

Herald 811

Chapter 811 Battle Of Sissilpond Ridge (Part-8)

After seeing the boastful mercenary leader Petricuno's dreadful performance and the almost instant annihilation of his army, Manuk had moved his army out of the camp, abandoning it, and instead instructed them to charge towards Perseus, intending to land a helping hand.

But though he was willing to undertake such an endeavor, that did not mean he was willing to do so with a cheerful heart.

He even half cursed,

"Darm idiot. I held your leg begging you not to give battle. And now I have to hold your leg and drag you back to safety."

"I already have one ass I regularly need to clean. I do not need another one."

But as he was muttering so under his breath, out of the corner of his eye, the man soon caught off a glint of blue, and turning around he noticed a line of men neatly organizing themselves into an orderly formation, in much contrast to the rest of the chaotic field of red and blue, and seemed ready to charge towards a destination ready to fight as a coherent force.

The direction of that destination- seemingly the same as Manuk's!

The priest was left in no doubt as to where these men wanted to attack and knew when they reached it, their intentions were completely different from his.

Whereas he wanted to aid the king there, those men wanted nothing more than to put that very man's head on a halberd.

And seeing so, the man's heart jumped and he wanted nothing more than to urge his men to spread apart and march faster, just like Petricuno had done.

But he did not!

Ultimately, learning from Petricuno he soothed his heart and calmed down, reciting the mantra-

'I'm better arriving late than never'.

So keeping his formation bunched up as it were and not giving those Zanzan reinforcements any chance to take advantage, he slowly proceeded at his own pace, with the elephants slowly leading the way and the expert mercenaries following close close.

His only consolation about the whole affair was that he had started far sooner than his opponent and the pious priest prayed to Ramuh that that head start would be enough to reach Perseus before the far nimbler legionnaires.

But who were those clever legionnaires who had the discipline and calm state of mind to forgo all the shiny loot and rejoin the deadly battle in aid of their general?

Well, it was a group of around 2,000 men led by Remus!

When Petricuno's army was broken and the mad dash for gold, women, and slaves began, Remus, who was second in command to Melodias and fighting right near the front line to boost morale, suddenly had a flashback.

His mind raced back to that night, to that battle against Lord Ponticus.

It reminded him that after smashing into Lord Ponticus's flanks and destroying his contingent, the forces Remus had seemingly dissipated into thin air as the unruly men chaotically ran across the battlefield in search of battlefield glory, leaving Melodias to face Lord Theony on his own, thus rendering the advantage they had gained in that engagement fully uncaptialized.

It was a great loss.

And Alxx had even brought that up in his post battle analysis, something that most powers did and in that, though he did not chastise Remus for letting this happen, he certainly urged him to pay more attention to similar things in the future.

'In the future' as in now.

"*Trumpet!* *Trumpet!*" Hence, refusing to commit the same mistake twice, Remus almost instinctively took out his horn and blew, attracting all nearby ears towards him as he then shouted,

"Brothers! The battle is still not over. The battle is still not over. Do not shatter."

"General Menes still needs our help. We must go rescue him,"

As he said this, he pointed towards the left side of the ridge which still had more than 40,000 men fighting to the death,

"Look! The enemy's defenseless backs are right open to us. They are laughing at such for not attacking them."

"Let us charge brothers. For glory! For victory! For Lord Alxx!"

Remus raised his strong arm into the air, swinging it wildly.

"Hahaaaa!" And his call was answered by numerous men.

Remus was a grassroots officer who was held great respect and reverence in the army, for a variety of reasons.

lightsNovel His youth, his tactical genius, the fact that he was in nickname terms with the lord of the land, and his natural talent for giving speeches and convincing people all contributed significantly to his popularity.

But perhaps most importantly, it was his personal charisma that gravitated people towards him.

And surprisingly, that last one came not due to an insignificant side effect of a particular habit of Remus, which was that he liked to sleep with many of the soldiers in the army, be they of any rank, for his tastes were as varied as adventurous.

And this was something that Alxx very much disapproved of- not because of the act itself since such practices were common, but more so because such a thing between soldiers posed the risk of blooming into something more, which could lead a commander into making decisions not optimum for the army.

The clear evidence of this was present in this battle itself when Petricuno ordered a premature retreat based on his son's safety.

But anyway, such foibles aside, Remus was indeed a very talented commander and leader, and hearing his speech and trumpet, around four battalions (2,000) of men stopped their chase of the fleeing enemy and relinquishing that loot, instead started to turn around in an anticlockwise direction until they were 180 degrees, and could stare straight into Perseus's defenseless nape, like a ferocious tiger ready to pounce onto it.

"*Trumpet*" And once they were ready, Remus had nothing more to say except blow the horn to advance.

And as he did, like his counterpart had, he too noticed Manuk and found the latter to be actually leading him, though not by much.

Initially, he was surprised by this contingent of men, as he did not think the Tibians had any reserves to throw.

And then for a moment, another greedy thought invaded his mind- to attack that small, roundabout 1,000 man force, surrounding and destroying them.

A thought further sweetened by the fact they had 12 gigantic elephants with them.

Those were delicious prizes, the ripest anyone could ask for and if Remus could capture them, it would be an enormous accomplishment on his part.

To say that the nineteen year old was not tempted would be a great lie.

But then rationality returned to his head, overruling his heart.

Killing those 1,000 men might be a great personal achievement, but it would not help him win the battle.

As a matter of fact, if he got bogged down fighting there, it might even lose him the battle as Menes would likely snap before Perseus did.

The general might even be killed in the subsequent rout.

So ignoring the juicy prey ahead, Remus only urged his men to march faster, wanting to hit the enemy's defenseless back before reinforcements could arrive.

And though this was undoubtedly the correct move to make under the circumstances, if Alexander was here, if he knew who was leading those 1,000 reinforcements, and if he was a prophet, he would have certainly chastised Remus for not killing Manuk when he had the chance.

But such magic did not exist in this world, and thus Remus only followed the most logical path, trying to cut off Manuk before he could snap Menes.

Unfortunately for Remus, even the fast foot of the legionaries were unable to catch up to Manuk who had gotten a significant start.

But frontal for him, the priest did not actually join the fight.

Instead, driving his horse right next to the currently barking king, who even now kept on urging his men to keep fighting, Manuk shouted,

"Your Majesty! Retreat! Sound the horn and retreat!"

The arrival of this familiar yet unwelcome face caused the king to suddenly pause, while his nearby bodyguards glared, making it very clear Manuk was not welcomed.

But an instant later, upon seeing the men he had brought, PR's sour, annoyed face melted away as the king flashed a victorious smile,

"Esteemed Enovy! Lord Manuk! You are here! You brought the troops! Great! Great"

Each and every one of his phrases had expletives that out pitched its predecessor, and Perseus looked at Manuk like his long lost lover, his eyes twinkling in delight, his face filled with fighting zeal.

To Perseus, it seemed Menes was that one straw he would need to break the back of the camel called Zanzan.

