew asking for 20,000 men was pushing it given Tibias's current situation.

So imagine his surprise when the king's aid surpassed even his most optimistic expectation, as the ruler promised to give him all he wanted and more.

So in the following two days of their arrival, the tired soldiers were given time to rest, while Lord Ponticus treated the nobles to great feasts to show this pleasure.

While in the meantime, he also got Lord Theony up to speed, telling of the enemy's tactics, his strategy, his siege machines, and then trying to think of a counterstrategy.

And to their credit, the two men did manage to find one, one which if Alexander knew would definitely sweat bullets, because it was a really good one.

Chapter 705 Lord Ponticus's Counter-Attack (Part-2)

"Hmmm, that wall is indeed else," Lord Theony, standing on the second wall commented as such while he gazed at the blockading wall Alexander had created, the amazement in his voice apparent.

The man was immaculately embellished in his full, decorative body armor while his stubby hands decorated with colorful gemmed rings twirled his magnificent mustache.

"That cursed thing was built in a month! Can you believe it?" While Lord Ponticus was much less appreciative of the concrete wall, only commenting just how quickly Alexander had managed to get this up.

The quickness with which the wall was a major factor that worked to push Lord Ponticus to such a dire state.

"No, I truly cannot. I might not have even believed it if I did not see for myself. How did they do it?" While Lord Theony, ignoring Lord Ponticus's vexation sounded more curious than distressed.

"Who knows! Your guess is as good as mine," And to this Lord Ponticus could only shrug his shoulders, while purring his lips.

This was one of many new, unexplained things the enemy had shown to possess at its disposal.

And Lord Ponticus would admit, he was certainly fearful of what else the enemy might have hidden under its sleeves.

And as a coping mechanism to hide those feelings, he vented in front of Lord Theony,

"Not only did they build it so fast, it's so strong too! Those new catapults that supposedly could break city walls did nothing to it."

"Weapon of the gods my ass!"

Lord Ponticus here even put some of the blame on the catapults, though he was not being serious.

They worked perfectly well during tests, and so it was more likely that the wall was really strong.

While Lord Theony only obediently listened, letting Lord Ponticus air out his grievance as much as the latter wished, and then commented,

"I can see how they were able to push you so far. Those walls are like static, ever-present siege towers."

"This is very clever. The enemy is not easy to deal with."

Lord Ponticus had of course told Lord Theony how Alexander was using the walls to suppress the wall defenders and launch fireballs into the city, and seeing the walls for himself, Lord Theony came to understand the true gravity of the situation.

Lord Ponticus was really not exaggerating.

As for the lord's comment comparing the walls to the siege towers, well that referred to how sometimes siege towers were not used to directly assault the walls, but as raised platforms to fire arrows and siege machines from, as the higher elevations made targetting the defenders much easier.

Just like Alexander was doing.

"What's the commander's name?" Lord Theony hence asked.

He had obviously heard of Alexander but wanted to confirm it was him nevertheless.

"We are not sure. It is mostly that new lord of Zanzan who is leading the army- Alexander. But he has not shown himself in the open."

"Bastard did not even send us a formal declaration of war! Barbarous brute" Lord Ponticus spar out both in indignation, as well as disgust for the poor manners Alexander had shown.

However he also conveniently forgot that neither had Tibias sent such a letter when they attacked Alexander.

And hearing this, Lord Theony only nodded and smiled, his thoughts busy on something else completely.

'This Alx...is really something,' The noble said to himself, thinking he should go find out more about him.

He knew bits a pieces of the man, especially how his involvement changed the result of Adhania's civil war, but he was not well versed about the man.

But now, seeing his handiwork right in front of him, Lord Theony was very curious.

After all, as they said, 'Know thy self and know thy enemy and you will be victorious in over a thousand battles.'

While Lord Ponticus, seeing Lord Theony become quiet and stoic, suddenly decided to change the topic, turning to his counterpart to ask,

"When they got my letter, how did the court react? Hmph! I bet everyone scoffed at it!" as he then slanted his eyes toward Lord Theony for his response.

"..." But Lord Theony here paused a bit, knowing that Lord Ponticus was a proud man and that it took a lot out of him to beg Perseus so openly for help.

Even if the circumstance forced him, and even if no one would blame him for it, even then Lord Theony knew Lord Ponticus still felt ashamed at making King Perseus do all the work and bear such expenses.

He saw it as his failure to properly defend the city was entrusted to protect.

It was because so if Lord Theony were to say yes, he would be simply poking at his distinguished veteran's wounds.

But Lord Theony also could not say no because then it would be insulting Lord Ponticus's intelligence.

The man surely had his own sources inside the court to know the basic gist of what happened.

So he embellished the reply with a little chuckle, "Hehehe, what do those soft punks sleeping in fluffy pillows know?"

"Bickering! That's all they do! Pointless bickering till your ears turn to wax!"

"My lord should not care about those imbeciles who throw stones at people while being a thousand miles away."

"If they could see what you and I are seeing, they would very quickly change their mind."

"And besides, what truly matters is His Majesty's opinion."

"And he has supported my lord from the very first."

Lord Theony tried to paint those nobles in the courts as being unenlightened and unaware of the situation at the frontlines, while also reassuring Lord Ponticus that he was very much in the good graces of the big man, the man who really mattered.

And Lord Ponticus did not outright reply hearing this.

But Lord Theony did notice the man's lips curl up ever so slightly.

Clearly he was pleased at heart.

And then taking this opportunity, Lord Theony quickly changed the topic so that he did not have to play nanny to a grown man.

"By the way, what about the scouts? Did they find what we are looking for? If they cannot confirm it, our plan will not work."

