

## **Herald 801**

### Chapter 801 Scouting of Sissilpond Ridge (Part-3)

Antonid's force of 1,100 surprise attack did manage to be quite successful, putting quite a few bodies on the ground.

The legionaries were able to maintain their formation even in the rough terrain, while organized rows of crossbowmen from behind shot volleys that softened up their target, as the calvary on the wings, though unable to charge given the short distance and rough ground, were able to use their javelins as well as their higher position on the horses to stab and hack.

All this worked to spread great panic among the Tibians, who in the still slightly foggy weather struggled to truly comprehend the situation.

But unfortunately for Antonid, they did not panic enough.

At least not enough to break rank and run.

For one, Perseus had sent among the best of his men on this scouting mission, for he trusted their intelligence gathering skills the most.

Given the importance of the upcoming battle, the king prudently decided not to take any chances.

And two, Antonid's attack really lacked that strong, decisive punch one needed.

The reason being- as they say, Mass has a quality of its own.

Sheer number was able to negate many disadvantages, like here where due to their absolute numerical superiority the Tibians were able to soak all the wounds being inflicted on them without panicking.

Their dead numbered by a significant amount in absolute numbers, but when taken in the context of the whole force, it was relatively minor- perhaps at best a 2% to 3%.

Painful but manageable.

It also did not help that Antonid's 100 crossbowmen's firing rate was abysmal, as was the nature of the crossbows, hence that withering storm of arrow fire that many might have envisioned during the surprise attack never materialized.

And without these long ranged attacks, the infantry really could hack and slash its way only through so much.

"Form up! Quick form up!"

"The enemy force is weak. They are trying to scare us."

"There are only a few hundred of them. Attack! Revenge our brothers."

Hence soon the Tibians, especially the ones in the back were granted enough breathing room to rally and as the scattered units quickly began to converge, the pressure on Antonid began to increase.

And with every Tibian who joined the fight, it became that scant bit harder for Antonid.

His only sliver of hope was that since these units were scouts, they were not as heavily armored and equipped as the traditional phalangites, in order to not restrict their movement.

But even so, once the Tibian commander managed to get his entire force into a coherent formation, the pressure on Antonid's men increased almost tenfold.

To him the enemy appeared so many and was pushing back on his army with such numbers that it felt like Antonid being drowned in the depths of the sea, the pitch black water crushing him.

His legionaries were barely able to defend against the myriad of spear thrusts and jabs that were coming from all directions, and many lines began to buckle and lose ground as casualties mounted.

And the same story unfolded on the wings so there was no hope of the cavalry charging and coming to the rescue.

They were pinned down by the Tibian's own forces and as the two sides stood in lines and exchanged spear stabs and shield bashes, even at a favorable 1 to 1 casualty raion, Antonid's cavalry due to its lower total numbers son found the losses unstainable.

It got to the point that Antonid even ordered this, "Archers! Bring yourself closer. Thicken the lines."

This referred to the fact that usually, the crossbowmen would stand a bit further back from the infantry lines.

And this was because of the nature of movement during a battle.

Any infantry formation at any point during combat was always moving, be it backward or forward, and this happened organically.

If the enemy pressed on the attack, rather than simply stand one's ground and take, it was far more prudent to simply back up and let the enemy tire itself coming to you.

And when the men eventually tired themselves out, an intense counterattack could have been launched to take the ground.

All this meant that individual infantry units tended to constantly move a lot during a fight.

Hence 'front lines' were never really a literal straight line as represented in all drawings and military doctrines.

But rather a band or layer within soldiers fought.

And all this went on to say that the constant undulation of position was quite irritating for a crossbowman standing right behind the infantry since he would also have to match their rhyme, to keep up.

All while trying to complete his long, tedious reloading procedure.

Thus the method Alexander's army came up with to mitigate this problem was to place these units around 30 m to 40 meters back, thus giving them ample space to reload their bows in peace, as well as the opportunity to look freely and aim their bows correctly.

And though 30 meters to 40 meters might sound like a lot, it really was not as individual infantry units could move literally as far as one kilometer during this back and forth pace dance very naturally.

But now, facing a real fear of the disintegration of his lines, Antonid moved these men to bolster the ranks of the infantry, thickening the lines and giving his men the feeling that they had much more backup.

And then Antonid even commanded his crossbowmen so,

"Shoot! Shoot towards where you think the enemy is."

Yes, the man was so desperate that he was asking his archers to fire even when they were so close in melee.

Antonid knew that his own men would surely take friendly fire if he did this, but at this point, the man was that desperate.

So when his second in command complained, Antonid shouted, "There are more Tibians than us. They will take more bolts than we do."

Yes, such was the desperation.

And then lastly to bolster his men's faltering morale, Antonid rode up and down his very thin lines, shouting and encouraging them with shouts as such,

"Do not falter.... you have taken their greatest city. This is nothing."

"Fight! Push them back! These peasants are no match for you."

"Men! Do not fear! Reinforcements are on the way. I can see them gathering by the foot of the hill. Just hold a few moments longer."

This last one was said in spite of Antonid seeing no such thing.

How could he, the fog was too deep.

But his morale raising speech did work to inspire the men, as they held on believing help was just around the corner.

Though even then, there were several occasions where the situation looked about to turn apocalyptic and was only stopped by Antonid's personal interference at the critical moment, as he quickly sent small groups of reinforcement from other parts of the lines to plug those temporary holes.

Antonid was a very skilled mid level officer, quite renowned among the man, which was also why he earned the right to report to directly to the highest man in the army- Menes.

And here he was showcasing them in the grandest way possible.

But still, no matter how skilled he might be, even geniuses had their limits.

And if Antonid did not get help soon, his men were going to eventually call his bluff about the reinforcements and break.

The three scouts that Antonid had sent downhill were able to make the short journey on their trotting horse relatively quickly.

And as they burst through the gates, one of them immediately started shouting at the top of their lungs to let everyone know of the fighting at the top ridge, urging them to quickly prepare to join them.

While the other two galloped full speed on their horse right towards Menes's camp, hoping to get an audience.

The black general, like many others in the camp, had just gotten up, and dressed in a light tunic when the two scouts found him the man, he was brushing his teeth outside his tent, a twig in his mouth, his mouth blackened with the ash he was using to clean himself.

There was no toothpaste after all.

The sudden appearance of these two garbed in full armor men naturally drew Menes's instant attention, but without letting him even get a single word in, the two scouts jumped off their horse and immediately began to regurgitate Antonid's predicament in as succinct a manner as possible without leaving any important details out.

And finished by saying, "General! Antonid needs help. There is an entire legion of the enemy on that ridge."

"They will break any second!"

At this information, Menes was naturally shocked, as he never thought a single scouting mission would involve fighting 5,000 men.

He even first cursed,

'Dammit! Why didn't you retreat and ask for reinforcement yourself when you were facing five times your number, Antonid? What are you doing fighting so many men all alone?'

But this was not the time to go over Antonid's decision.

Knowing each second was worth in gold, he quickly sent a contingent of 1,000 men up the ridge with the orders to climb it up as quickly as they could without tripping themselves over.

#### Chapter 802 Surprise in Perseus's Camp

In their summarized version, the scouts had omitted much detail about the fog and the initial shadows they encountered, deeming them secondary.

Instead, they had focused on the enemy numbers, where they were, and the threat they posed to the 1,100 men.

And this was indeed the right choice, as Menes obviously did not grill these two over Antonid's, in his mind 'foolish' decision, but immediately set out to organize a rescue force.

The men fighting up there were of very high quality, for in a very similar thought process to Perseus, Menes too had sent expert men to survey the enemy.

After all, what would be the point of sending some raised levies on this specialized mission?

Thus Antonid was chosen for the mission.

He was one of old man Menicus's most trusted officers during his time having led many scouting units prior.

And the people under him were mostly from the various original mercenary groups Alexander had started his army with.

So leaving them to die there was of course impossible, even if they were also 1,000 and Menes still had another 28,000.

Thus immediately after getting the report, Menes instantly threw his twig to the ground, rinsed his mouth of the ash, and within half an hour 1,000 men were charging up the hill.

But why only 1,000 when Antonid clearly asked for 4,000 to 5,000?

Well it was because Menes had learned from his mistake.

After that chastening he had gotten from Cambyses during the siege of the manor when he had waited by the foot of the hill to gather a large enough force before launching a rescue, resulting on the manor burning down and Cambyses almost dying, Menes promised himself that he was not going to do the same mistake twice.

So as an emergency relief force, he sent those 1,000 ahead, composed of entirely of his own bodyguards as well some of the very best mercenaries that Alexander had hired, hoping the quality of the men would make up for the numerical deficiency while the rest caught up.

\*Trumpet\*, \*Trumpet\*

And as these thousand men joined the fray with blaring trumpets, Antonid finally felt life return to his heart.

The sound of those noisy, ear screeching instruments had never sounded so melodious to the man.

The subsequent addition of these men doubled Antonid's forces and the lines immediately stabilized, as fresh breath was introduced into the Zanzan legionaries.