And facing such an overly familiar address, rather than being put off by Perseus's ingratiating tone, Manuk actually groaned with incredulation, 'He is not going to keep fighting is he?'

He could not believe the balls of this man.

Half of his army was destroyed, his camp was being raided, his own men had been fighting for hours, and a force of 1,000 to 2,000 was coming to outflank him, and he seemed to still fight.

But perhaps that's why Perseus was known as a great warrior king.

However this time, this king needed to face reality, as Manuk shouted, "Your Majesty! Now is not the time to fight. A large contingent of the enemy is coming to hit us in the flanks."

"Give the order to retreat. I will command the rear guard."

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The king upon seeing Manuk's arrival felt his spirits soar as he thought, 'Ancestors bless me! I have not lost their favor yet!'

For he then wanted to immediately send the fresh 1,000 troops into the frontlines to join the fray and win the battle for him once and for all.

And as the king cheerfully expressed such a desire, the vehemently opposed Manuk cried out in alarm,

"Your Majesty, this battle is not something we are likely to win. The enemy in front of us are still holding on and there are 2,000 men aiming to strike us from behind any time."

"Please let us retreat while the door is still open."

"The thousand men I brought will be enough to act as a rear for a while, so if you give the order right now, we can still save most of the army."

"Do not dally Your Majesty, let us go before the soldiers become too tired." Manuk's face was flushed, his eyes burning his impatience, while his heart actually filled with bitterness.

For upon learning of Perseus's eagerness to still fight, Manuk felt a mixture of incredulation and regret wash over him, as he could not believe he had risked his life up the slopes to save an idiot like this.

Even when the door of life was imminently close to disappearing in front of them and the scythe wielding death was starting to manifest itself, this delusional, battle crazed king still wanted to fight.

And seeing this, even Manuk, who was not a man lacking in colorful experiences, was stunned.

A feeling that was soon compounded as upon hearing Manuk's emphatic plea, Perseus surprisingly did not share the same urgency.

Simply cocking his head to look the approaching Remus, he turned to Manuk and in a simple but dignified manner first pronounced,

"Esteemed Envoy Manuk. 'We' are very happy, even grateful to you for all that you have done up until now."

Perseus used the royal 'we' that he rarely used since it always sounded grammatically wrong to him, as he continued,

"We also appreciate the fact that you could have easily left the battlefield like the others around the camp, but chose to brave the many obvious dangers on the way just to come to 'Our' aid."

"That must have taken no small courage."

"Without you here, 'We' truly would have lost my kingdom."

"We recall that when you came to Us initially, We may have not received you with the utmost courtesy. And for that, I apologize."

Perseus sounded very sincere and courteous, though he did cleverly switch the last pronoun to indicate that it was Perseus- the individual person who was apologizing, not the king.

Because a king never apologized- that was almost an ironclad rule.

Not only because that would be too demeaning, but because a king was above everyone else, a physical manifestation of his people and country, a supreme guardian entrusted to lead the lands by some kind of higher power- be it the gods, ancestor spirits, heavens, fate, etc.

But right now, Manuk was not bothered by such petty wordplays.

The man had been part of one of the most ruthless royal courts in the whole world almost since the time he was weaned, and what kind of tricks had he not seen?

Not to mention he had managed to survive under the 'Mad King' even when many of his betters did not.

So he put Perseus's dressed insincere words through one ear and threw it in the trash can the moment it left the other one.

Instead, he was far more alarmed by where he thought this talk was going.

Because the man recognized the pattern,

And to the priest's dismay, his prediction came true, for Perseus then suddenly his tone changed, into an authoritative figure as he addressed Manuk like an officer ordering his subordinate,

"But I hope you will still remember your position, Sir."

"You are not the military commander here. You hold no position. Even the 1,000 men you have under your command is something that I gave you temporarily."

"Do not tell me what to do with my army! You have no idea of the stakes!" Perseus declared with a will as strong as steel, his voice sounding like sharp nails, as he glared down at Manuk.

"..." Manuk only pursed his lips, more annoyed than intimidated.

Naturally, how could a king of a tiny nation strike fear into the second hand man of a lord, who, even in his diminished state ruled over territory magnitudes greater

And seeing Manuk's placid, silent response, Perseus felt a bit defeated at being unable to establish authority, before exhaling with an audible emphasis, and then lastly revealing, "I thank you for bringing the 1,000 men, Lord Manuk."

"I'll be sure to remember your great accomplishment in this victory."

"But now...."

Saying so Perseus then turned to look at one of his officers and then unceremoniously dismissed Manuk from his commander, as he stated,

"Zephir, you take over the troop from the envoy. He must be tired."

"Go hold off that flanking force. Fighting that large enemy will not be easy, but I know you can do it."

"Do not let the enemy breakthrough." Perseus patted a large, black man on the shoulder as he said, his face solemn but lips curved into a smile, happy at the thought of the imminent victory.

While the man, who due to the exhaustion of having been fighting for so long, had sweat running all over him like a river, greatly nodded and enthusiastically grinned,

"Rest assured Your Majesty. This Zephir swears he will hold the enemy back as long as it takes or die trying,"

"The elephants and mercenaries are so formidable, I could even face 20,000 men and not break, haha."

If there was one skill this 'Zephir' had for sure, it was boasting, and boasting to absurd levels it seems.

"Good! Good!" Hearing the spirited reply, Perseus showed his pleasure by repeatedly slapping the man on the shoulder, and then finished by promising,

"You will not need to do it for long. My men will be able to break these lines in less than half an hour. Just hold on till then. Now go!"

"Yes!" And since time was of the essence, the black officer immediately saluted and whirling his horse around started to order the thousand to their doom.

And it was their doom no doubt about it, as no matter how nicely Perseus wrapped up the situation, asking the men to hold a force twice their size on a terrain such as this using a phalanx formation was basically asking him to die.

This was not even a suicide mission, because in a suicide mission soldiers were not 'expected' to survive.

But here, they were 'not going' to survive.

While, Manuk the outsider, observed all this with muted silence for he understood his role in this play had already been terminated, though Perseus, after seeing Zephir off, did turn to face the man and grandly declared this with a large smile,

"Envoy Manuk... once we win this battle, your contributions will not be forgotten. From today on Tibias and Adhania will be the staunchest of allies."

Perseus was worried that Manuk might feel slighted at being so unceremoniously dismissed from his command, especially when he took such a high risk getting here as well as the fact it was these 1,000 men that could be argued at having been the trump card Perseus needed to win the war.

Thus the promise he made, which really meant that he was agreeing to the alliance proposal Manuk had brought, one whose main highlight was a clause about mutual defense.

Attacking one meant attacking the other- an exact copy of modern day NATO's Article 4.

While Manuk hearing the declaration, instead of being happy actually had second thoughts.

He might have jumped in happiness even a few minutes before, but now, after seeing Perseus's true color and fatal flaws in his personality he was not so sure.