Lord Theony did not need to specify the details as Lord Ponticus readily understood.

"Yes, it indeed exists. But they could not find the exact way. They say that will take a few more days." Lord Ponticus was very curt in his reply, leaving out many explicit details in fear that someone might be eavesdropping.

The chances of this happening were of course miniscule, but being in the military all his life, the experienced general was very measured in his speech when it came to military matters.

"Hmmm, that is indeed a shame. Zanzan might not give us that time," To this, Lord Theony a bit ruefully shook his head, laying his eyes on Alexander's completed siege towers and the ramp leading up as for his reason being so.

"Yes. Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. They will attack by then," And Lord Ponticus fully agreed with him, the tone in his voice sure and confident,

And the fact that he could make such a prediction by just looking at the battlefield spoke volumes about his experience.

To him, everything seemed ready on Alexander's side.

"Then let us commence the plan tomorrow. If we wait too long, the opportunity might be gone."

Thus Lord Theony prosed.

And Lord Ponticus agreed with a heavy nod, adding. "Yes, let's. Though it is a bit risky, since the scouts have found the way, we can figure out the exact route as we go."

"The plan might be a little dangerous, but it is certainly a very good plan."

"I will lead the flanking forces, Lord Theony can lead the main."

Lord Ponticus very casually made a massive announcement.

"Mmm, okay. Then I will wait for good from Your Highness," While Lord Theony readily accepted, finding the arrangement wholly to his liking.

Thus Tibias decided to launch the first strike before Alexander could go for the knockout.

And that first strike came right after dusk on the very day Alexander decided that he would attack the next morning, right around the time the soldiers had finished their meals and were getting their beds ready.

This was also not as big a coincidence as it seemed because the attacking Tibian soldiers too had their meal around the same time as Alexander's and marched out afterward, hence the matching timing.

Paaaaaahh, *Thud!*

The Zanzan soldiers guarding the siege towers and the wall all heard the distinct sound of the city's drawbridge lowering itself with a strained creak followed by the heavy, metallic clanking of the port cutlass being lifted.

And moments later came the loud, thundering footsteps of heavily armored men wearing thick leather shoes.

Then soon a flood of red began to gather, as a huge number of soldiers began to arrange themselves into a proper rank-and-file formation.

Now, these soldiers did not come out of the front eastern gate that was being besieged.

That would have been too dangerous as the few thousand archers waiting on the walls just a bit ahead of them would rip these men slowly coming out of the narrow gate one by one to shreds like it was a turkey shoot.

No, the men were more sensible, instead using the western gate which they now opened.

And then started to gather down at around the foot of the city.

While Alexander was informed of this as quickly as possible, and he at once bought his army out to reply to this threat.

Chapter 706 Lord Ponticus's Counter-Attack (Part-3)

As Thesalie arranged its forces at the foot of the city, Alexander, being as quickly as possible informed of this, also at once ordered his own army to form up outside the camp into proper battle formation to reply to this threat.

And so the camp was very quickly set abuzz with activity, where soldiers ran to and fro carrying weapons and armor, slaves and servants performed all kinds of errands and officers barked orders to get his unit organized.

While the commander of the whole thing, Alexander who oversaw all of this was neither panicked nor fearful at this sudden turn of events, his heart unconcerned by this sudden, what seemed to be imminent night battle.

"Heh! So they finally could not wait!"

Instead, he smirked mockingly.

To him, it seemed that whoever the commander of the city was had finally lost his nerve, and seeing he was about to attack the next morning, had decided to hastily launch this attack at this odd hour.

And the decision to leave the safety of their walls and engage him in direct combat was too foolish in Alexander's opinion.

In fact, the enemy doing this was almost like a wet dream come true for him.

Because it meant that now he would not have to fight these tens of thousands of soldiers on the narrow walls where his numerical superiority would have been neutralized.

Nor would he have to push through that huge mass of soldiers to clear the walls.

Previously, Alexander had already accepted that the casualties from those fights would be heartbreaking for him.

But now, if they fought on the open field, Alexander could avoid all those losses.

He was even very confident that he would be able to win the battle.

Because not only did he have a larger force, but he also had the terrain advantage, as his legionnaires were able to make much better use of the rough terrain than the opposing phalangites.

So in his eyes, it was certainly a mistake for the enemy to come out to meet him in the open like this.

But it was not like Alexander thought the commander to be a complete idiot.

No.

Because he could also understand where the enemy commander was coming from.

Alexander guessed the man probably felt that if they stayed inside their walls and only just passively fended off the attacks without effectively striking back, they would be at one point eventually overwhelmed.

And that type of thinking was indeed correct in some sense.

After all, against Alexander's siege towers, they had no real answer.

Setting them on fire before they could reach the walls was too hard and it was durable enough that rocks from the catapults would not be able to destroy them on time.

And even if they knew where the soldiers from the towers were going to make the landing, they could not bunch up to repel them through sheer numbers because then they would present themselves as the perfect target for the archers on the walls, who would turn them into porcupines.

It had to be remembered that those 1,000 lb crossbows were no joke, being able to easily pierce even the thickest shields the Tibians carried.

And even a hit to the nonvital areas give a grievous wound, with a good chance of making it infectious.

While a good, proper hit to a major area would cause an instant death.

It could even knock a man off his feet.

So after facing four months of the terrifying weapon, the Tibian defenders had learned to grow very wary of the weapon's power.

As for the scorpion, well that one's lethality did not need to be even said.

The huge darts would rip through wooden shields like paper and literally send a man flying if hit directly, skewering through him.

There was even one incident during this siege when the weapon did the almost miraculous feat of going through two men simultaneously, making both die with a look of utter incredulation on their faces.