After being under the merciless onslaught of the enemy for so long, the original men were exhausted, and they started to retreat to the back lines, taking their much needed rest.

While the fresh and experienced men started to prepare for a counterattack, wishing to take advantage of their still high stamina to push and retake lost ground.

And sensing the equation change for the worse, the commander of the Tibetan force quickly did what Antonid had done.

Send word for help.

"What! Flaminio is up there fighting? Why?" And when that scout eventually brought that information to Perseus, this was his response, shock and surprise.

"This is indeed worrying!" And overhearing the report, the man sitting opposite of him, who was sitting with a plate of bread and cheese furrowed his brows and commented so.

If Alexander had been there, he would have been shocked to see who this was.

He would have recognized that bald head anywhere- Manuk!

And what was the former archpriest of the Grand Temple and Amenheraft's right hand man doing in Tibias, right in this battlefield you ask?

Well, it was simple really.

Once the man had learned of Alexander's triumph at Thesalie, he wasted no time taking steps to try and halt the man's progress.

And one of the ways he tried to was to come to Perseus with a formal offer of alliance.

And since there was much bad blood between this country and the man he served, Manuk felt that if he wanted the offer to succeed, he had to come in person to show his sincerity.

So he came, despite the fact it was quite hard for him to make the journey.

Much time was needed for news of Alexander's victory to diffuse, even after Alexander's own intention to spread the message of his accomplishments.

And then Manuk had to spend a large amount of time verifying this, sending messenger birds and riders to bring firsthand accounts.

And once it was truly confirmed, other than consoling and placating the jittering nobles in the faction, which itself took a lot of effort, Manuk had to make a few other arrangements on how to counter Alexander too.

After all, he was not going to put all his money into Perseus.

It was only after putting all those plans into motion that the bald priest left Ankoot, with a very short time on his hand to meet Perseus on time.

He first used a large sailing boat to travel down the mighty Naher river south towards Kuleef, and then took a ship from the port city of Ormus.

But by then winter had already come.

And even though the Kyoskin Sea, situated directly south of Zanzan, was much less treacherous than the Mad Sea situated southwest of Zanza, which was why the Mad Sea was called that because its waves were considered mad by sailors, but still, it was a perilous journey.

The cold winter winds blown south from Zanzan and Ankoot, clashed with the warm, hot sandy dust cloud blown north from The Arubin Peninsula, creating lots of strong water currents that flowed in unpredictable directions, as well as creating typhoons and hurricanes right in the middle of the sea, which resulted in the creating of huge water sprouts that the sailors mistook and even worshiped as giant sea serpents.

And because these water sprouts were a regular phenomenon, sailors called the sea Kyoskin, named after a local legend about a silver snake that could take various forms- be it ordinary household species to huge, world devouring beasts to even humans, appearing mostly as a burly, fishman.

But sea serpents or simply water sprouts, these were still dangerous phenomena to have a rickety, wooden ship around, thus, Manuk had to be kept close to the coast as he traveled west, passing Zanzan and finally landing on Tibias.

Also as a side note, as he was passing by Zanzan, his ship did port in Zanzan city itself, to rest and restock.

And the man even stayed at the city for three days, residing in an inconspicuous inn with two of his bodyguards, while taking the chance to tour.

And to say that he was surprised by the city's transformation would be an understatement.

Manuk had been to Zanzan during Pasha Muazz's rule before.

And had even stayed in that city during much of the drought when Amenheraft had conducted his invasion on Tibias.

But if he were to be told that and this city was the same one as back then, he would have called you delusional.

And if you told him this change had occurred in just three years, he would have beaten you to death because he would think you have been possessed by the devil.

Be it the wide roads, the still but being built aqueducts, the rows of concrete buildings, or the new port all left a deep impression on the man, as did the places he could not fully enter like the brick factory, the coal briquette plant, cement firm, and others.

Manuk was not an easy man to please but when he saw the crazy, bustling market of Zanzan he was shocked, impressed, and perhaps most importantly alarmed!

There were many in Amenheraft's court who saw Alexander as a secondary threat, one inferior to Pasha Farzah, including Amenheraft, but Manuk was the exception.

And the man's skill in being able to turn a dump like Zanzan into this paid testament to Manuk's fears.

Seeing Zanzan made the archpriest even more determined to form an alliance with Perseus at any cost.

Manuk met the king just days before he was about to set off, offering his proposal of an alliance and showering him with gifts in gold, silver, and slaves as well as the most significant of all -8,000 fresh men!

He even gave complete control of them to Perseus, so that he didn't misunderstand them as a Trojan horse, smiling and saying, "Your Highness, please see it as a small token of our sincerity."

The significance of this timely 'coal in winter' was not lost on Perseus and although his heart wanted to reject shaking hands with the devils that had ravaged his lands, his head could not.

The numbers were too significant.

But one place where Manuk did disagree with Perseus was in his intention to face Menes head on, urging him instead to stay in the city and wait for the bulk of his 'gift'.

He had revealed, "Your Highness, please, wait for two.. no ... one more month. And Matbar (Marquis) Kyaum can send you another twelve thousand (12,000) men."

And this was the same advice he gave now, "Your Highness, order Command Flamino to retreat! We must not fight the enemy here where he was all the advantage. Let us wait and gather our forces"

And Perseus was forced to ponder.

#### Chapter 803 Perseus's Decision

When Manuk first came to Perseus's court, obviously he was seen with great distrust, given their understandable bitter history.

And Perseus was even momentarily alarmed when there came reports of Adhanian troops landing on another part of Tibias, as he thought the worst- a two pronged attack.

It was only after Manuk clarified the situation and even handed control of the men to Perseus without any condition did the king lower his hostility.

These eight thousand, 8,000 men were arranged under Manuk's order by Matbar (Marquiss) Kyaum of Zanzan, whose territory lay west of Zanzan.

And these were only the vanguard force he sent as quickly as he could.

A further twelve thousand, 12,000 were scheduled to join once the ships carrying these men returned.

So it was only natural for Manuk to urge Perseus to wait for the total force.

But for Perseus, it was not that straightforward of an equation.

There was still the inherent distrust he had of Manuk and because Menes was too close, he could not simply sit and wait hoping the rest troops would come in time.

So he came out to meet the enemy in the open.

Besides, Perseus was very confident he would be able to win a fight.

Never mind if it was on the open fields, that would be a sure dunk, but even in rough terrain like this, was confident in his victory.

And this belief was cultivated based on the fact that he most likely outnumbered his enemy!

This was because although Perseus himself managed to get only eighteen thousand 18,000 infantry, he had been able to obtain the help of two additional allies aside from Manuk.

One from was Thesos.

With Tibias seen as the birthplace of the city states, many had sent their aid, culminating in about 10,000 Thesian mercenaries- made of elite archers and fantastic, heavy, phalangites.

And the other came from the Kaiser family of Sybarsis, who sent around 3,000 mercenaries, along with twelve new war elephants.

These alone would have been enough to match Menes, and with Manuk's unexpected addition, Perseus's total strength soared up to thirty nine thousand 39,000 men, composed of:

Thirty two thousand, 32,000 light and heavy infantry

Five thousand, 5,000- archers,

Two thousand, 2,000- cavalry- primarily being gifted by Manuk, and

Twelve, 12- war elephants.

Hence Menes's scouts were actually correct in their reporting, the enemy did number around forty thousand, 40,000.

And if Menes had faced them head on an open field with his twenty nine thousand, 29,000, made of-

Twenty four thousand, 24,000 infantry,

Two and a half thousand, 2,500 crossbowmen and

Two and a half thousand, 2,500 cavalry,

A loss would have been almost certainly guaranteed.

So although he did not know, it had been prudent of the general to avoid fighting the enemy in favorable grounds and take this rough road.

"What? Leave Commander Flamino to die? You Adhanian ..."

At Manuk's suggestion for the fighting group to disengage and retreat, the scout hearing so sounded this in alarm, unable to hold his course.

'There were 4,000 men up there, how can he say that?' The man was appalled, knowing that doing such a thing would undoubtedly cause a lot of those men to die during the subsequent chase.

So the scout only saw this advice as Manuk trying to sabotage their group.

The inherent distrust Tibians had of Adhaninas was very well ingrained.

And Perseus of course sided with his men here, quickly nodding his head with solidarity and very succinctly saying, "Abandoning Flamino is impossible. Go! Tell him that I will be soon coming up with my army."

This curt, short response naturally delighted the scout, as the rapid order showed his king's firm support on the matter.

So with an energetic bow, he hurried back to the hill, his body filled with zeal at being able to carry this good news.

While once again alone, Manuk tried one more time to advise Perseus,

"Your Majesty, I beg of you to reconsider. I have fought against these men before and they were very adept in fighting in rough grounds. You should deny them a fight here."

"Instead, bait them into fighting on flat ground, like along the banks of the river Diannu. Or temporarily retreat south and wait for more of my men."

The archpriest sounded very sincere, even a bit pious.

And from a military point of view, he made very good sense.