'A defensive pack with this man might be more hassle than it's worth.' The priest's eyes flashed a chilly light as he pondered, while his gaze wandered towards Perseus's legs, around the satchel that was hanging off the saddle.

For there was a large, golden horn nestled within.

Blowing it once meant to advance and blowing it a second time meant retreat.

And Perseus had already blown on it at the start of the battle to commence the fight.

Yes!

Manuk was thinking the unthinkable.

To snatch that horn and blow it himself.

Because there was no way he was going to risk his life by getting caught up in Perseus's lunatic fantasy.

For if Zephir broke before Menes did, Manuk would bet all his money that the commander leading that contingent of 2,000 men was not going to hit the phalanx in the back just anywhere but choose to hit the nerve center of the enemy army.

Because that nerve center, aka- the place where the king was standing was very prominent, with everyone around wearing vibrantly colored armor and most importantly, the king's gigantic standard standing tall and proud around it, intentionally done so that the soldiers knew their king was with them.

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The reason why Perseus's surrounding was so gaudily decorated was of course very intentional, for it was to reassure the soldiers that their king was still with them.

But unfortunately, that also had the side effect of also letting the enemy know that the king was with his soldiers.

So unless Remus was completely blind, there was no way he was going to miss such a juicy target that was visible for miles.

And indeed he was trying to beeline his troops towards that small group.

Something that all the busy and delusional men around Perseus missed.

So being the only one with a working brain who could clearly see Zaphir would never be able to hold the 2,000 legionaries and they were all soon about to be cut to pieces- Manuk made up his mind.

He was going to do that.

And once the thought was cemented, he slowly approached Perseus, getting real close to him, and very intentionally positioning his horse right next to that prized satchel, as he then with a smile, cheerfully chucked,

"Hahaha, thank you, Your Majesty. With this agreement both your sides with surely prosper."

Here Manuk was of course referring to Perseus agreeing to the defensive alliance.

Up until now, Perseus had received and swallowed all the gifts Manuk had given him, but neither gave a yes or no, only asking Manuk for more time claiming he needed to think.

The reason why Perseus was hesitant for so long was because he was aware that Adhania was in a civil war and Amenheraft being attacked was not an if but a when.

And he did not want to get dragged into a war that he had no part or interest in due to this defense treaty.

He was in no shape to fight another man's war.

But now, seeing the result of the battle and knowing what lay in store for him, even if he won, Perseus knew he had little other choice than to seek help.

He needed a strong bodyguard like Amenheraft to protect him in his weakened state that was scheduled to last for years and though he would far prefer to lie with other powers, most preferably from Thesos, they sent no such envoys and Perseus knew from his long interactions with them that he was unlikely to get any even if he sent messengers.

So true to the phrase- 'Beggars cannot be choosers', Perseus decided to make bed with the man claiming to be the real king of Adhania.

"Haha, yes, I thought it was time I gave you an answer, Envoy Manuk." Seeing Manuk was not peeved about his abrupt dismissal, Perseus too flashed a cheerful smile, and to further smooth over the rough edges, he added,

"I too believe that this alliance will bring out realms together. Hahaha"

"Hmmm. Hmmm." To the reply, Manuk too showed his enthusiasm by heavily nodding his head, though his mind was really preoccupied with the sight of that horn.

And then he gave Perseus one last chance before he committed this great act of folly, "Will Your Majesty not reconsider retreating? There is still time. Next time we will have 10,000 more men. Next time we will have a better chance of winning."

But the moment he said this, the amicable atmosphere between the two men that had formed just now shattered like thin glass.

Perseus's face hardened like granite and with a fiery stoic voice shouted, "We have already lost 10,000 men in this battle!"

"The enemy will also soon get 10,000 reinforcements just like Petricuno said. So what use will those 10,000 men be?"

Following so he snarled,

"Do not tell me what to do with my army Manuk! I must win this battle, for my country, for my ancestor, for myself."

"Got away!"

Perseus's face by now had turned almost unrecognizable due to the anger as he widely swung his arm to dismiss the man.

While Manuk seeing so pursed his lips and produced a helpless sigh, muttering almost to himself, "Well that is unfortunate."

And then it happened.

Suddenly, as Perseus was seething at the sight of his military decision being questioned, Manuk lunged his large arms towards the horn placed in the satchel at Perseus's feet and,

"Voila!"

He got it- The battle horn that he had eyeing for so long!

It was his.

And surprisingly, since no one was expecting such a thing to happen, it was very easy to get.

The item, being an intimate possession of the king, a king that very much liked to go to war, it went without saying that it was a masterpiece to behold.

The golden colored instrument was large and heavy, made from a huge bull to commemorate the Tibian ancestors.

It was exquisitely carved, and ornamented with supplementary cuts of precious wood, and decorated with various studded jewels and pearls.

For the Tibians, this horn was simply not an instrument, but a divine vessel carrying the blessing of their original ancestor, one that would bring them good luck on the battlefield.

And now Manuk had it, having obtained which he started to bolt away from Perseus as fast as his horse would carry him.

And seeing an outsider snatch this precious artifact, something that was even religious in nature, the amount of anger Perseus felt at the moment could be imagined.

"What!" For a brief second, Perseus was stunned with silence, even producing an insane voice he did not know he had,

"Priest Manuk have you gone insane! Give it back!" Then he roared like a madman, before turning to his bodyguards and viciously shouting,

"What are you imbeciles gawking at? Go get it back! Go kill him and get back the War Horn!"

Attentuated by the pressure of the battle he had been under for so long, this act made Perseus give the brutal command to kill another country's emissary.

Normally this would be an extremely unwise move.

But then again, what Manuk had done was indeed worth such a response.

In fact, the fate of thieves stealing such a valuable thing might not only be a swift death.

Hence hearing their king's will as well as feeling indignant at themselves for letting this happen, the five men around Perseus all willed their horses to start galloping, attempting to give chase towards the thief.

"Do not come! Or I will blow this! And your lines will disintegrate!"

But just before Perseus's trained warrior could start running to hack the bald priest to bit, the man loudly threatened such, placing his mouth on the trumpet and mimicking the act.

A move that worked very well in persuading the attackers, for all the bodyguards, being expert soldiers themselves, knew exactly what would happen if the men heard the distinct booming sound of the trumpet.

There was no way they were going to mistake that sound for anything else, and being themselves under attack for so long, and many even witnessing the collapse of their right wing, it would only be natural for them to assume the fight was over.

"Manuk!" And Hearing this, Perseus dropped all the honorific suffixes and boomed, cursing, "You traitor. I knew you were a snake sent by Adhania. So this is why you came here. To steal our horn. To think I trusted you."

"Kill them! Kill them all!" Perseus madly screamed as then pointed to the seven bodyguards Manuk was hiding behind, who by now had formed a defensive ring around their priest.

These men came with Manuk as his protectors and even when outnumbered to more than a hundred to one, none of them displayed an ounce of fear.