And these weapons loved nothing more than to see clustered up men, where they could reap lives like harvesting wheat.

It was due to all these difficulties in holding the wall that Alexander believed the enemy had come out to face him in the open in this 'last-stand' kind of fashion.

As Tibias formed itself in front of their city, Alexander's men too continued to do the same in front of their camp, with both sides keeping an ever-vigilant eye on the other, in case one side decided to charge to try and take advantage of the other still disorderly lines.

"My lord, should we call back our men manning the walls and siege towers," And as this was happening, Menes came to Alexander with this proposal.

There were currently about 3,500 to 4,000 men there, manning the walls, catapults, and siege towers, and though they were on the eastern side, while the enemy was just of them, Menes still felt it would be prudent for this detached force to rejoin with the main group.

Hearing the request, Alexander thought about it for a bit.

From the direction of his camp, these soldiers were straight north of him.

While the enemy was north-west.

So if the enemy were to march south down towards him, their flanks would be exposed to this nearly one legion worth of troops present to their east.

They would never be able to ignore that threat.

So to neutralize that, they would have to send a detachment force to engage the legion, thus weakening their main force.

This would be a very good outcome for Alexander.

But that was the good version.

The bad version was if Tibias decided to detach a much disproportionately bigger force to attack those soldiers and if Alexander was unable to come to help in time, then they risked being overrun and destroyed.

However, this was really Alexander being too pessimistic.

Because such an outcome was very unlikely given all the fortifications around the siege works, as well as the presence of thousands of crossbowmen and other weapons on the wall that would be able to rain down huge volumes of firepower on any attacking force.

Hence with a bit of thought, Alexander declared,

"No, let them be there. The siege towers and the walls cannot be left undefended, They need to be protected."

"And I suspect the enemy's real target might very well be those. Why else would they be launching this attack at such a god-forsaken time?"

"We cannot let them succeed."

Alexander clenched his teeth in determination.

And then turning to Menes, gave the order regarding those soldiers,

"Tell the three battalions on the ground to stop protecting their individual towers and join together to form a solid, coherent defensive line."

"If they are too scattered, the enemy will be able to pick them off one at a time."

"Then order men on the walls to also remain alert and support those on the ground in case of an attack."

"And lastly send three more battalions to reinforce them. That should boost morale."

With this order, the forces there would be brought up to a full-fledged legion and be much better prepared to deal with any attacks, at least until Alexander could send adequate help.

"Yes!" And Menes had no problem with this order, as he saluted, before riding off to relay the order.

"Wait!" Or he was about to when he when Alexander suddenly demanded his attention.

And as Menes turned back curiously, he heard Alexander add, "Send Remus to take overall charge of the legion there."

"And have him take 300 cavalry. Just in case the enemy tries to do a sneak attack on the towers while we are occupied."

It took a lot of time, money and men to make those towers and naturally Alexander was really protective of them, even sending a tenth of his cavalry to act as a kind of rapid reaction force.

Once Alexander was finished, Menes quickly rode off to arrange for the execution of the order, while soon Grahtos took that place in front of Alexander, informing,

"My lord, our scouts are back. They say that the enemy right now numbers around 15,000 to 20,000."

"But given they have not finished forming up and many more are still pouring out of the gates, the number could be expected to rise to as much as 30,000."

The tone here was neutral because when they planned for this attack, they had obviously checked the city's garrison strength, which was reported to be 30,000.

Now of course that original number had been eroded by a few thousand due to the past four months of fighting.

But the scouts only gave a rough estimate, not an exact, down to the penny number.

Besides, it was not impossible for them to recruit a few thousand city dwellers as replacements, now was it?

"..... *Nod*, Good. Keep an eye on them. And inform me if they seem ready to charge."

Upon hearing the report Alexander only stoically signaled that he had gotten the message.

It seemed that other than leaving the barest number of defenders on the wall, Thesalie was going all in.

And it suited him just fine.

So for the next two hours, both sides readied them for the imminent clash which likely would decide the fate of the city.

Chapter 707 Lord Ponticus's Counter-Attack (Part-4)

The next two hours went in a blurry wind of speed, as both sides worked quickly to try and finish organizing their troops as soon as possible.

And by the end of the time, both sides were finished relatively at the same time.

Tibias had their troops directed toward the south, squarely facing Alexander's camp, and conversely, Alexander's men were turned looking northwest, directly looking at the enemy.

While the detached legion under Remus faced west, able to keep an eye on both camps.

Thus three groups formed a kind of triangle of forces.

And then, once they finished, the boring waiting game began.

Because it seemed neither side wanted to attack, much preferring to let the enemy waste their enemy coming towards them.

"Tell the soldiers to hold the ground. I do not want to fight uphill at night!" On Alxx's side, this was the order.

And the tactic was a no-brainer, given the poor visibility at night and as Alxx was on lower slopes.

Also, he did not need to attack Tibias as much as they needed to attack him, as once dawn came, Alxx would be able to launch his attack on the wall and likely conquer it.

So he was perfectly content with stalling for time.

But though he followed that reasonable thought on that matter, he did not follow that in his deployment, choosing not to form his men into a standard battleline formation, i.e- the center making up the infantry and the wings cavalry,

No, instead like his center, his wings too were made of infantry, worth one legion on each, each made of four thousand (4,000) infantry and two thousand (2,000) crossbowmen.

While all of the 2,700 cavalry were kept at the back as reserve.

The reason for this arrangement was simply because of the enemy's troop arrangement, which had cavalry, and more importantly elephants on the wings.

And after learning from Menes's defeat, Alxx figured pitting horses against elephants was a bad idea and so kept them at the back.