"I cannot leave four thousand, 4,000 men to die." But this was Perseus's sharp retort, his tone firm and irrefutable.

And in many ways, it was the correct decision to make.

One, because all four thousand, 4,000 of those men in that scouting party were from Perseus's core group of the army, the regular, well trained troops, a distinction which by now had shrunken to a mere handful of thousands courtesy of Alexander brutally cutting so many of them down in the past battles.

So if Perseus were to let these last vestiges of his army die too, he would really become a king in name only.

Furthermore, Perseus was not that kind of military commander.

He greatly cared for his men and in return was able to wield great respect from them.

Simply abandoning such a huge force would not only tarnish his reputation, but it would also greatly affect the morale of the rest of the army.

This was one reason.

The second reason was because when Manuk suggested they retreat south, he meant all the way to the tip of the Tibian peninsula, to the city of Lilybee, Tibias's third or fourth biggest city depending on if you counted the city of Thesalie to be still Tibian.

It had a large population, rich fields, and a huge, natural port.

That last part was perhaps the most important because of all the three reinforcements Perseus had gotten, he got them from across the sea.

Meaning if he were to garrison his army in a city with a port, helping him would become a lot easier for the other powers.

But again, though Manuk's suggestion on paper was very good, it failed to take into account the human and political element.

Which was that to do so, Perseus would have to leave his capital undefended, potentially dooming it to be sacked.

And though Parthenigh to the Tibians was not as valuable as the Holy City of Adhan to the Adhanians, it still held enormous value.

It was the country's capital after all.

There were lots of riches be it gold or luxurious materials, slaves to be taken from the one hundred to one hundred and fifty thousand (100,000 - 150,000) people there, and lastly, the most important of all, in the city, along the banks of Diannu resided The Ancestral Shrine, the biggest and oldest shrine in all of Tibias, one which housed the original statues of Tibias's ancestor- The bull and the twins, along with many lesser heroes.

Perseus feared that if the capital was to fall, the enemy might damage or even demolish many of these precious artifacts.

And if that were to happen, Perseus feared his competency and legitimacy over the throne could be openly questioned, as rivals would claim he had lost the protection of the elders.

Hence neither the abandonment of the forces on the ridge nor the retreat to Lilybee as presented by Manuk was applicable to Perseus politically, even though they were sound militarily.

Perseus then explained this situation to Manuk, but the archpriest simply replied, "Your Majesty, you need to be alive to consider these things."

"If you wait a bit, you can crush the thirty thousand 30,000 with fifty thousand 50,000 men, cutting them down to the last."

"His losses will be so devastating that Alexander won't be able to threaten you for another twenty years!" Manuk exaggerated, though he was right in the core concept.

But Perseus, ever the tactician but never the strategist was unable to see past this.

Instead of cutting of flesh to save his bones, he wanted to protect everything.

And the reason for this newfound confidence was expressed in the following speech

"Do not worry. We outnumber the enemy by 10,000! Even if the terrain is not suitable, we can simply crush them by sheer numbers."

And it was indeed true, in wars, usually the bigger side won, as he then went to show a bit of flaw with Manuk's rhetoric,

"Besides, if we retreat now, the enemy might get reinforcements."

"I'm told Alexander had ten thousand, 10,000 men in Thesalie. And then there also small numbers of garrisoned troops all over the surrounding city."

"They were to all join..... You can see how by the time we get your ten thousand, 10,000 the enemy might also get their ten thousand, 10,000."

"And then we will be in a worse position." Perseus cleverly pointed.

And that he meant by the last line that was that the percentage advantage between 40,000 vs 30,000 was greater than 50,000 vs 40,000.

"..." And Perseus's unequivocal insistence, Manuk at last was worn down enough as he could find no other effective retort to try and convince the man.

So he weakly nodded.

Chapter 804 Battle of Sissilpond Ridge (Part-1)

In Manuk's mind, Perseus's rhetoric that 40,000 vs 30,000 was a better deal than 50,000 vs 40,000 did not hold water in the current circumstances.

Because the terrain negated all that advantage.

In fact, Manuk would have argued that even with a 10,000 men advantage, they were in the backfoot due to the terrain.

But Manuk did not push these talks any further, for he knew his limits

He was ultimately a foreign dignitary and even his current privilege of being able to accompany the king to war was purely based on the fact that he had contributed so heavily to his army.

And even then Manuk had no control of the 8,000. something he had to give the entirety to Perseus to secure his trust.

And he could only hope all the various legends regarding the king's military leadership were right.

"I believe His Majesty is right." And as the bald, bearded man was feeling quite down with himself, another gruff voice sounded from behind them, hammering the last nail into Manuk's coffin.

And if Alexander were to see the man, he would have certainly recognized this man too.

He was the only mercenary leader who had not accepted Alexander's offer of staying in Adhania and serving him but had chosen instead to leave and fight for Cantagena.

And riding high on his successful venture to Adhania, he was able to show greater accomplishments in numerous subsequent battles for Cantagena, due to which he was even granted full citizenship of the city state, a very big thing at the time.

And in a similar vein to his successful in his civilian life, his professional life too took a turn for the better, as his mercenary group, through its fame able to swell to an incredible five thousand, 5,000, with him being on track on to being the prime candidate who would replace Damious- the ten thousand, 10,000 men mercenary leader Alexander and Cambyses had assassinated.

So when this big shot threw his weight behind the king, Manuk was truly defeated, while the former further reasoned,

"I was there when Alexander created the legionary formation." Petricuno referred to how he had participated in that battle against Amenheraft, which Manuk had led, recalling,

"Its great advantage is being able to keep coherence between units in rough, hilly areas, whereas our bulky phalanx formations tend to become scattered and lose its effectiveness over there"

"But as long as we thicken our lines enough, even if we scattered, there will be no gaps."

"We have the numbers to be able to do so."

"And then our huge sarissas will destroy the short sworded legionaries with ease!"

Petricuno sounded very confident.

And yes, Petricuno did use the word exact word- 'sarissa', which was a much longer spear.

Because it seemed back in Thesos, a military revolution had occurred.

It had happened around the time Alexander took Adhania, i.e.- there years ago, when one of Cantagena's allies led by a famous general managed to actually draw against one of Exolas's allies, even when they were equally numbered.

This itself might not sound like anything impressive, but the biggest point to note here was that the opposing ally was supported by a few thousand Exolites.

And since most battles in Thesos were still held in open, predetermined locations, it almost became a written rule that the one with the bigger number and better trained troops won.

And no one had better trained troops than Exolas.

So in all previous battles bar none, Cantagena was forced to rely on numbers to defeat Exolas.

Until that battle that is, when that general, after equipping his soldiers with the huge sarissas, 4 to 5 meters in length, denied the Exolites the close quarter fight they so sorely desired, hence forcing the aggressors back.

This great news of victory had spread like wildfire in Thesos and in the past three years, all nearby powers knowing the age of the sarissa was here had worked to upgrade themselves to that new weapon.

And Petricuno was eager to try this out against Alexander's famed legionaries.

"Mmmm, my thoughts exactly. " Finding support among his key ally, Perseus quickly sought to reinforce it, adding, "We always planned to charge down the hill and hit the Zanzan camp after our scouting was down"

"Now that they have come out, it will be easier."

"We will just take the top and then use the momentum downhill to bore through these soldiers equipped with only a tiny sword with our huge spears and sarissas."

"It will be easy!"

Like Petricuno, Perseus sounded infectiously optimistic.

And then knowing time was of the essence, quickly turned to Petricuno to order,

"I will take my remaining 14,000 and the 2,000 cavalry that Esteem Envoy Manuk has brought up the hills to the right right now."

"Petricuno, you take the rest of his 6,000 infantry, and the 2,000 mercenaries the Kaiser family has sent and then combine them with your own 10,000. These 18,000 men are the most experienced fighters here."

"The plan is that I will go first ahead and pin the enemy down. You wait a bit and once you see the enemy has fully committed his force and is locked in melee, come up from the left and swing right to hit them in the flanks."

"This will surely shatter them."

Perseus had managed to form a battle plan right there,

"Great idea! The hill and this fog will easily be able to hide me. They won't even know what hit them." And Petricuno approved, chuckling, "Hahaha, I heard Alexander caught Captain Flamino by surprise using the fog. Time to return the favor."

It seemed Petricuno, or anyone else in the Tibian camp was aware that the Zanzan commander was not Alexander.

While Perseus, seeing Petricuno's enthusiasm in facing Alexander felt a bit surprised, as he asked,

"I heard you two know each other. Do you feel hesitant about fighting him?"

After all, Perseus knew Alexander was a great general, and it was natural for commanders to revere such people.

Perseus himself was one.

But to this Petricuno first pulled a face like he was offended by the very question, and then remembering who was asking, quickly reformed himself and replied this in a very patriotic tone,

"Alexander is a disgrace to all Thesians."

"He gave the jewel of the East- the city Adhan that should have belonged to us back to Adhania."

"He licked the boots of their king to become their Pasha."

"And now he even wants to destroy the ancestral place of all Thesians."

"He is no ally, he is our most hated enemy."