Being fanatical zealots they had no qualms about dying right here, right now.

While the other set of bodyguards, even getting such a clear set of instructions from their king, were far more hesitant and held back their deadly charge.

But not because they were any less zealous.

But for the very simple reason that Manuk still had his lips on the horn.

Unless they could accurately hit the arrow through the ring of men right into Manuk's throat or head, Manuk would likely die before he could let his pipes sing, disintegrating the lines and putting 20,000 men up for death or enslavement.

Hits to the chest or even the heart would not work, for arrows were not bullets after all.

And besides, many of the bodyguards paused because they understood Perseus claiming Manuk was a spy really did not hold water if one thought about it for even a second.

Simply stealing the battle horn was hardly worth so much effort and if Manuk wanted Perseus to lose, he would have simply left the king to fend for himself while he retreated with the 1,000 men.

Why put himself in so much harm's way?

"Traitor? You idiot! I wish I had the luxury to betray someone as imbecilic as you. If you are not such a vital strategic piece, I would have stabbed you myself."

Manuk also, having finally had enough, at last raised his voice from behind the curtain of men, and it was one of utmost annoyance, as he vented his frustration, before making his demand,

"Now you stupid king, listen! We are gonna retreat and you are going to give the order. Now!"

Chapter 814 Battle Of Sissilpond Ridge (End)

Manuk's plan was indeed this.

To use the threat of making Perseus's lines disappear to force the king to reconsider.

lightsNovel "Yo... you..." And upon hearing Manuk's demand, Perseus felt a mixture of emotions he had simply forgotten existed.

As a king, he certainly had never been threatened like this.

So the man simply ignored much of Manuk's insults and preoccupied more of his mind with what he was being asked to do.

If he did that they would surely lose.

So why?

To Perseus, Manuk's action made no sense.

But the priest by now was way past explaining anything to Perseus.

Talks had failed long ago, and now it was time for forceful action.

So Manuk ignored the enraged look on the king and proceeded.

"I will count to a hundred. By that time, Zaphir, you," Manuk turned to address the man who was surreptitiously attempting to sneak attack Manuk from the back, but froze the moment Manuk called his name out, as he then heard the envoy say, "You organize the 1,000 men into a rear guard formation."

"All the infantry will guard the front."

"And tell the mahouts to take their 12 elephants and charge the flanking force. That's all they need to do. Just charge and then they can escape."

"Go! Do it now!"

Manuk shouted the simple battle plan he had managed to think up, and the black man, after a bit of hesitation as he turned to look at Perseus for his thoughts on the matter but received nothing, ultimately decided to follow the demand.

And as this defense was being hastily prepared, Manuk quickly turned to Perseus to dictate, "And you! Send messengers to the officers informing them we are retreating. This battle cannot be won. We are going to run."

"And do not think about asking them to ignore the sound of the horn. I know a lot of soldiers will still run the moment they hear the horn."

"Now quick! Remember, you have only 100 breaths!"

Becoming aware of Manuk's ask, Perseus had an incredulous feeling in his heart, as he encountered a couple of things he never felt in his life all at once.

Nobody had addressed him as 'you' before and he never even thought such a scenario where his entire army would be held like this was even possible, much less predict it.

"Ma... nuk.. You!" Hence he could only wrathfully growl.

But he ultimately did what he was told, fiercely swinging his arm and sending messengers as fast he could, while at the same time also swearing to himself- 'I will butcher this dog the second I get the chance. Darm Amenheraft! Darm Adhania.'

What Manuk had done was basically tear apart the entirety of the fragile goodwill he himself had so painstakingly nurtured, and by forcing Perseus to lose a battle that he in his mind thought he could win, there really was no way for these two sides, who already had so much bitter acrimony between them to ever truly reconcile.

But then why had Manuk done that?

Could he not see the result?

Did Manuk think that if he helped Perseus win the next battle it would all be forgiven and forgotten?

But did he not realize that Perseus might not want to ally with him till the next battle?

Would it not have been better to instead let Perseus do his thing?

That way, if he succeeded, then good.

But if he failed, well without any army, the man would be even more dependent on Adhania, would he not?

Well if you asked Manuk directly as to the reason, he might have snarkily remarked, "Heh! If His Majesty was to tie his foot with this clown, that Alexander might have laughed his head off."

By now, Manuk had really given up on Perseus, for upon spending time with him, he judged the man to be too erratic to be a useful pawn.

If he really lost his army and then Amenheraft gave him another one, it was likely he was going to use it the way he wanted, not how the king of Adhania wanted.

So in Manuk's mind, the far better option was to save this army and as long as Perseus lived and had an army to fight with, he knew the boorish king would keep on fighting.

And that way he could keep on sapping Alexander.

Thus even though Manuk personally strongly disliked the man, even though his act meant putting himself in huge danger, just because keeping Perseus in the fight was beneficial to him, the priest committed such a reckless move, trying to save an army which Perseus apparently did not seem to want to.

The 100 breaths Manuk had set flew by in the blink of an eye, but the priests did not yet blow on the horn, for when he set the number it was really more of a figure of speech than a literal time limit.

Trumpet!, *Trumpet!*

And then a while later he did, once he felt he had waited long enough, and the enemy flanking force was getting too close for comfort.

And that very moment.

Trumpet

*Trumpet*lights

Trumpet

Following his signal, many similar signals blasted across the battlefield as in reality, a single trumpet could never cover the entire battlefield.

So like clockwork, many more such blares resounded one after the other, with each of the signallers hearing the sound and passing it on to the next.

And then....

Well, then all hell broke loose.

The soldiers hearing that distinctive boom all felt like it was the sweet chimes of the heavenly bell relieving them from this hellish task and the moment the blast washed over their ears, all the tightly held formations instantly started to scatter like sand dunes in a storm like these men were ants in a hot pan trying to run away as soon as possible.

The first to run were of course those at the back, throwing away their heavy shields to lighten themselves, with some even abandoning their spears, while others chose to keep the offensive weapon on hand.

And following suit, the others soon followed, as in this way the lines rapidly thinned in the blink of an eye, while the legionaries, seeing the tight formations disperse like magic in front of them, the oppressive pressure in front of them vanishing, rejoiced with jubilant cheers,

"Breaking! The enemy is breaking!"

"We won! We won!"

"Lived. I lived! Hahaha, I lived"

But sounds of relief washed across them.

"Chase them! Kill them!"

"Revenge! Bastards... killed my brother. I want revenge!"

"Do not let a single fucker escape."

"The king! Find the king! I want to screw my sword into his ass."

But soon these joyous cheers turned bloodthirsty, as many of them, being under the sharp spear tips for so long, let their anger take over.

And then they left their formation and started to give chase.

"No! Do not chase. Get into formation. The enemy has sent its rear guards. We do not chase a fleeing enemy."

Something that even the strict and screaming commands from their officers could not halt.

For these legionaries were driven so much past their rational thinking that they disobeyed all of them, including Menes's personal shouts, and forgetting all they had been taught, started to maddeningly give chase to the fleeing enemy.