Instead, he decided to utilize his infantry there, where he switched their primary weapon, which was the sword, with long halberds, as well as having the men in these two legions carry extra pilla and javelins to throw at the enemy so as to better counter any cavalry charges.

So the exact composition of Alxx's main force was five legions in the center, arranged in two rows, three on the front, and two back, flanked by one legion on each side, with a cavalry reserve, thus totaling thirty five thousand (35,000) men and two thousand and seven hundred (2,700) horses.

Then up front, near the siege works there was Remus's force, numbering close to six thousand (6,000).

This brought Alxx's total deployed forces to about forty four thousand (44,000) out of the initial forty eight thousand (48,000) he came on campaign with.

As for the rest of the four thousand (4,000), well they were either dead due to the fighting up until now or wounded and unfit to serve, hence kept inside the camp,

While about fifteen hundred (1,500) good, fresh men were also kept there to oversee its defense in case of any unforeseen incidents, as well as to keep order there while Alxx was away.

After all, there was a lot of food and money in there, and Alxx did not feel safe leaving all of it at the mercy of slaves and servants who would have every opportunity to steal these supplies.

Thus, with all these reasons, came Alxx's current deployment.

Tibias in its stead had deployed around 25,000 men out to meet Alxx, with almost all of them in the middle, and just 500 on each flank.

The reason for the thin wings was obvious, they were never meant to be the ones to be doing the fighting, the elephants that were deployed there were.

"Tell the soldiers to stand their ground and wait for my signal. We will together when everything is ready," Alxx's counterpart Lord Theony commanded this to LL, urging him not to charge down the hill just yet but to hold the ground.

"Yes, my lord." And LL being aware of the plan, readily nodded back.

Now what was most interesting here was how Lord Theony was leading the forces, but not Lord Ponticus.

Also where were the 10,000 men that recently came to buttress Lord Ponticus?

Well, they were of course with Lord Ponticus, out of a deep flanking maneuver to hit Alxx on the rear!

"Come on, quick! Move your feet, soldiers. Stay quiet and march faster! Our other force is depending on us," Lord Ponticus's rough, but muffled voice could be heard echoing across the ranks as this group made their way across the uneven, heavily wooden route.

These ten thousand men had sneaked out of the city around the same time the men under Lord Theony had rushed out, but instead of joining them, they had discreetly separated themselves, taking an abrupt turn to the east and heading into the hilled forest.

The tactic that Lord Ponticus and Lord Theony had worked out to defeat the numerically superior Alxx was this-

Lord Theony would draw the enemy out of its heavily fortified camp by lining his own forces out of the city, thus baiting him to meet this force.

"The enemy will have to come out to meet us because he will want to protect all those siege works that he has spent so much time building," Lord Theony's reason behind the prediction was such.

"And if he does, we will tear and burn everything down," While Lord Ponticus helped to finish that logic with a heavy smirk.

It was a win- win case for them.

Either Alxx came out to face them, leaving the protection of his camp, or turtled and laid witness to all the work he put in the past five months getting erased.

There really was one answer for him.

So as Alxx came out, it was decided that at the same time, Lord Ponticus would take his ten thousand (10,000) detachment in a roundabout circuitous route through the eastern hilly forest to stealthily emerge right onto Alxx's defenseless rear.

At that point, Lord Ponticus was to sound the trumpet, after which both he and Lord Theony would launch their attacks simultaneously, catching Alxx in a pincher attack and decisively destroying him.

Because once you are surrounded from both sides, that's it, there is no way to win from there,

No amount of tactical genius and ingenious generalship could save you from there, no matter if you are Hannibal, Sun Tsu, Khalid, or Alxx.

At that point, unless there is some kind of reinforcement on the way, your best chance of survival is to run.

Hence this tactic was a fantastic plan and really showed why Lord Ponticus was so highly regarded.

And completely unbeknownst to him, Alxx had played right into their trap.

"Haha, clueless brat. Took the bait hook, line, and sinker, hehe" And as Lord Theony saw Alxx place his army squarely towards him, thus making his back be entirely defenseless towards the eastern woods from which Lord Ponticus was poised to strike at any time, the noble twirled his impressive mustache in glee.

"Hahaha, well it is the general we are talking about. His plans are really too shrewd. No wonder these foolish Adhanians would fall for it," And LL joined in the celebrations.

It seemed to them that victory was already in the bags.

And why would he not think that?

He was there during the planning of this strategy and saw with his own two eyes just how meticulous Lord Ponticus had been in his attention to detail.

From the battle formation to the number of men to be used, to using the elephants, to even the time of the day the battle was to take place, all had been planned with great detail.

For instance, to ensure success in this attack, Lord Ponticus had mostly hollowed out his garrison, leaving less than two thousand (2,000) men to man the walls, throwing everything to this roll of the die.

Then to divert the enemy's attention from the flanking force, he deployed the elephants very prominently in the first echelons of the main force, designed to draw all eyes to these awe inspiring beasts and convince everyone to think this was the whole attacking force

And lastly, it was his idea to attack during the night.

The darkness would not only make it would be easier for the ten thousand men to hide in the forest and maintain stealth for far longer, but he also reasoned that such a move would give the enemy the impression that they were desperate, hence this last minute, suicidal attack.

"This will dull the enemy's senses, make him think that that is all we have. This way the flanking attack will be even more successful." Lord Ponticus had posed.

And it was scary just how accurate he was.

Because the thoughts inside Alxx went exactly like Lord Ponticus had predicted as if he had a mind reader bug inside the former's mind.

Lord Ponticus's military genius was at full display here.

So going by the development till now, Tibias had good reason to be optimistic about their chances.