"I have no qualms about fighting him."

"In fact, the mere thought makes my blood boil with bloodlust."

"I would love nothing more than to have his head on a spike if I could."

Petricuno presented himself as being unable to wait a second longer to go chop off Alexander, something which Perseus was very pleased to see.

Though in reality, Petricuno's hatred for Alexander was much simpler.

It was the green eyed monster- Jealously.

Petricuno was jealous of what Alexander had accomplished.

So he wanted to destroy that.

Thus turning to Perseus, Petricuno advised,

"Your Majesty, you should also take the 2,000 Pelomos peltist I brought. They are great at holding the enemy down and preventing him from moving. I'm sure they will be very useful."

Stone throwing peltists were extremely effective offensive units being perfect missile throwers and a unit of them could devastate the enemy.

"Good!" And Perseus immediately agreed as he got to preparing his forces.

While archpriest Manuk seeing all this only pursed his lips and was then left assigned a token force of 1,000- officially to act as a reserve, but really to suck his thumb and guard the camp.

Given the bad blood between the two sides, it would have been weird for Perseus to trust Manuk with any significant force.

As Perseus got ready to battle, back in Menes's camp, the tall now armored general too was preparing himself, and once ready, he asked this of Melodias,

"I will go up the hill with 20,000 on the left (Right from Perseus's perspective as the men were standing opposite of each other)."

"You wait here with the rest of the 9,000."

"This fog is too deep to see anything. Who knows that's the actual situation is up there."

"Wait till it clears up and then make a judgment on what to do on your own."

"Or until you get my signal to advance."

Menes prudently decided not to commit the entire army without seeing the full picture for himself and gave Melodias a large degree of freedom to act depending as the situation developed.

And then soon once both sides were charging up their side of the ridge, turning what was supposed to be a scouting trip into a full fledged battle.

What was even more amazing was that given the slope and fog, neither side knew of the other's advance, so as each of them emerged out of the fog and came into view of the horizon, they presented the other with a great surprise.

'They are here!' Both Perseus and Menes shouted in their minds.

The battle of Sissilpond Ridge had begun.

Chapter 805 Battle of Sissilpond Ridge (Part-2)

Menes had managed to reach the top of the ridge first, aided by his unique unit formation, and was able to bear onto the Tibian scout commander with the full might of his twenty thousand 20,000 men, almost instantly crushing him.

But just before Flamino started to despair, aid from Perseus arrived at just the nick of time, in the form of two thousand, 2.000 forward cavalry units.

He had sent them galloping ahead to help Flamino in case of any unforeseen circumstances.

And then following this, a few while later, before Menes could destroy those 6,000 men, the bulk of Perseus's phalangites crashed into the legionaries, devolving the battle into a slogging match.

The match staring 22,000 spear wielding Tibians vs 20,000 sharp bladed Zanzanians had begun.

And the initial charge of the phalangites as they made contact was quite damaging to the legionnaires, since the slope and the rapid with which the Tibians were able to make contact made it so that the legionnaires were unable to find the breathing room needed to throw their pillas and blunt that impact force.

Thus the deadly phalanx formation was allowed to hit them with the full might of their spears and huge shields, creating large casualties.

And once the enemy was pinned as Perseus hoped, a brutal melee began, as both sides vowed not to lose a single inch of ground.

The legionaries knew the further they retreated, the more the enemy would be able to use the ridge's sloping curve to their advantage, as that higher elevation would give them greater angles of attack, making defending against such attacks ever more perilous.

"Don't give them an inch. You have fought these men before. And you have beaten them before. Fight! Fight more each grain of ground."

And knowing this, Menes rode up and down the lines, encouraging the men as such and ordering the officers to force their soldiers to stay and fight, to trade bodies for ground.

All this caused the battle to become very bloody.

The Tibian phalangites used the razor sharp tips of their spears to try and pierce through the bronze thoraxes, steel chainmail, and linen gambeson garbed by the legionnaires, with most of these being simply deflected away by the thick wooden shields, with some even getting stuck between the many layered wooden weapon.

As for those that did manage to get in, the triple layered armor did provide its wears quite significant protection, many times turning what would have been a deadly stab to a painful but ultimately harmless thrust or perhaps a small cut, or even just a tiny blood clot.

But of course no armor was invincible.

Some spear attacks did manage to slip past, such as by hitting critical weak points on the armor, or even simply bulldozing through all the defenses using sheer force, such as when wielded by an especially strong man.

When that happened, it would manage to produce deadly puncture wounds which many times would make the man fall to the ground groaning with pain, incapacitating him.

Or worse killing him on the spot if the hit was vital enough, like piercing the heart or skewering the throat.

Though such instances were rare given a spear was more of a poking weapon than a deadly killing one.

And in response to this attack, Menes's men used their large rectangular shields to skillfully swipe away or simply duck beneath the wall of bristling spears to get close enough so that those pointy sticks would lose their effectiveness.

Then they could use their sharp short swords, perfect for engaging the enemy at distances where they could almost hug each other, to deftly swing around and cleave through the mostly leather and linen armor they encountered like butter, the low grade armor a clear evidence of Perseus's financial difficulties.

And it was perhaps only this weak armor that let the legionaries stay in the fight, enabling them to eke out a favorable casualty ratio.

Because when the Zanzan infantry tried to close the distance with the phalangites, as expected, it was easier said than done.

The very nature of this move made it quite dangerous and there always was the risk that in attempting to brush off the spear in front of him, the man would get a spear stab from the sides.

Or simply have his attack blocked by the phalangites's own huge shield, and then be counterattacked with the enemy's shield bash or even a spear stab.

The latter would be deadly as he might fall then and there, but even the former was very dangerous, as it would not only send him back but also possibly disorientate him, thus lowering his defenses and making him vulnerable to an attack from either side.

Something that happened quite often as the static nature of the battle meant that the phalangites were able to plant their feet firmly on the ground and calmly deal with various such infiltration attempts.

And with the legionaries having their movement restricted due to the terrain and order from their officers, they found their most prized advantage taken away.

Thus that natural undulation that occurred during a battle was forcefully stopped and the legionaries found themselves having to take the far heavier hits of the phalanx formations head on.

Hence as the battle raged, many casualties with both large and small wounds began to appear on Menes's side, and the numbers were definitely higher on his side than the other.

Although the lines still held, micro cracks were indeed starting to form, and once a time would come when they would eventually snap.

Melodias was needed, though not right, but eventually.

But reinforcements were also needed in the back, as in a similar color to the infantry, the crossbowmen at the back were not doing much better either.

They had been made to face a withering hail of stone throws from their counterpart missile units, the much better trained and expert Peltasts.

And even in the short exchange, these men had undoubtedly proved to be the superior force.

They were much well trained and much more experienced than Alexander's levies, and the lead balls they threw were scarily accurate and even more frightfully deadly.

Just a single good solid hit could shatter teeth, blind eyes, break bone, and even directly knock someone unconscious.

In the worst case, it could even directly cause death.

Facing these extremely powerful and fast expert units, Alexander's levied crossbowmen found themselves utterly outclassed and were barely able to lift their heads out of their large pavises, taking one or two odd potshots here and there, from behind the cover.

And it was here these levies truly came to appreciate the fact that they didn't need to shoot a crossbow like a traditional one.

Because if that had been the case, if they needed to get out of their cover, draw the string, take aim, and then shoot, well then things would have been a lot different indeed.

The casualties for such an exposed unit against such accurate arrow fire would have been astronomical and it was even very possible that Menes's 2,500 crossbowmen might have already shattered and routed.

The inherent steady aim of the crossbow, the large pavises, and the fact the crossbowmen outnumbered the peltasts all helped to keep that fight in the balance, at least for now.

And lastly, in regards to the cavalry, well it was a stalemate here too.

First of all, given the rough ground they were in, many cavalymen had actually gotten off their horses and decided to fight as light infantry, skirmishing in small units with their small shields and light spears.

Their opponents- usually similar units from Menes's heavy cavalry who found their large lances bulky and unwieldy, and the terrain not suitable for huge, thundering charges.

Menes of course knew this of disadvantage but had chosen the terrain due to other greater advantages as discussed earlier.

So like the enemy, the Zanzan horsemen too left their steeds behind and joined in the melee, exchanging spear and sword strikes with the lightly armored Tibians, or maybe more specifically Matbar (Marquiss) Kyuam's cavalry.

And surprisingly it was the latter who came on top.

The sloping terrain allowed the nimble Tibians to dash around the field and get quick, cheeky stikes in, many of which managed to draw blood, dying their silver blades red, while the much heavier and bulkier Zanzanians were forced to bunch together and use their heavy armor to try and endure.

They at first tried to bring the fight to the opponent, but quickly found that trying to chase or catch these nimble opponents was an exercise in futility and something that only worked to tire them out, thus making them vulnerable to openings these Tibians could exploit.

And then there was the last type of unit- the cavalrymen that were still on horseback.

Although the ridge was still rough, there were of course some flat plains as well and in those limited spaces, the two sides most expert cavalrymen were found duking it out.