Most of these men were still verdant levies and without the temper of being tested in the crucible of battle repeatedly, these men, after their grueling hours long fight had finally snapped.

It had to be known that ancient battles were extremely taxing on the mind, for the close hand to hand nature of combat, the visceral sights and smell, the drowning chaotic noises, and perhaps deadliest of all, the groans of the dead and dying, all played havoc on one psyche, driving one to close to madness.

Even the most trained soldiers suffered from this, but they were able to suppress them.

A resistance that the levies under Menes were yet to develop, hence driven by a natural instinct to live and the subsequent battlelust, most of the legionaries irrationally started to chase the enemy, wanting to kill them before they did.

And as they came out of formation,

"Attack!"

"Kill! Hahahah,"

"There is the Enemy commander! Go!"

The 1,000 rear guards were given a once in a life opportunity to launch a counterattack, as they were able to scythe through the mass of soldiers that outnumbered them literally 20 to 1 like a hot knife through butter.

Up until just a few moments ago, these men had basically resigned themselves to death as there was no way a mere 1,000 man rear guard would be able to hold against a force of 20,000 for any appreciable length of time.

A rear guard formation was after all no magical formation that magically protected all fleeing soldiers.

You still needed to man those positions.

And to hold a force of 20,000 you at least needed a couple of thousand men, or even just a defensive terrain like a river.

But now, due to the indiscipline of the legionaries, a great hole was punched so effortlessly into the line that had held for so long, and

"Oh no!" Menes's own position appeared to be in danger of being overrun.

Chapter 815 Menes's Plight (Part-1)

Seeing the enemy phalangites run, the legionaries all madly dashed haphazardly, breaking rank against the explicit orders of their officers and making themselves vulnerable.

An opportunity that the experienced mercenaries from the Kaiser Family of course did not let escape, as they quickly counterattacked, cutting down many lives which could have been easily avoided if only these soldiers had exercised a bit of patience.

And in this, somehow their relative small size that was up until now a massive hindrance suddenly became a great boon.

Because the thousand men, arranged in 4 units of 250 men were nothing in size when compared to the 20,000 huge force, meaning whatever damage these bulky, slow units could do, they could only do to a small number of legionaries.

Most of the mad Zanzanians were simply able to bypass the spears by swinging around, not being interested in biting a prey that could fight back, not when there were so many juicy fishes in the sea.

And since this hardened prey could neither cause too much harm due to being so small in numbers, their carnage was never enough to alarm the maddened legionaries enough that they came back to their senses and started forming up to deal with this great threat.

Which resulted in the creation of a rare opportunity for the mercenaries, for as Menes's lines were hollowed out, the sight of the general of the army, dressed in splendid attire standing alongside a huge, eye catching standard denoting where he was standing came into the view of mercenary commander.

He could even roughly make out a path that should never have appeared in the first place.

But it did.

And instantly a greedy thought ran through that man's head- 'The enemy has already broken rank and ran. There is no point in us acting as the rear guard.'

'We can either retreat safely....Or!'

Eschewing the safe option, this commander, who was the second in command of the 3,000 strong mercenary unit daydreamed,

'Or I can go after the enemy commander. He should at best have a hundred men. I can destroy that paltry force with a single hit.'

'Then... if I can get that Lord they call Alexander's head, heh hehe... from the way everyone talks about him sounds like a bigshot.'

'If I can kill him, hahaha... that mercenary leader's position will surely be mine.'

This second in command of the mercenary group gleefully chuckled in his heart.

To be able to receive the great boon of surviving a near suicidal mission and then subsequently so openly disregard it, choosing to instead again so willingly jump into the fray of battle instead of quitting while ahead, just to kill the enemy leader for glory, one thing that was certainly not missing in this man was ambition, anyone would have to give him that.

But then again, if mercenaries were not brave and ambitious, they would not be mercenaries.

So revealing his ambition to his nearest officers, this second in command loudly urged,

"Charge men! Charge!"

"If we can kill the enemy commander, you lucky bastards will have all the gold, wine, and women you could want for life."

"So what are you waiting for?"

"Attack!"

"Today we will drink from the skull of a true lord haha."

"Fortune favors the brave."

The man's slogan very well revealed the motto of his life.

And the 1,000 men seemed ready to attack imminently.

While on the opposite side, seeing this approaching formation of doom, Menes's bodyguards bunched together into a solid, almost impregnable formation before its leader turned to shout at Menes,

"General! Get on your horse and hurry back to the tent. We will hold the men as long as we can. Quick!"

The man sounded very alarmed and the reason was very apparent.

Because in the subsequent chaos following the disastrous disintegration of the army, they had been so busy attempting to get back control of the unruly men, Menes's bodyguards did not simply have the spare capacity to spot these Kaiser mercenaries beeling towards them till the very last moment.

They did notice that the enemy had set up a rear guard, but rear guards were defensive structures, meant to be almost static formations that slowly retreated.

It was common knowledge rear guards did not attack.

So when this one did, like now, it caught the hundred or so men completely off guard.

The Kaiser mercenaries by luck had been able to seamlessly camouflage themselves around the chaotic ocean of men who were running all around and managed to get very close before they were spotted.lights

So close in fact that it was no longer safe for the hundred or so men to turn around run, as that would mean presenting their defenseless backs to the intimately close phalangites.

And then who knew if a lucky arrow strike or javelin hit their general?

A possibility made true far more likely by the fact that the rough ground and the still chaotic battlefield with men running all around meant even on horseback, the speed of these men would not be much different from running or even sprinting.

Hence, the far better option was thought to be that the majority of the bodyguards would sacrifice themselves in a delaying action trying to hold 1,000 men, while Menes made the short distance into the safety of the camp.

Under the current circumstances, this did appear to be the most sensible plan.

"Bah! Who is leaving? Not this daddy!" But it was also one that Menes unequivocally rejected, as whirling his horse, he loudly ordered,

"Get ready, we will kill as many of these bastards as possible. If the gods have written I will die on this, then they have surely written a lot of men will die with me too Hahahaha."

Menes fearlessly laughed as he equipped his shield and lance, ready to charge.

And it was not like he was putting on a false bravado either, for even as the doom stack of spears made their way towards him, his face only glowed his anticipation and his eyes with zeal.

The man was not afraid of death.

Sure there was a pang of regret that he was most likely going to die from being skewered by the firmly held spears when he charged that tight formation, especially since he had already won the battle and should have been celebrating.

But that was regret and bitterness, not fear.

As a mighty warrior, Menes could confidently say the thing he was not afraid of was death.

And perhaps that was why he did not run even when given the option to.

For if the black giant had been a bit more cowardly and a bit more selfish, perhaps he would not have been so eager to put himself in danger.

"Haha, how can I escape and leave my brother to die? If we are going to die, we are gonna all die together."