And though Alxx did not mean, he was like a defenseless fawn exposing his white fair nape to a ravenous tiger.

A fearsome beast that was posed to snap his neck at any moment!

Chapter 708 Lord Ponticus's Counter-Attack (Part-5)

The night soon rolled on, and both sides by now had spent three hours under the full moon of the summer night, neither making a move.

'What's the holdup? Did they get cold feet?' And waiting atop his horse for the past hour or so, Alexander thought a bit impatiently.

He had been looking very forward to the phalanx units charging down the hill, disrupting their own formation in the process, and then being cut down by his organized legionaries.

But it seemed the enemy was just content to just stand there as if they were having last-minute thoughts about whether to really bet everything on this one roll.

So Alexander too waited, cocksure that the opposite side would break before him, as he spent his time swatting the mosquitoes buzzing all around him.

'It should be time!' While Lord Theony was much more anticipating, his ears perked for the call of the trumpet, and his hands itching to issue the order to charge.

The prey named Alexander seemed all too unaware.

"There! We can see light over there! That must be the Zanzan camp,"

And the hunter soon found its mark, as quite like how Perseus was drawn towards the manor using its lights, Lord Ponticus too was led right onto Alexander's rear by his camp's bright illumination.

Except though Alexander had managed to escape that trap by the skin of his teeth, this time his nape appeared bare and defenseless.

"Form up! Quickly! And quietly!"

Once Lord Ponticus confirmed it was indeed the prey he was there to hunt, he immediately gave the order for the soldiers to form a proper battle line and get ready for the attack, with the military veteran placing himself around the front to lead the attack personally.

This was not the traditional place for a commander, but Lord Ponticus felt that given the pain and suffering this enemy had caused him, as well as the loss of face in the Tibian court, his heart would not be soothed if it was not him who was the one to lead his destruction.

And who knows, perhaps he could even capture the enemy commander Alexander himself.

'We never had a pasha being paraded around the capital. Hahaha, that will indeed be a spectacle," Lord Ponticus almost could not wait.

He could see a very prominent standard placed around the back which he strongly suspected to have Alexander himself there and.

Lick

Tibias's supreme commander could not wait to bite down on that prey and tear his to shreds, so much so in fact that he wetted his lips in anticipation.

And this was a sentiment which was shared among his officers too, who cheered in whispered tones,

"Hahaha, the gods really favor us. I was afraid the mountain trail was going to be rough, but it was surprisingly smooth. We had no problem hiding our way even through the thick woods," This was said by a high-ranking scout.

"Yes, yes, I did too. Especially because it's easy to get lost at night and we could not even light many torches."

"But the enemy really helped us out here. With them cutting down so much of the forest and today being a full moon, really helped light the way."

"Hahaha, what nice guys." Another snickered.

"Mmmm, that's why we should be grateful. And repay them in full....by slaughtering these helpless sheep, hehehehee!" While a third sneered with a crazed look, causing his colleagues to form a slight distance between them.

They knew this third guy to have a few screws loose and a tendency to go berserk in battle.

While the last one, possibly their leader stopped all this useless banter with a whispered chiding,

"Quite! The gods have graced us with every opportunity of success."

"So don't alert the enemy by your useless talks and get in formation. Or I will hang each and every one of you!"

This threat of course worked and everyone returned their focus to doing what actually mattered.

"Captain! Look! What are those lights!"

But while Lord Ponticus was getting ready to imminently chop off Alexander's head, Remus suddenly got a shout report from one of his men next to him, his voice panicked and alarmed.

But the bored boy, sitting atop his horse and yawning, only sluggishly turned his head toward the forest left of his side to see what his friend was getting so exactly about.

'What is it... a fox?' He wondered mindlessly, not even fully reacting to the mention of the lights or the man's shocked words.

But that nonchalance almost immediately evaporated when he at last saw the sight in front of him.

Because It was a horrifying sight!

There were lights, loads of lights.

It was difficult to see at first through all the foliage, but undoubtedly they were lights from which could only be torches.

And along with lights, clearly there were shadows moving around- many shadows.

And they all seemed to be conversely right behind Alexander!

'Flanking attack! The enemy is about to hit Alexander in a flanking attack!'

Remus was able to instantly figure out what was going on and cried out in shock.

They never even considered the enemy would use the hilly terrains to launch such an attack.

'Dammit! Of course they were going to something like that! They know the terrain better than we do.'

'We should have been more vigilant.' The nineteen year old cursed and rebuked himself.

And then turning to the man who informed of him this, who was also his second in command, shouted at the top of his lungs,

"Have the men charge the enemy. Now! You must stop them at any cost. I have got to save Alexander."

And then as soon as he said this, he was gone.

Spurring his horse on at full gallop, Remus rode like the wind, completely ignoring the shouts shout of "What? Hey wait!" coming from behind.

For in his mind, there was only one thing and one thing that he needed to do, and that was to try and find Alexander before it was too late.

This fortunately did not take long, as in a horse at full speed, Remus was able to complete the short distance of about three kilometers in a matter of minutes.

"Alexander! Alexander! Alexander!"

And as he approached the main body of the army, the captain of the detached legion shouted this at the top of his lungs, more out of panic and out of actual reason.

Finding Alexander, the general of the army too did not prove too complicated as under the full moon, Alexander's standard shone brilliantly, as it was intended to.

There were even large braziers lit around to make him even more prominent and reassure the troops that their lord was with them.

So whirling his horse towards the back of the army, Remus seemed to have no intention of applying the brakes anytime soon as he approached his destination.

As for the case of Alexander, it took a while for his ears to pick by Remus's calls, as the battlefield was a very noisy place.

Gathering tens of thousands of men in one place tended to do that.