And it was perhaps only here that Menes's men found some success, as their heavy armor helped destroy the much lighter units, while the scouts, now turned skirmishers were able to use their 'instant bows' to continuously harass the enemy like any other expert horse archers.

Chapter 806 Battle Of Sissilpond Ridge (Part-3)

The cavalrymen on horses on both sides could be seen menacingly circling each other, as they threw javelins, pilla and spear and sword stabs, as they tried to open an opportunity to charge once given the slightest chance.

The far more agile Matbar (Marquiss) forces would try and conduct hit and run tactics on their much heavier armored foe, while Menes's men tried to bait them to come closer so that even their slower attacks landed.

Now normally, in such a case the lighter skirmishing force would win as it would be able to eventually whittle down the enemy slowly but surely, and kill it with a thousand cuts.

But this was not a normal battlefield.

Here the flat terrain was limited and if any unit left it, they would find themselves in a severe disadvantage, even risking losing their horse on the rough slopes.

So in this confined game of cat and mouse, the heavier Zanzan cavalymen were not out of the fight yet, being occasionally able to hit one or two hits of their own.

But much more than that, they usually relied on the scouting cavalry that were mixed with them, armed with, to what the Matbar's (Maruqiss) appeared as strange crossbows.

This was of course the instant bow and Alexander usually equipped only his scouting units with these, giving his men a sudden burst of enormous damage.

This came as a very nasty surprise to any unsuspecting and even suspecting enemies.

Employed defensively, it could give the scouts a good weapon to dig themselves out of a pickle, like when facing an outnumbering enemy force chasing them.

A rapid release of the five shots could puncture a hole in most encirclements efforts, and leave the enemy in the dusts even before he could wake up to what the hell happened.

While offensively, it was quite a useful trick to have when you can dirt in and out of somewhere very quickly, sowing chaos through these hit and run tactics.

A scouting unit equipped with this was able to double as a skirmisher, with the ability to not only harass the enemy but use the suddenness of the attack to leave the him stunned and immobilized.

\*Bang\*, \*Bang\*, \*Bang\*

The five rapid shots not only were unexpected, but they were also loud enough to surprise the enemy, while the strange shape of the weapons left most seeing it for the first time shocked at the weird gadget.

And then die before being able to fully comprehend what had happened as they would find with one or two bolts sticking into them.

These scouts usually had twenty to forty percent accuracy.

Alexander even thought of using them as deadly assassins with the situation presented itself.

And now, when mixed with heavy cavalry like now, they unexpectedly became a potent mix of fighting units.

When the Matbar's (Marquiss) forces were too far away for the heavy cavalry to charge, these instant bow wielding scouts would be able to harass them with their superior range.

But if they were threatened with the enemy coming at them to engage, well they could quickly retreat behind their much tank-ier comrades and wait, or perhaps say dare the enemy to come and get them.

Because the lances the heavy cavalry members carried were no joke, those lightly armored men would be figuratively cleaved in two, man and horse.

The forces Matbar (Marquiss) Kyuam had sent were the best he had, and they would be able to match the standard of any well trained cavalry unit not in just Adhania, but in the whole world.

But even they when faced with this new and unorthodox technique they were stumped.

This current situation went against all their preconceived perceptions.

Because it was well understood not to mix heavy and light cavalry.

Because they did very different jobs.

One was quick and nimble, meant to tire the enemy by repeated stabs and jabs, while the other was heavy and bulky, meant to stand its ground and fight.

Mixing these two sounded like they would only get in each other's way.

And even Alexander was of that school of thought.

So he never mixed the two.

But now, here, under a very specific circumstance, these two seemingly contrasting units very organically fused together to form this perfect symbiosis of a phenomenon.

It was magical and while Menes rejoiced, many of the Matbar's (Marquiss) men cursed.

And hearing these words, many of the Zanzan cavalrymen had some thoughts.

And it was that thorough heavily accented, it sounded very much very were speaking Azhak, and not at all like Tibias's native tongue.

In fact, though Manuk's six thousand 6,000 infantry was very well hidden by its armor and the rest of the surrounding Tibian men, the cavalry were all Matbar (Marquiss) Kyuam's men.

Meaning they were all Adhanians.

And Menes's cavalymen fighting the enemy did find it weird just how similar these men seemed to their own.

Their looks, get up and the various small personal fashion choices they had on their clothes, such as the colors they wore, the distinctive designs they had, the way they had their hair done, or simply how they walked, the cavalymen did not know why, but these men all gave the aura of being from places near Zanzan.

Of course, immediately following this they felt absurd, for in their mind there was no way this made sense, since they were clearly fighting Tibians.

But still, they could not shake off that nagging feeling.

It was like how are you able to a fellow country men in around foreign land just from looking at his back, or you can which state someone is from just from the way he talks or behaves.

Of course in the modern world, due to the existence of rapid transportation and much intense intermingling of cultures, many such subtle differences between cultures have worn away.

But in Alexander's current time, even adjacent villages might have clear visual distinctions in many aspects of their life.

Of course, it also helped that the men were very obviously speaking Azhak, taunting and mocking many of the cavalymen as they attacked.

"Haha, you got nowhere to run."

"Fresh meat."

"Die! I already killed three."

"I will enjoy fucking your ass."

Though it was quite heavily accented, the Menes's men thought they were Tibians who had learned a few phrases and were trying to intimidate them.

Whereas the real reason for this discrepancy was that given that Zanzan was quite a mountainous region, traveling was quite hard, so without the cultural exchange, many areas developed their own independent version of Azhak.

And in doing so, some dialects became so twisted that they almost became their own language.

For a real life example of this, one only needed to look at the British Isles, which is relatively a small island, yet the amount of dialect and accents they managed to create is truly mind boggling and a testament to human creativity.

It feels like every town has its own way of pronouncing one or two specific words.

And so it was already a small miracle that a country as big as Adhania, spanning around 4 million sq kilometers still spoke the same language.

Or at least the root of the spoken dialects were the same.

And the sole reason that Alexander could think of why this would be was because of Ramuh's Holy Scriptures.

It had been written in standard Azhak, and the tens and hundreds of thousands of priests had helped propagate that version of the book every day of every year for centuries to all corners of the empire.

Due to that the people at least that some connection to the basic root of the language.

If not for that, Adhania might have simply become a patchwork of states with a king nominally at its head.

Indeed, religion would bring people together.

But anyway, since the cavalymen were in the middle of a literal war when facing these weirdly accented 'Tibians' they really could not just stop and ask to clear their doubts.

That would have been too convenient.

So they pushed such curiosities down, replacing it with the desire to triumph and survive, and kept on fighting.

And the cavalymen for their part mostly did well and were even able to push the enemy back quite a bit.

But alas!

This was perhaps the most insignificant part of the battlefield, with the lowest number of combatants.

Their results would not really be enough to turn the tide.

And so as the clock ticked on, the inevitable tide of the battle began to become clearer and clearer.

Perseus was able to maul to Menes very bloody and the black general felt his men reaching thier end point.

They had been under the dreadful spear tips of the enemy for literally hours, and though Menes had been able to constantly cycle new troops to the front, thus spreading out the fatigue, even that had its limits.

They might break soon.

Of course, Perseus's own phalangites were having no cake walk either.

As said earlier, the melee had been brutal, and these men had to earn each and every kill in enormous blood and sweat.

Menes and his officers made sure of that.

But even still, ultimately it were the phalangites that came out on top of the exchange no question about it, thus dashing Menes's hidden wish that the enemy would simply break from exhaustion.

'Time to call Melodias.'

'Time to call Petricuno.'

And seeing this, the two leaders almost simultaneously decided now was the time to play their trump card.

Chapter 807 Battle of Sissilpond Ridge (Part-4)

The brutal melee at the center raged on for hours with both sides cracking from the bloody engagement.

And as time passed these cracks spread and bloomed, with both sides taking huge casualties, until finally one side could not take it anyway.

The cracks on Menes's side had become too large to ignore.

So he at last sent word to Melodias, asking him to charge up the right side of the hill and swing around to flank Perseus, thus relieving the pressure off him.

"The enemy is weakened. Use your legionaries to hit them on the side and destroy these bulky formations." The instructions read.

And as Menes was giving this order, at the same time, sensing the same weakness in the Zanzan lines, Perseus sent word to Petricuno, informing him that the enemy was truly and well pinned down with little strength to struggle or run.

"Now is the time to hit him where it hurts and win us a great victory," The scout read out those exact words said by Perseus to Petricuno.

Thus by following the most logical path, both generals inadvertently played the exact card they had hidden at the same time.

This had happened also because due to the fog and heat of battle, neither side got a chance to get an exact number of the troops the other side had deployed, and so both thought that this was all they had.

Otherwise why would they endure for so long under such brutal condition?

Upon receiving Menes's word, Melodias, who already had everyone formed up, quickly blew the trumpet and shouted in large expletives, "Charge! Quick! Our sides needs help! Charge!"

By now most of the fog had dissipated and for the past few while, Melodias had been able to celery observe the fight on the top from the foot of the hill, and the scene filled him with great tension in his heart.