And when some objected to try and convince Menes otherwise, it was this what he said loudly, boldly placing his horse right in the middle of the very first line, intending to take the full blunt of the attack head on by himself.

And if that were to really happen, no matter how well the man was built, no matter the armor he wore, or how good of a fighter was, there really would be no way of saving the man.

But Menes would rather die than leave all his brothers, these men who had been with him since the original mercenary group.

So resigning himself to death, the mighty, black warrior put on his flamboyant helmet, brought his shield right up to his chest to try and protect it as much as he could, and held his lance firmly and with steely determination.

Rather than huddle together and defend like a coward, buying time and praying for a miracle, Menes would rather take the fight to the enemy and kill as many as he could before going down in a fiery wrath of glory.

That was Menes's ideal way to die on the battlefield.

And besides, who knew?

Maybe these men would break upon seeing the charge.

Though in reality, Menes knew perfectly this was not going to happen under any reasonable circumstance.

A heavy cavalry could indeed break formations, but not when it was outnumbered 10 to 1, not when it was traveling through such inhospitable terrain where it would not be able to pick up any real speed in fear of stumbling and destroying the whole formation in the process, and certainly not against a group of highly trained mercenaries.

But hey, a man could dream, right?

It was with these thoughts that Menes lowered his lance and adjusted the aim for one last time, and as he did, his mind became filled with flashes of many memorable experiences of his thirty year old life.

His capture by the slavers, the beatings he endured under them, his purchase by Nestoras, the training under Aristotle, the battles he fought, the adventures he had, and finally the faces of that one man-Alexander.

It pained him to think he would not be able to again see him.

'Sigh, I wish I could have been with him a bit longer. Won a few more wars for him.'

Bang.... Ahhhhhh

But Menes's mournful remembrances were suddenly cut short by a heavy cavalry attack from the back of the mercenaries, by uniforms that Menes actually did not recognize!

Something that caused the men at the frontline to become distracted.

Chapter 816 Menes's Plight (Part-2)

Just as Menes was about to charge to his doom by smashing into the Kaiser family mercenaries, he detected a sudden ripple of chaos and fear spread across the tight formation of the unit right in the middle.

And then large shouts of panicked confusion followed.

The reason for this was glaringly obvious, as Menes could clearly see a group of riders, numbering around thirty, attacking the completely defenseless backs of the phalangites, dealing devastating casualties.

They were all cloaked, foiling any attempts at identification but the way they attacked and fought spoke volumes, for it made it clear to Menes that all these men were all trained warriors of the highest calibers, with many of them even able to match his own prowess.

This level of skill combined with the low numbers made it clear to the black warrior that these were no regular soldiers but an elite unit, most likely bodyguards or perhaps frighteningly, assassins!

But whichever group they belonged to, for now, it seemed they were on his side and they had presented him with a great opportunity.

For they had disrupted the tight formation!

"Attack!"

And there was no way the experienced Menes was going to let that chance go.

So willing his horse the bulky general himself led the force immediately on a fierce counterattack, smashing into the panicked infantry with deadly force, and claiming many lives.

And then started to engage in a deadly hand to hand melee.

Due to the efforts of the unknown ally, Menes did not have to charge his heavy cavalry with his lance through the rough terrain in a risky move, but could instead commit to a far more convenient skirmishing battle.

Here the trained men on horsemen used their height advantage to wield their spears and swords expertly, stealthily navigating them around the phalangites' shield to reap many lives, while using their own shield and sometimes simply their heavy armor to negate many deadly jabs.

Menes had divided his 112 men in a sort of square formation, with three rows of 16 men, totaling 50 on the front, and 31 men on each side, arranged in two rows consisting of 16 or 15 men, with the back being left open.

In this way, even if the adjacent phalanx units tried to swing around to attack Menes's flank, the general would have some sort of protection.

Although this would likely not be enough to defeat the enemy, Menes hoped that he would be able to inflict enough casualties to make these men retreat.

After all, all 112 men under him were willing to die.

Were the 1,000 mercenaries willing to do the same just to make their commander the mercenary leader?

Menes would put his money on - Not.

So the general fought on, even though his tired body tried for respite, as he kept telling himself that the enemy must break before he did, that he would be not allowed to fail, and that he must live on.

It seemed that having escaped such a close encounter with death, the man had gained a new sense of appreciation for life as his nice house, his nice clothes, his nice food, and even his nice slaves came to his mind.

So Menes was eager to keep on fighting.

But while Menes and his men were filled with fighting zeal, many of the attacking phalangites, hearing the commotion at the back panicked!

They thought they were being attacked by that 2,000 flanking force that they had spotted earlier, and assumed that the war elephant charge had failed.

And this sort of thought was very natural, as that was the most logical answer.

And determining anything else was very hard given the nature of their formation made it very hard for the phalangites to turn and look back.

Thus two of the four units decided to cut their losses and run.

While the other two stayed, being the most loyal of the men to the mercenary commander, as well as being baited by the fact that their prize was literally in front of them, just a mere sword stab away.

Menes was after all valiantly fighting on the very first echelon, swinging his massive greatsword to not just slash his enemies, but literally smash many bones using the sheer force of impact.

If these men could get lucky and get a good hit on the man, all their sacrifices would have been worth it.

It was with these thoughts that these men kept on fighting.

But soon their condition became even worse, as the 2,000 men under Remus did eventually come to join the fray, completely enveloping the five hundred desperadoes within minutes and just after a few hits from them, all the ambitions of the 500 were turned to dust, as they fled chaotically into the open ground to be cut down later or laid dead on the ground, underneath a pool of their own blood, fear, and regret etched on many's faces.

At the last moments of their life, many did bitterly think back on their folly, wishing they had taken the chance to retreat when the heavens had allowed them to.

"Sorry, Menes, we were late." But such emotions were of no concern to the leader of the 2,000 who had helped end the battle, as Remus quickly walked up to the general issuing this apology, addressing the man casually by force of habit.

And then the boy quickly explained why it had taken him so.

"Captain! Look! The General! He is being attacked! He is in trouble!"

As Remus was coming to hit Perseus on the back, he laid witness to the enemy lines disintegrating before he could there, which left him feeling both joyous at the result but also a bit regretful that there was no glory left for him.

So, seeing there was no battle to be had, tasked his contingent to meet up with the general as indicated by the huge blue colored standard that denoted his position.

But as the group approached the place, they were equally stunned and horrified to see a thin line of blue about to be imminently assaulted by an overwhelming tide of red, with the blue clearly being their entire central command.

Hence Piseus's alarmed call to Remus.

"Hurry! We need to hurry!" And Remus's command was expected, as then breaking Alexander's protocol of the commander always staying at the back, Remus instead brought his horse right to the frontlines, intending to personally lead the rescue.

Trumpet! *Trumpet*! *Trumpet*!

But the distinct roars of a certain beast that Remus had gotten very used to hearing defeated that endeavor even before it could start.

For almost at the same instant he had given the command, this deadly blare pierced his ear, and then looking around, Remus found both his left and right side were blanketed by a screen of pitch black darkness!