There were weapons and armor clanking, tens of thousands of soldiers whispering thus setting the air alight with a buzzing din, officers barking out orders, trumpets going off here and there, horses neighing and so many other miscellaneous clamor and din.

Hence it took Alexander's ear quite a bit of effort to even separate this faint call as being something intelligent as opposed to being just a garbled mess.

'Is it saying Alexander? Is it me? Who could be calling?' And even when he heard it, Alexander was confused.

The people who called him just Alexander could be counted on one hand and none of them should be here.

So for a while he even wondered if it was just the wind or even whether it was just his tired mind playing tricks on him and making him hallucinate.

"Halt! Who are you!"

"Don't you dare come any closer!"

"Cease!"

And of course, as Remus got closer and closer, he got such a 'warm' reception from both Alexander's bodyguards and also some of the cavalrymen.

A few of the more anxious ones even raised their crossbows, intending to put this rogue rider down.

Who knew if this was even an ally?

He did not even carry a standard.

So many even presumed it to be a clever trick employed by the enemy to try and assassinate their commander

But Remus was way past caring about such trivialities.

Even the sight of spears being lowered and crossbows being cocked did not faze the man for a second.

If his death could save Alexander, Remus would be willing to die a hundred times over.

So instead of stopping to explain himself, he continued his charge, now changing his shout to a deeply, panicked voice, "Ambush! Alexander! it's an ambush! Look behind! Look behind! The enemy is coming! Look behind! Look behind!"

Remus must have said the phrase 'Look behind' a hundred times by now, but in his fear, Remus had actually shouted this out in Thesian instead of the native tongue of Adhanians- Azhak.

So most of the soldiers were even unable to understand it.

Instead, hearing the foreign, unknown language, they saw it as vindication for their suspicion that it was indeed a foreign spy sent here on an assassination mission.

So many of the men quickly took aim with their crossbows, ready to put this rogue man down.

It seemed Alexander's savior was about to be prematurely killed.

Chapter 709 Lord Ponticus's Counter-Attack (Part-6)

Remus, even facing the threat of imminent death showed no sign of slowing down.

While the men, hearing his shouts were ever more sure that it had to be an enemy, a belief that was reinforced by the fact that the tongue Tibians spoke could be said to be a variant dialect of Thesian.

This was because Tibas and Thesos shared a common heritage, being that it was from Tibias that the region of Thesos originated when people migrated there due to a massive flood a few thousand years ago.

Now, there was a difference between the two languages if one paid attention carefully, but the men among Alexander's ranks were no polyglots and many simply wanted to put this, frankly quiet bad assassins down and earn glory for themselves.

But just as some of the more trigger-happy men were about to let lose their arrows, they heard a loud shout expressing familiarity burst out from behind,

"Remus! It's Remus!"

It came from Alexander, as he blurted this aloud in shock and surprise, finally understanding why he had been getting that feeling of familiarity like he had heard that voice before.

It was because he had, but his ears were not used to hearing it speak Azhak.

'I wondered why that voice sounded so familiar,' Alexander hence thought as he turned to focus on that tiny voice, the sound suddenly gripping his attention like a clamp.

While the men who were just about to turn Remus into a porcupine upon hearing Alexander's recognizing tone quickly found themselves confused and were unsure whether they should stop the rider.

And while they were dithering, Remus brushed them, shouting the same words, until he finally slowed his horse down upon entering the thick ranks of men, who quickly gave away to make space for the man on the horse.

"Remus! What are you doing here!"

Alexander came rushing on his horse just as the boy stopped but instead of any greeting, he was immediately blasted with these singular words while Remus pointed at the forest about a kilometer away.

"Alexander! Look! There! Look!" His voice had gone hoarse by now, his face flushed and panicked.

And it was a face that transposed itself onto Alexander as soon as he laid his eyes on what Remus was pointing to.

As did many others who too were curious and turned their head to look.

All felt their eyes shrink to the size of a needle as if they were pricked by the most unbelievable sight they had ever seen.

There he was, Lord Ponticus and his ten thousand, the dimly lit torches revealing only their faint silhouettes, while the moonlight glinted off their raised spears, making them almost appear like an army out of a fairy tale.

And these mythical soldiers seemed just about ready to charge.

Trumpet, *Trumpet*

Scratch that, they had started charging.

At Lord Ponticus's sounding of the horns, thousands of eager men could be seen pouring out of the dark forest, shields locked and spears thrust forward, the sounds of their heavy yet fast footsteps reverberating around the entire battlefield.

"Haah! Haah! Haah!"

Their cheers almost shook the sky as they rapidly closed in towards their unaware enemy and being only a kilometer away, it would take them less than ten minutes to make contact.

'Fuck!' And seeing this, Alexander was so overwhelmed that he had the mental capacity only to mutter this.

"There! That's the signal! Charge!"

And things only got worse for him when upon hearing Lord Ponticus's signal, Lord Theony too initiated his attack, thus starting the two-pronged, pincher attack.

It was only at this moment that Alexander was finally able to understand the trap he was in, and for a brief while, Alexander was so caught off guard that he even did not know what to do.

His head felt blank and his heart hollow with fear, as if the grim reaper had plunged his icy, cold, skeletal hands into him, grabbing it in his palms and was just about to squeeze it, turning the organ into pulp.

The sickle of death seemed to be all too near Alexander.

But his name had not yet been written on the Book of the Dead.

The grim reaper was yet to harvest his soul.

He still had a chance.

Because Remus had given it to him, a tiny, tiny chance to live.

His only saving grace was that he had gotten a ten-minute early warning.