How could he see not how the tide of the battle was becoming more and more against them?

He had even sent multiple heralds to Menes if he should start coming up, but the black general rejected it, asking him to be patient for a bit longer.

"Not yet. I can still hold on. Let me tire the enemy out a bit more." He claimed.

Until finally he gave the order for Melodias to move.

And the clear weather meant the latter was able to quickly ascend up the hill, eager to assist his ally in battle.

While his counterpart on the opposite side, Petricuno was not so nimble.

The heavy phalangites wielding the much bigger and heavier sarissa were hardly Olympic sprinters, and the nature of their formation meant that for these units to be most effective, they needed to be bunched together.

So when a bunch of heavily armored men wielding deadly 4 to 5 meters spears were bunched up together and asked to move up a steep slope, well it was not wrong to say they moved at a snail's pace.

"Come on men! Faster! The enemy is gonna break any time. Do you want those lowly Tibian peasants to get all the glory?"

"Hurry! Move quickly. Or else the fight is going to be over."

"Spread apart! Spread apart!"

"There is no enemy. Spread apart and moving quickly."

And seeing the crawling speed, the ever impatient Petricuno ordered this.

He could never accept 'Alexander' being defeated without him even getting a single stab in.

That was the whole reason he was here.

This mercenary leader had learned quite a bit of Alexander's accomplishments in the past three years and each of the latter's achievements had set his heart burning with green flames.

He simply could not believe in three mere years the man had obtained powers beyond Petricuno's imagination.

Whereas he had managed to get a meager position as an ordinary citizen in a city state, he became a person surpassing in power even when compared to the most powerful senators of Cantagena.

Now, becoming a citizen of a city state like Cantagena was no small feat in itself.

It was the ultimate dream of many stateless people of this time, kind of similar to how many people dreamed of receiving a US or Canadian Green Card, though the former was a lot harder.

The superpower Cantagena had an enormous demand for its citizenship, but only limited space within its walls, not to mention the inherent racism.

So what Petricuno managed to do was certainly very impressive.

But when compared to Alexander's position as a Pasha, one who currently controlled around 100,000 sq km, the status of an ordinary citizen really could not hold any candle.

And what wounded the mercenary leader most was perhaps the fact that he knew he too could have become a lord if he had only swallowed his pride and taken that offer.

He too could have been like Menes, Melodias, and Menicus, lords with huge plots of land, a beautiful house to live in, fine food and drink to eat every day, and sexy servants to attend to all his whims and desires.

But he missed that opportunity, letting it slip right through his fingers.

All because he was too proud, too vain, too stupid to see the opportunity.

And given that that door had closed, Petricuno's heart turned crooked.

'If I cannot have it, then no one can.' The mercenary leader venomously ground his teeth as he swore.

And that is why he was really here to help Tibias.

To pull down Alexander from his high pedestal and show that he and him were not so different.

And for that to happen, Petricuno needed to join the fight currently raging on.

It would be of no use if 'Alexander' broke before he could come.

Then he would not be able to gloat.

Thus eschewing his own advice of keeping his phalanx units bunched up so that they do not scatter and open up gaps between themselves, in order to speed up the march, he did the opposite, allowing each formation to advance up the slope without having to worry about bumping into the unit next to them.

And this order did produce the intended result- the marching speed almost doubled.

But it was still not as quick as Melodias's who by now had already reached the top.

Up until now, both sides had been unaware of the other's presence as a slight fog still lingered along some parts of the hill, and the current ongoing battle and its clamor and din captured all the eyes.

So just imagine Melodias's surprise when he was about to turn to hit Perseus's right flanks when suddenly he laid his eyes upon what was coming up the other side of the hill.

Around twenty thousand, 20,000 heavily armored men wielding spears the size of which he had never seen before!

'What is that?' And for a moment, Melodias's heart became dry as a desert as all strength seemed to have left him.

Even a child could tell that if these men managed to join the fight, they were done for.

The only lucky break here for Melodias was that Petricuno was spread out, just like that time against Manuk, and Melodias decided to clutch at that chance with both hands and if he could even both feet.

His heart even danced joyfully at this sight, as a torrential flood of euphoria filled his shrunken heart, ballooning it to double its original size.

'You idiots. You still haven't figured out why we brought you here to fight? On this hilly ridge. Where the ground is so uneven. Hahaha.'

And then when he thought about it for a bit, Melodias found that it was indeed natural for the bulky phalanx units to be spread out and disorganized.

So he hastily ordered,

"Quick! Charge downhill!"

"\*Trumpet\*, \*Trumpet.\*"

"The enemy is still disorganized. Charge downhill when we still have the chance."

"\*Trumpet\*, \*Trumpet.\*"

And naturally, since Melodias could see the enemy, many officers could too.

Hence the 9,000 men and horses were instantly told to halt turning left to hit Perseus and instead redirected to charge thundering down the slope.

"Ahhh....."

"Advance!"

"Ready your pillas."

"Kill them all!"

Moments after Melodias's trumpet rang, many similar such signals waved past the nearly two legion worth of men and the orderly formation began a deadly swoop down the steep slopes of the hill, determined to catch the enemy off guards, as they shouted various threatening words and let out huge roars to pump themselves up for battle.

And then once the infantry started to advance down the slop and finally got close enough, they threw their pilla just like they practiced and pounced into the enemy, eager to destroy them.

But they did not attack head first.

Because that would have been suicidal.

When Petricuno's men noticed the blue wave of torrent slip down the slopes bee lining for them, these trained men did not simply panic and run, but instead instinctively halted and lowered their huge weapons, forming a very formidable spear wall.

If the legionaries were stupid enough to attack head on, these sarissas could very well become gigantic shish kebab sticks, with two or even three men at the end of each stick.

So it was fortunately for Melodias that his men had that survival instinct.

Chapter 808 Battle Of Sissilpond Ridge (Part-5)

Melodias's profusely thanked Gaia that the enemy commander had chosen to rush up the hill with his phalanx, thus presenting him with this once in a lifetime opportunity to win the battle.

And to capitalize it, he ordered his men to hit hard and hit fast, and to show no mercy.

Now, this thinking that had Petricuno not rushed up the slope and thus lost cohesion with his force, but instead had slowly approached with methodical precision the battle would have been over, was overly simplistic.

Because if the mercenary leader had indeed been too careful, his advance up the slope would have been really a crawl.

And that would have given Melodias ample time to spot and locate him.

Then he would have had options.

The simplest one- he could have charged down the hill and taken the fighting to them.

With the high ground on his side now, the legionaries would not have their movement restricted like Menes's, but instead, it would be Petricuno's men that would be suffering, unable to move freely for the risk of losing cohesion.

Hence even if the phalangites were bunched up together, the constant harassment and attacks from the nimble legionary formation would either cause them to finally lose their patience and chase after these units, thus dislodging and scattering them and opening up new opportunities for Melodias's men, or they could simply sit there like a duck and endure the hits and jabs directed at them, knowing it was only a matter of time they broke.

Of course, this would still be quite a risky move on Melodias's part, as Petricuno literally outnumbered him two to one.

So it was also highly possible that Petricuno would simply be able to muscle through the legionaries, absorbing the casualties nevertheless and simply drowning his enemy with sheer numbers.

Thus, instead, perhaps Melodias could have instead contemplated hitting Perseus's defenseless flank, hoping to rout the already tired men who had been fighting for hours before the slow Petricuno could catch up.

And if he was successful, then the newly relieved Menes could join forces with Melodias to conduct a two pronged attack on Petricuno, destroying the two separate armies one at a time individually.

Or lastly, Melodias seeing how the winds were blowing, might have decided to ask Menes to retreat from the battlefield, as he acted as rear guard to prevent Perseus from chasing them.

If that had happened, the battle would have turned into a tie, as the two men upon reaching the foot of the hill could have used to defenses around the camp to tire the enemy out, and then decided their next move.

Though it was more likely that the battle would not even go so far, as neither Perseus nor Petricuno would have wanted to go down that steep slope and expose their loose formations to a counterattack.

But for better or worse, the rivers of fate decided to forego all those possible streams.

Instead, the tributary that it chose to flow through was one where Petricuno was rash, and one where Melodias capitalized his chance for a deadly charge downhill.

And when the legionaries came in range, throwing their pallas to neutralize many of the shields of the phalangites, before swerving past their bristling pike to hit them on the sides, a terrible bloodbath began to bloom.

The heavier than usual sarissa wielding phalangites found themselves to be even more unwieldy than their regular counterpart, enabling the legionaries to freely attack them without the fear of retaliation leaving them with grievous wounds and producing devastating losses.

"Hold men! Hold"

"Turn around! Face the enemy"

"Join up! Join up with the nearest formation"

"Bunch together! Bunch together so that they cannot get in between you."

"Help your comrades! Go help them."

And facing these attacks, the officers commanding the phalanxes were unable to form a coherent strategy, with each giving his unit a command that he thought was the best but failing to take the overall situation into account.