Yes, the head mahout of the elephants was a very clever guy and upon getting Manuk's order, instead of directly facing Remus head on and putting his elephants under the threat of javelin and spear throws, he had instead opted to split his forces in two and swung around to hit Remus on the flanks!

This way, because the legionaries were concentrating on looking straight ahead failed to spot these massive beasts until they were near enough to smell.

And by that point, there was no time to counter these deadly charging behemoths.

"Scatter!"

"Scatter!"

"Scatter!"

So Remus only had the state of mind to shout this single word as the great white tusks of the beasts appeared to be just about to skewer his men, while arrow fire rained from the archers placed above.

Trumpet! *Trumpet!* *Trumpet!*

The maddened beasts roared like the devil as they crashed straight into the underbelly of Remus's formations, and destroyed it like fragile glass, causing the men to panic and run,

"Run!"

"Get away!"

"Shield from the arrows!"

"Save me!"

At that moment, the 2,000 strong force had turned into 2,000 panicking mob, as Remus lost control of most of his forces.

And if Perseus was there to see this he would have probably died from a heart burn out of regret.

For the entire retreat had been predicted on the

And if he had managed to think of this strategy and could predict the result of the charge, perhaps the battle would have been very different indeed.

But fortunately for Menes, that did not happen.

Though then again, it could be argued that without the lines breaking, the battlefield would not be so chaotic, and Remus would have been able to spot these huge four legged titans from miles away.

So perhaps he would not be caught off guard like he was.

But such ifs and buts could only be relegated to theory crafters.

For now though, with Remus's forces scattered, the elephants did not actually choose to stay and fight, trying to rake up the kills.

The head mahoot knew his limits and having disrupted the enemy formation and bought time for the king to make his escape, he could confidently say he had done his job.

Now, it was time to exit the battlefield while he still could, for he did not wish to share the fate of that mercenary commander.

This let Remus quickly gather his shaken but not wounded force and finally come to Menes's rescue.

And with that mystery solved, Menes turned to face the other group who had handed him a crucial hand in his time of need, wondering about their origins.

Chapter 817 Menes And Manuk (Part-1)

With the mahouts quickly leaving the field to save their own skin, the soldiers under Remus did not have to run far to escape the sudden attack.

As a matter of fact, the attack dissipated almost as suddenly as it came, causing much chaos in Remus's ranks but surprisingly few casualties- only a few wounded by arrow fire and exactly seven trampled to death by elephants.

The total death from this attack would be less than twenty.

Thus, suffering only surface level damage to his forces, the captain of the contingent was fortunately able to quickly regain control of the 2,000 men and reform the lines, before finally coming to Menes's rescue, killing almost all of the 500 men that they had found.

Remus's narration helped solve that mystery for Menes, and so following that, he turned to solve the other one, as he turned to face the other group who had handed him a crucial hand in his time of need, wondering about their origins.

They had seemingly appeared out of nowhere and given him a hand that quite possibly contributed very heavily to him still breathing.

So Menes had many guesses float through his mind as to their origin.

'A rebel faction under a noble who wanted to help me?'

'A rebellious part of the army?'

'Group of opportunistic men wishing to earn my favor by this?'

'Some kind of reinforcement from Alexander that I don't know about?'

Menes's eyes probed the nondescript men as he tried to discern their origin and motives.

While those men stood in a double line formation, respectfully keeping a distance of twenty meters between the two parties, not wishing to provoke any negative response from the opposite party, and seemingly content to silently wait without uttering a single word.

Until Manuk, who had been till now hiding in the back, finally stepped forward in his horse and taking off his Corinthian type helmet greeted Menes in a jovial, familiar tone,

"Esteemed Commander of Zanzan, my name is Manuk! I serve as the Head Priest to His Majesty Amenheraft, the True Ruler of Adhania."

"I have come bearing message for Your Lord, Ruler of the City of Zanzan."

"Please take me to see him."

The bald priest loudly pronounced.

As many of you could have guessed that group of thirty men was indeed all of Manuk's personal retinue, consisting of seven bodyguards and twenty three servants and helpers, who were no slouches in the combat department either.

And as to why Manuk had attacked forces friendly to Perseus and helped Menes live, well again it was due to self interest.

Given his devastating falling out with Perseus, the man feared that the enraged king might very well send assassins and hunting parties after him the moment he got the chance, and for just thirty men to survive the pursuit of hundreds of expert hunters in this unknown land that they knew nothing of, with no knowledge of where to go and with not a lick of supplies, well it was basically impossible.

And the solution that Manuk came up with was surprisingly simple: Just join the opposite side and seek their protection!

As for how, well you heard the man- By pretending to be an envoy from Amenheraft.

Well, not exactly 'pretending' since the word had a negative connotation.

It was not like Manuk was a fake, he had all the seals and paper to prove he indeed was who he said he was.

It was just that he was an envoy from Amenheraft visiting Perseus, not Alexander.

But the archpriest was confident he would be able to easily twist the fine details to fit the narrative.

As for saving Menes, well Manuk feared that if the opposing commander were to die, well then who was he going to seek protection from?

The entire camp would be in disarray and then who knows what could happen.

Manuk did not want to gamble his life so casually.

Besides he knew that with just this little extra bit of work, he would be able to raise quite a bit of his favorability with the opposite side.

Hence the move.

"Manuk?" At the 'stranger's' introduction, Menes produced a questioning tone, as his brows furrowed.

He felt he had heard the name before somewhere, but was not able to quite pinpoint it, causing him to rake his mind.

Of course as Amenheraft's right hand man, Manuk's name had come up one or twice during Alexander's council meetings, but Menes, having never personally interacted with the man, had simply forgotten.

Besides, he was very tired and Manuk should have no business being here.

So he found it hard to associate the man in front of him with that true bigshot of Adhania.

"It is Pasha of Zanzan- Alexander. Get your honorifics right." While Remus was more concerned about how Manuk had addressed Alexander- which was simply just a ruler of Zanzan city, not of the entire province and glared at the man for his rudeness.

"Hahaha, His Majesty has never recognized that title. Thus, as his envoy, it will be inappropriate for me to address Lord Alexander as such. My apologies." To which Manuk gave this standard answer with a polite chuckle, while at the same time, he put his hand inside his robe, and bringing out a silver large seal, he flashed it before Menes,

"Here is my proof!" lights

This was referring to his identity, and on the seal, it was written the following:

'By the power of The Son of The Eternal Ramuh, this is an order of the Sovereign.'

'Whoever does not show respect to the bearer will be guilty of bringing plague, war, and famine on his lands.'

'Be Aware!'

Menes did not need to see the seal to be convinced that this Manuk was indeed a messenger from Amenheraft.

For the moment he heard the retort to Remus's claim, he knew this man was not a nobody.

The friction between Alexander's official title was known mostly to high level members of the court.