'Dammit. The prey's been alerted!' And it was also this that had caused Lord Ponticus to sound the trumpet for the attack prematurely before he was fully ready.

He would have much preferred to advance silently as far as he could before blowing the horn, thus not letting the enemy be aware until a spear went through him.

And he was actually confident in being able to do that, as the battlefield was usually so noisy, even ten thousand men marching towards one could be hidden if one was not properly paying attention, especially if one's back was turned towards the other side.

But that plan was now foiled by one rogue rider.

Being at the very front, Lord Ponticus was lucky enough to clearly see the exact moment Remus had come running in panic towards the Zanzan rear, the clear, moonlit sky letting the veteran military man even pick out how the rider's arm was pointing towards him, a signal he could tell what it meant even with his eyes closed.

He did not yet know how this had happened, but he clearly understood that the torches and the noise they made had given their positions away.

So he cursed,

"Darm! We have been noticed! But how! Why is there even a scout patrolling the rear at this time!"

Seeing Remus, Lord Ponticus had primarily chalked up his revelation to bad luck.

Because he was sure he had managed to keep noise to a minimum, and the thick undergrowth had soaked up all the light from the torches.

But this was actually very wrong.

Because for all his meticulousness, Lord Ponticus had forgotten to account for the soldiers around the siege works.

And it was not known exactly why.

Perhaps he thought they would be recalled back to join the main forces.

Perhaps he thought they would be busy attacking the wall defenders.

Perhaps he thought those forces would be squarely facing Lord Theony like Alexander was.

Or perhaps he had simply forgotten about them all altogether.

No matter the exact reason, it was a fact that Lord Ponticus had completely discounted them, thus leading to his premature reveal.

Thus he sent death glares towards Lord Ponticus and if looks could kill, Remus would have died a million times over.

But unfortunately for Lord Ponticus, he did not possess the power to kill Remus with his eyes only, and so seeing the horsemen inform the enemy of his whereabouts and with ripples starting to appear around Zanzan's rear lines, he feared the worst, he feared the bird might be alerted to leave the coup.

So he hastily blew the horn for the flanking attack even though only his front echelons had managed to form up, while his rear lines were still in the process and thus in disarray.

By now, the old man would only hope against all hope that he would be able to catch Alexander before he ran.

'Dammit, I should have bought some cavalry,' And while the phalanx units moved as quickly as they could without breaking ranks, Lord Ponticus still felt the speed to be too slow, and regretted not bringing any cavalry with him.

Of course, he had good reason for not bringing them, as moving horses through a forested hill at night was too burdensome.

They could trip and break their legs, the animals in general did not like moving through darkness and needed to be regularly coaxed, and lastly, they made a lot of noise, so if there was a large number of them, they could alert the enemy to their position.

It was due to these sensible considerations that Lord Ponticus had foregone that ability, instead choosing to come here with his most elite ten thousand.

But that decision was also making him regret it now, especially as the enemy commander was on horseback, meaning he could run at any time.

Whereas if he had a cavalry force, he could have sent them ahead to start skirmishing right now and likely prevent him.

Hence the brief ten to fifteen minutes felt like ten hours to him, for oh how he wished these men would march faster.

"Alexander! Into the camp now!"

While in the opposite camp, upon seeing the trap closing in, Hemicus was the first man to break out of his stupor and shout such toward Alexander.

The camp was only a few hundred meters from here, and on horseback, they would be able to make it in less than thirty seconds.

And once inside, with the defenders there, as well as the army stationed outside, they would have a much greater chance of repelling the enemy.

This to Hemicus sounded like the best course of action.

"No!" But Alexander actually rejected this, knowing if he were to leave the battlefield, his chances of taking Thesalie would leave with him, the army scattering upon seeing their commander run.

"We attack! Follow me!"

So Instead Alexander wanted to charge the enemy infantry head-on and smash it to bits.

But the question then was would he have the time to form his lines?

The enemy might be too close!

Chapter 710 Alexander VS Lord Ponticus (Part-1)

Laying his eyes on the flanking force for the first time, Alexander had felt that the flood of men seemed like the open ocean, vast and endless.

The army seemed much more than just ten thousand.

But that initial shock only lasted a while and soon faded as Alexander quickly regained the focus in his eyes.

'Now is not the time to be dazed!' He lightly bit his tongue as he centered himself, trying to get a hold of the situation.

And as he got his bearings, he found the enemy's numbers to be much more manageable.

'Whew! It's a detachment force. Not the main one.' Alexander breathed a sigh of relief.

His biggest fear had been that the force in front of him was just bait and that the real one was just behind.

That would have been a true nightmare as then it would have meant that the enemy outnumbered him almost 2 to 1.

But this much Alexander still felt he could handle.

It was right then he heard Hemicus's panicked shout, urging him to leave the battlefield and take shelter in the camp.

And this was certainly possible, even seeming like an attractive proposal to Alexander as he subconsciously turned his head to gaze at the inviting, thick wooden gate, one which promised safety and security.

But Alexander did not immediately bolt towards that comforting thought, denying his fear dominion over him.

Instead he cooled his head and tried to think of the consequences of doing such a thing.

He knew that if he left the battlefield right now, the soldiers seeing their commander flee and facing the pincher attack would disintegrate instantly like wet tissue paper.

The casualties would be horrific and the siege would definitely come to an end.

Meaning even if Alexander survived, all the money and hard work he had put into the last four months would be for naught.

Alexander was unwilling to do that.

Even though escaping now would surely ensure that that he would live to fight another day, but Alexander was still unwilling.

And it was not just because of material concerns,

He also feared that perhaps the enemy might wise up to the trick he used this time and not let him do it the next time.

Which might mean this time was his only real chance of capturing Lord Theony by land.