All this meant that as each formation tried to do what they thought was best for them, many got in each other's way, sowing chaos and allowing Melodias to strike them in their most vulnerable places.

This way, even though Melodias was only half the size of his opponent, by picking out these individual units one at a time instead of facing the entire army at once, he managed to surround and eliminate many individual phalanx formations, making the mismatch spectacularly bloom.

Petricuno could see many of the individual units encircled and on the verge of collapse.

He knew that if these men ran, seeing their example a cascading avalanche would follow.

But even though he knew it, he did not seem to know how to stop it, while his subordinates came to him shouting as such,

"Commander! Retreat! We must retreat!"

"Captain, we are unable to hold. Send reinforcements."

"We have lost too many men. Many are starting to run. Help!"

Most of these pleas were from units placed at the very front echelons and in response to them, Petricuno at first told them to try and hold as he tried to gather those less unit affected in the rear to mount a comeback.

He was not going to lose to Alexander that easily.

And given the advantage he enjoyed in terms of the sheer relative mass of his army, it meant that although he found himself in a precarious position, the opposing general had been unable to deal the knockout blow to him.

Perhaps Petricuno could not turn the result around in a single stroke, but he could definitely try and slow or even stop the collapse.

And then perhaps even drag Melodias into a long grinding fight, preventing him from going to the aid of his partner on the other side.

If Petricuno could do that, it was very likely that Perseus would break Menes and the battle would be won.

The expert mercenary leader, even when facing such a dire situation did not lose heart and could accurately find his winning condition.

Though of course, it had to be said that none of this presumed tactic was guaranteed.

As always there were caveats.

For instance, it was unknown if the front lines could hold on until he could get the required forces ready as it was common knowledge that making an army do anything except advancing straight ahead was a major pain as the simple size of the organization made any complex maneuver painfully slow.

A fact that could not be more true more for Petricuno with the disadvantageous terrain, and his immovable phalangites.

So he would need quite a while to get ready.

And in the meantime, if those men in the frontlines ran, well it all be over before Petricuno could even begin.

Additionally, it was also unknown if Petricuno would be even allowed to gather a large enough, as the enemy commander, perhaps recognizing the build up might choose to send reserve contingents to break them up before they could become a threat.

And lastly it was even unknown if Petricuno simply had the ability to get all the men under his control.

After all, the active battlefield was quite large and his units haphazardly scattered in various directions.

To send accurate messages to them, have them turn according to his instructions and then link up needed impressive communication skills and a robust chain of command.

Something that Petricuno was certainly not blessed with.

After all, remember, just how hodgepodge of a forces his own native ten thousand 10,000 were.

lightsNovel Although he was nominally their leader, controlling five thousand, 5,000 men, the rest were a chaotic patchwork of various Thesian mercenaries and city state levies, all with their own command structures and thoughts.

These people might follow him into battle when things were looking up, but now that things had turned dire, all these small commanders should have only one phrase in their head- 'Every man for himself.'

Petricuno cursed each and every one of them by name thinking so.

But these were not his only concerns.

For aside from 8,000 men currently under him (2,000 of the peltasts were given to Perseus), there were also 6,000 Adhanians from Manuk and 2,000 of the mercenaries provided to them by the Kaiser Family.

These two factions certainly did things their way.

Who knew how they would react to Petricuno's order?

Who knew how much zeal they had in participating in this fight?

Who knew if they were thinking of simply cutting their losses and running?

Many such doubts swam in Petricuno's head as he pondered the dilemma.

But he would never get to find these answers.

Because he would be in fact one of the first ones to run!

For as he was in the midst of trying to patch his formation some way he could, a very simple message was delivered to him by a breathless messenger,

"Commander! Petretus! Petretus's unit is in trouble. Please send help!"

By itself, this was nothing new, as Petricuno had been inundated by similar requests for close to half an hour now.

But to the specific man, this was very special.

And the order he would give to rectify this could cause the rout of his entire wing.

Chapter 809 Battle Of Sissilpond Ridge (Part-6)

Petretus was Petricuno's favorite son and one who was supposed to succeed him as the leader of the mercenary group after his father's retirement.

So when the messenger came to him informing him of his son's precarious situation, the first thing Petricuno felt was an intense surge of regret.

But it was not upon hearing his son's predicament.

Instead, it was over the fact that when placing the units in the formation, he had chosen his personal group and even the most elites to be in the position of honor- at the very front, to act as the vanguard.

The reason back then had of course been so that he could claim credit for defeating Alexander, to be the first units to break the Zanzan lines and gain great wealth and glory for himself.

Something his men very much appreciated.

Furthermore, to lead them, he handed the very first echelon units to his son, to help him gain some free credit. while he himself, following Alexander's philosophy stayed at the back to better command the troop,

After all, at that time, in Petricuno's eyes, the battle was already over.

But now, that same decision had come back to bite him.

Since Melodias had launched his ferocious attack, it was only natural that the very front rows bore the greatest brunt of it, and it was not only Petricuno's son that was suffering, but it was also his mercenary group that was taking disproportionate damage, soaking sword hits for the benefit of other groups.

To any mercenary leader that would be unacceptable.

Petricuno was aware of this mismatch from the very beginning but had been willing to swallow them if it meant getting his most fervent desire fulfilled.

But now that even his son was in danger, the equations changed.

There was no way he could sit still and wait to gather his force, for the time that it would need would doom his progeny to death, and who knew how many of his treasured men.

That was something unacceptable to him.

"Send out the order."

"Those units at the back are to form a rear guard while the front retreats."

"And go tell His Majesty- 'The enemy's attack is too fierce! We cannot hold on. We are pulling back to the camp'."

To save his son's life, thus Petricuno officially gave the order to retreat without a second's thought!

"Yes!" And given the dreadful losses they were suffering, the messenger was more than happy to oblige.

\*Trumpet\*, \*Trumpet\*, \*Trumpet\*

Thus soon such blares began to float around Petricuno's side and knowing what this meant, many rejoiced as they broke rank and ran in all directions.

While others cursed Petricuno for his lack of spirit, 'Darn! We could have won if we had just held on. That coward!'

But given others were abandoning them, even these eager men soon found themselves running for the safety of their camp.

"Charge! Kill!"

"Chase them!"

"The camp! The enemy camp is free! Go!"

"They are running. Brothers come, let us take revenge!"

And naturally, when one side ran, the other side chased- that was the rule of wars during this time.

Thus, almost similar to how a dog would chase a tail, Melodias's men started to chase the fleeing enemy, or for those with a more keen eye, attempted to breach Perseus's camp and loot it.

Now, Petricuno had ordered a rear guard be formed to try and prevent this, to form a protective screen that would give fight to the legionaries in a delaying action that would prevent them from breaking rank and chasing after the other vulnerable escaping units.

But again, Petricuno was thwarted by a variety of reasons.

One was simply because he did not know who to assign that dangerous role.

The mishmash of so many different units from so many other places in his ranks meant that he was not intimately familiar with much of them, and could not effectively delegate.

It had to be known that a rear guard formation was a highly technical formation and was accompanied by much danger, for one needed to face a large number of units and pin them in place, preventing the enemy from dispersing and chasing after one's out of formation, vulnerable men.

Such an effort was usually accomplished by launching an aggressive attack to catch the enemy's attention and making them fear that their lines would snap if they did not defend otherwise.

And as it could be imagined, attacking an outnumbering foe while your own side was dispersing and running for their life was a challenging thing to do indeed.

One needed true discipline to simply not start running with the rest and instead truly believe in one's capabilities of holding on till everyone about retreated to start running.

But that would also now mean these few rear guards units would be at the forefront of the bristling enemy attack, facing an overwhelming number of possibly very angry men.

If the rear guard was unable to disengage properly or the enemy was really tenacious, many of them would die in the process.

Something that might be even more true here, as the rough ground would mean an almost impossible escape for those left behind.

But cruel as it may sound, that really was the point of the rear guard, to sacrifice a smaller part of the army so that the rest could live.

Though that also went to mean that such a task could not be given to anyone, for one needed very well trained men with the zeal and guts to die for their cause to hold these posts.

Petricuno had no shortage of the former- 'well trained men'.

Almost everyone under his command were professional soldiers with a whole lot of experience.

As for the latter- 'men with the zeal and guts to die for their cause', well that was a lot harder to come by.

None of the men under Petricuno were native Tibians and really had no real attachment to the result of the battle.

Sure, they would like to battle, but most were not willing to die for it.

This way- 'What the men had in competency, they made up for by their lack of will and their profound love for life.'

Thus a rear guard never formed.

Besides, in reality, Petricuno never really had a chance to form a rear guard.

Because the order had been too sudden.

There was no way a sizable number of the slow phalangites would have been able to come together in that short time.

And if they could have, Petricuno would have already sent them to help relieve his son.

Thus it could even be argued that Petricuno never really wanted to form a rear guard but only gave the order so that official records show that such an order had indeed been issued.

All so that he could absolve himself of any responsibility and ensure that he had a face to show to Perseus.

'Before the retreat, I ordered a rear guard formation. But the men were too cowardly and ran. I tried my best' Petricuno already had his excuse ready.

The man might have his flaws, but he was no idiot when it came to battlefield politics.

But whatever the reason behind the collapse of Petricuno's wing, be it due to Petricuno's personal incompetence or simply Melodias's attack being too fierce and causing the positions to be overrun, the result was the same.

It was like the floodgates had been torn open and the men on both sides burst into the open field, chasing and running after one another like madmen.

Petricuno's side on the ridge soon devolved into a chaotic swirl of red and blue.

And with that, the help that Perseus had sought in order to deliver a decisive killing blow to Menes dissipated.

Laying witness to all this from the back of his army and seeing half his literally shattered, Perseus surprisingly did not despair!

No, such was the nerve and insight of the experienced king.

For in his mind, he thought he could still win!

Because by his calculation, the battle had reached a stalemate.

lightsNovel And how did he come to this ridiculous conclusion you ask?

Well according to him, the enemy had won on his right side but if he could break the enemy on his left and win, the battle might still end up in his favor.

Because remember- a tie would still be a victory for him.

He was the defender and as long as the enemy could not attack him anymore, even if he lost his army, he would still win.

"Attack! The enemy has been defeated on your right. He has no more reinforcements! Attack! Their lines are crumbling."

Hence Perseus, embellishing the truth not just a little bit but literally turning black to white, actually urged his men to fight men harder,

And because everything that was going on was happening behind these men, in the heat of the battle, these phalangites had no time to turn back to see the actual situation.

Thus instead of feeling downcast, bolstered by their king's words actually started to fight harder, feeling the fight was nearing its end, with victory in sight.

This put Menes's already frayed lines under far more pressure and somehow, in a twisted way, Melodias's victory actually hurt Menes.

And Perseus's wish for a tie appeared to be coming closer and closer to coming true.

Chapter 810 Battle Of Sissilpond Ridge (Part-7)

Upon learning of the 'enemy's defeat', Perseus's men felt their morale surge and the pressure on Menes subsequently increased, threatening to destroy his already fragile lines soon.

Thus in a twisted way, Melodias's victory actually hurt Menes.

And seeing this, Menes truly did not know how to react.

When he had first seen that huge army, like Melodias he too had panicked.

And then seeing how the man's quick thinking was able to destroy an army twice his size and so effortlessly at that, he should have been cheering like crazy.

It was a result that should have been a dream come true.

But somehow, that great result in a twisted way caused great pain for Menes.

What misfortune!

And ultimately the fatigued general could do little but hold on, telling his men that Melodias was on his way.

And some of the legionaries could indeed peek at some brief flashes of blue in front of them, and so rallied, feeling that help was just on the way.

Their morale strengthened, they locked shields and held on for dear life with clenched teeth.

However as time went on, that feeling of optimism on their part began to wane, for that ocean of blue never materialized.

For Melodias's unruly levies, thinking the battle was over, began to chase after loot and booty in Perseus's camp.

"Haha, kill!"

"Shoot! Do not let them escape."

"They are ours. Capture them."

"The camp! The camp doors are open! Come, brothers!"

"Women! There are beautiful women there."

"Hahaha, Daddy is gonna teach these girls what a real man feels like."

Groups of cavalry chased after the running phalangites- slashing, stabbing, and jabbing them at every opportunity.

Though surprisingly this proved to be not so easy, as the men who had shed their shields and threw their heavy sarissas proved to be quite hard to catch, especially since the uneven grounds were hard to traverse for the heavy Zanzan cavalry.

So many were limited to chasing them at speeds that only netted them a few kills, only able to claim the unlucky few right in the vicinity.

Or for the lucky one, surrounding a small group of Petricuno's men and barking such,

"Lay down. Throw away any weapons."

"Hands above your head! Hands above your head and you will be spared."

"Tie them! Quickly tie them!"

It was this way that many of the fleeing Thesians and Adhanians were captured.

But due to the terrain, and limited number of cavalry, a majority of the 16,000 to 17,000 men escaped into the woods or the camp.

Though the latter, which would have at any other time been a fierce stronghold, now proved to be a death trap.

Because the now bulkier legionaries, after finding out they really could not chase after their nimble foes in this rough terrain, decided to change target.

They chose Perseus's camp!

This camp was actually structurally not bad, with two meter high fenced walls, constructed of wooden logs with spiky points at the top, supplemented by a few watchtowers and even a nearby ditch.

It was pretty defensible, able to ward off even large scale attacks if properly defended.

But the pickle was that- if defended.

For even such good defenses were of no use if there was no one to guard it.

Even a formidable star fortress was just as good at defending itself as an open fishing hamlet if left abandoned.

And since Perseus had taken almost everyone out to fight, the doors to his riches lay wide open.

So the soldiers were easily able to grab the wood and climb up it like they were climbing a tree, the spikes at the top simply hacked away by the swords and axes the legionaries carried with them.

Thus soon around a legion's worth of men- 6,000 of them were inside the camp- looting, killing, burning and taking women as they pleased.

Perseus did not bring a lot of gold cold with him, because he did not have much, but that did not stop the soldiers from taking whatever there was.

For instance, in Tibias, both men and women liked to wear ornaments, and thus many tents had numerous such trinkets- rings, bracelets, bangles, etc.

Of course, given these belonged to poor peasants, these were nothing precious nor were their quantity voluminous, but for those peasant levies of Melodias, even a simple silver ring was worth fighting for.

Aside from the easiest loot, there were also plenty of food stocks in the camp, and though the soldiers could not take the granary for themselves, they did take control of it, knowing parts of it would be given to them as booty.

There were also precious items like smoked meat and fish, or eggs, which they tried to pocket or eat right there.

Yes- the eggs too.

Of course no one took the time to cook that delicate thing, but simply cracked it open and drowned the yellow and white mixture raw.

For these battle crazed men, it tasted heavenly.

And lastly in the food section, for those that were lucky enough to raid the tents of the officers and nobles, they got to taste the fine wines many of them had brought with them, drinking themselves silly.

Alongside the food, there were various draft animals like mules, oxen, and donkeys in the camp that the soldiers took ownership of, killing many of the handlers who tried to resist.

Lastly, and perhaps the most alluring of all to the legionaries, there were the women and for some, even the male servants and slaves there to be enjoyed, as well as the pleasure women hired for the soldiers.

And most tragically were the family members that many of the mercenaries had brought with them on this long journey, maybe not the entirety, but a beautiful concubine to warm the bed during the tedious journey, or a loving wife or a cherished daughter to help with the camp chores or even a son who come to learn the ropes of warfare with his father but was too young to join the battle for himself.

Many such innocents were forcibly taken, and if anyone tried to stop them, killed, as the related mercenaries seeing their women's fate howled in pain and anguish.

It was a vicious cycle, where if the side to lose were the Zanzanians, it would be they who would be crying in pain, while the mercenaries would be cackling in delight like the legionaries were now.

Thus the red uniformed men who came to take refuge in the camp were killed and their spoils taken.

Now one might ask about the one thousand 1,000 men and the 12 war elephants that Perseus had left behind with Manuk as reserves as well as to guard the camp.

Where were they?

Did they simply die?

But that would have at least produced some sound.

Did they not defend the camp?

Because if they had used the camp's defenses, the 6,000 legionaries would not have found the place so easy to breach.

So given the current development, it was not unreasonable to think they had most likely fled.

But no!

Manuk would not flee.

At least not without Perseus, for he knew the king's importance.

Thus currently the man was actually charging up the hill, shouting,

"Quick! His Majesty needs our rescue. Hurry! Move those feet faster."

The bald man had seen the apparent disintegration of Petricuno's force with a kind of schadenfreude look, both feeling good at having his prediction come true, but also sighing in dismay at the defeat of his forces.

Their outnumbering force should have been easily able to win this battle, but impatience and hubris had squandered that.

Now, the best that they would be able to reasonably achieve was a tie.

It was with that thought that Manuk raced up the now clear slopes, the elephants leading the charge, hoping to snap Menes finally in two, but even that beautiful scenery produced little comfort for the archpriest.

Perhaps he would be able to deal a devastating blow to Alexander and cripple him, preventing the ambitious lord from launching any more offensive attacks and taking more grounds.

But holding onto much of the gains he made should still be quite possible.

After all, Perseus himself had almost no men left to conscript, and it was unknown how much the foreign powers would be willing to aid him, especially given the destruction on Petricuno's side meant many of the soldiers these powers sent were either lost, killed or would need significant time to return to their base.

Many might even refuse to fight and ask for their coin and leave.

And then, after all, perhaps Perseus and Alexander would sign a peace deal.

Manuk did know the Tibian court had already sent out peace feelers.

And a peace treaty between the two powers was definitely not beneficial for his cause, as it would free Alexander to pursue fighting on other fronts.

But what could he do?

Things had developed into such a quagmire state and he could only will his tiny force to go to the royal's aid as soon as possible.

But unfortunately for Perseus, help was not only due for him, for soon Manuk spotted a small contingent of blue beelining for the exact position he was heading!