So Alexander decided to not bail out, especially not when he still had a chance.

Because he still believed he had a chance.

And it was not only because his heart said so.

Alexander's sharp eyes had also caught the sight of a small dust cloud approaching from the east, one that was bearing his standard, as could be clearly seen in the clear moonlight.

And seeing so Alexander was instantly able to work out the chain of events that must have occurred.

'Remus must have managed to notice the flanking force from his position and ordered his legion to move to intercept,' Alexander correctly guessed.

But those forces were still a bit of distance away, and would not likely be able to stop Lord Ponticus before he made contact with Alexander, so to buy time, Alexander turned to Hemicus, and shouted in a determined voice, "No! We attack. We can still attack," as he then steadied his horse to face the enemy.

"What! No Alexander! Listen! You go! Switch armor with me and go inside the camp. I will hold the line!" But Hemicus did not approve of this one bit, even grabbing Alexander by the arm to stress the point.

Hemicus judged the enemy that they would be here in ten minutes and knew very well that this was nearly not enough time for the nearly 3,000 horsemen to turn around and initiate a charge.

That amount of time might be needed just to get the orders across.

And he also knew that if Alexander was to leave, the army morale would collapse.

So as evidence of his quick thinking, he even offered to stay in place of Alexander.

So there seemed to be no reason for Alexander to reject

And this sentiment was shared by many, including Remus, who too echoed Hemicus's sentiment, shouting,

"That's right, Alexander. I have already told my legion to attack this force. But they might not make it on time."

"You go! We will hold them back till then!"

An interesting point to note here would be that it seemed that though Alexander's close friends would call him by his noble title most times, but when it came to critical and time-sensitive situations, they would revert back to their usual way of calling him out of habit.

It was of course not something that Alexander minded, but felt was an interesting observation,

Anyway, at both of the two men's loud urging, Alexander did not immediately acquiesce, but only softly placed his hand on the latter's shoulder and comfortingly said in his native Thesian,

"Don't worry, my friend. We have not lost yet."

"Thanks to Remus the enemy was forced to launch his attack prematurely. Meaning his ranks are shallow and disorderly. "

"Our lances will rip right through him!"

"Come! Follow me!"

"...." Hemicus only pursed his lips at that.

He would not say he bought Alexander's explanation but understood Alexander had finished explaining himself and had made up his mind.

He was determined to hit this force head-on.

The evidence of this was how after saying this to Hemicus, even before the latter could respond, Alexander swiftly turned his head to Remus and gave this long list of orders,

"Remus, I will properly reward you after the battle. But for now, go find Menicus."

"Tell him that the frontlines are to hold and wait for the enemy's main force to make contact."

"And that he is to make the 5th region turn around and attack the flanking flanking."

"Take Digitumas with you! He knows the way!"

Alexander in one breath had thrown out a lot of information.

Firstly, regarding Menicus, well he was the leading man in charge of all the infantry.

Meaning, though each of Alexander's seven legions had a commander, such as Menes, Heliptos, Jamider (Earl) Tikba, and others, above them all was Menicus himself, coordinating with all of them.

While Alexander was at the back, interfering only if any unforeseen situation arose.

So Menicus was kind of like the general manager, overseeing the everyday things, while Alexander was the CEO.

Then there was mention of a man named Digitumas.

He was one of Alexander's trust and competent heralds, and he carried a special flag indicating his status.

It was this flag that allowed him to enter the protected ring of any general, and without it, most would be cut down by the general's bodyguards at the very perimeter.

In regard to that, Remus was in fact quite lucky, given the security around Alexander was much tighter.

But though the boy was lucky that time, did not mean he would always be, especially given it was nighttime with very low visibility.

At least during the day, the armor would give any the rider's identity.

Hence Alexander paired him with his herald, who as a bonus also knew where Menicus was exactly.

After all, it was a huge battlefield, and given the darkness, finding Menicus among the sea of people would be like searching for a needle in a haystack for Remus alone.

And lastly, the mention of the fifth legion referred to one of the legions Alexander placed on the second row who were being ordered to turn around to face the enemy.

Alexander had compressed all this information into a few short sentences, and as soon as he confirmed Remus had received it, Alexander spurred his horse forward, readying himself to attack and leaving Remus to his task.

Thus the two men parted, while Remus galloped full speed towards a point quite close to him, while Alexander in a weird maneuver actually did not gallop straight towards the enemy, and abruptly turned his horse left and started riding north, in the same direction Remus's legion was.

This at first confused the contingent of bodyguards following him, because their lord seemed to riding away from the flanking force, in a perpendicular direction to where the siege works were.

But nevertheless, none argued, only obediently following him regardless.

While Alexander, unconcerned about explaining himself, only took a bronze horn out from his saddle, and placing it onto his lips, got ready to blow it.

This was a special horn and the sound from it was designed to give the signal to all the cavalrymen that they were to follow him and soon, this was exactly what they heard.

Trumpet, *Trumpet*

And again.

And again.

All the cavalrymen placed in the rear repeatedly got this signal, which was saying, 'Follow me! Follow the sound!'

And so, as their training dictated, that was exactly what they did.

The thick chunky formation the cavalry was arranged in began to break apart, as block by block, in packets of 100 all the riders began to follow Alexander, riding north just as the trumpet dictated with the huge standard carried by Hemicus himself acting a visual cue.

And then after a while they saw that standard begin to swerve to the right, taking a giant smooth turn in an enormous arch until the whole formation was made to take a full 180 degree clockwise turn

And suddenly the 2,700 riders then found themselves gazing directly onto Lord Ponticus's own defenseless flank!

The hunter just seemed to have become the hunted.