Thus instead Menes found his eyes drawn to that inscription on the seal, and could not help but taunt Manuk after reading it with a sneer,

"Quite domineering. Wish your king really had that power. Heh!"

Of course, since they were on the opposite side of the civil war, the mockery came naturally.

To which Manuk wanted to reply, 'Well then you and everyone else around here would be already dead. Like you would be if I had not saved you. So why don't you show a bit of gratitude?'

But the head priest of course endured.

It was Menes who currently held all the cards and Manuk knew no matter his contribution, he could not rile up the opposite party.

So treating like he did not hear that insult, Manuk in a pretending urgent voice pronounced, "Where is His Lordship Alexander? I have come a long way bearing important news from my liege. It is vital that I deliver the message as soon as possible."

"Is he inside the camp?"

Manuk then pointed to the large camp at the foot of the hill.

And there was a reason for the man's eagerness, for the faster he could meet Alexander, the faster he could officialize his status as an envoy and the quicker he would become safe.

For once recognized as Amenheraft's envoy, it would make him totally immune to any hostilities, as guaranteed by the convention regarding messengers of the time.

And killing him would turn every neutral and even many allies nobles against Alexander, for such strict were the customs of the time in Adhania.

But for every second he dallied amongst these men, well what if these men suddenly thought Manuk was a fraud and cut him down?

Manuk even wondered if any of these 'barbarians' as he liked to call Alexander's men knew of the convention.

So they might just kill him out of ignorance.

Manuk was not willing to take that chance, for even if the mistake was realized later, even if they were punished, well Manuk would still be dead.

What use would justice be to him?

So Manuk was eager to meet the man whom he was sure would know of the consequences and act accordingly.

"Lord Alexander is not here. Why do you suppose he is?" But much to his astonishment, that large, well built black figure replied such, his eyes narrowed in caution.

"He is not here?" And hearing so the surprise this time on Manuk's face was real, as he then quickly added,

"We heard the villagers say that an army is heading to attack the capital. Is it not this army? Is Lord Alexander not leading you?"

Manuk's voice was truly inquisitive.

"We are indeed going to attack the capital. But the Lord is not with us, He is in Thesalie. I'm sorry to say that's almost 500 km that way," Menes pointed to his right, though he did not sound at all sorry.

In fact, his tone was almost gloating at learning of Manuk's mistake.

After all, they were ultimately enemies who were only under a truce, so there was no need to be too courteous to them.

Though unknown to him, Manuk too was elated to hear this, for that solved a lot of his problems too!

Chapter 818 Menes And Manuk (Part-2)

"How can that be?" To Menes's 'grave' news, Manuk outwardly sounded alarmed and even crestfallen.

But internally, he was elated.

Because being able to avoid this encounter was actually a very large boon for him.

For this way, Manuk would not have to really come up with whatever message he had originally wanted to make up.

He would not need to even see Alexander. as upon learning of the news of the absence, putting on a long face, Manuk proposed,

"Lord General, the message I carry with me is really important. I must see Lord Alexander as soon as possible. Would it be possible for me to hire 10 of your men to escort us to Thesalie? I'm afraid we do not know the way."

The man of course had no intention of really meeting Alexander, for there was no need to.

He wanted these men only to lead him too close to Thesalie, which stood at the very edge of the borders.

And once there, he could make his way to friendly territories on his own.

But if he were to go on his, well, 30 well armed men drew too much unwanted attention.

So to avoid that, upon making his request, without giving Menes a chance to respond, Manuk immediately put his hand inside his satchel and brought out a small pouch, "Of course I will pay. Here."

Clang, *Clang*, *Clang*

As he said so, ten small, very thin gold bars popped into his palms, glittering under the afternoon sun, and sending dazzling sparkles.

Each of these bars was custom made by Manuk and weighed 10 grams.

This was a little trick the priest had picked up over the course of his life when he was sent as an envoy to various parts of the country.

He had found that during travel many small inconveniences such as harassment from city guards or small officials could be easily solved with gold and bribes.

And while gold coins usually did the trick, sometimes larger amounts of 'oil' were needed to grease the wheel.

But carrying a lot of coins was bulky, so Manuk came up with carrying pure gold in small denominations like this.

With gold going at 50,000 ropals a kg, each of these 10 g chips was worth around 500 ropals, more than three months of a peasant's earnings.

And Manuk here was offering 10 of them for the service of 10 men!

Just to escort them to a place that would at best take three weeks even if they really took their time.

A killer deal to say the least!

"What is the message?" But before accepting the rich payment, Menes posed, appearing curious, for he too was a member of the council.

'Since Amenheraft has sent his men, it probably has to do with Tibias right? What does he want?' Menes was intrigued.

"I'm afraid my instructions were clear, General." But Manuk very deftly declined to answer.

'What message? Even I don't know the message,' While internally he sniggered so.

To the rejection, Menes did not seem perturbed, for he expected much, and felt like whatever Amenheraft wanted, it was better felt to the much smarter Alexander.

Thus ultimately accepting the payment, he nodded and replied,

"We will arrange a boat for you. It will be quicker to reach the city through the River Diannu. You should prepare to load your supplies."

Since Manuk had informed him the message was of quite an importance, Menes wanted to arrange for him to arrive at Thesalie within the quickest time.

"Ah!" And at the mention of the supplies, Manuk produced a very convincing troubled face, delineating,

"General, you see... we have run into some troubles with our supplies. Our ship ran into a storm and ran aground, losing much of our supplies."

Following so the priest turned to look at Menes with pleading eyes,

"I know that your camp supplies are limited. But would it be possible to part with some?"

"Of course we will pay."

Fearing Menes's rejection, the man quickly produced another pouch of similar value- 5,000 ropals.

It had to be known that it usually took only 2 ropals a day to feed a man.

So thirty of them would need 60 ropals of food every day.

And here Manuk was offering 3 months of pay for a journey by boat that would take at best a week, as a show of sincerity.

As for just how genuine his true feelings were, well almost everything he told Menes was bullshit, but his need for the supplies was indeed real.

Everything he had brought was left at PR's camp, and that had been already raided by the legionaries.

Manuk had already written everything there off.lights

To Manuk's offer of rumination, Menes casually waved his hand and in a sudden grateful tone, pronounced, "Keep it. Take it as a token of gratitude for saving my life."

And then quickly turning to Remus to avoid looking at Manuk's surprised face, he commanded,

"Remus, I put you in charge of arranging everything for them."

"Make sure to do it within today. The message he carries should be very important."

"I'm going back to the tent."

And with that dumped on that the head of his subordinate, Menes was out, but not before hearing this chuckle come out of Manuk,

"Hahaha, Lord General is truly a sincere man of virtue."

While Remus hearing all this extra workload blurted, "I...", before trailing off.

He knew that since Menes had given the order personally, he was militarily obliged to carry it out unless he wanted to risk being court martialed, and he had to follow it no matter how tired or exhausted he was.

And with a rueful shake of the head, he then went to process everything for Manuk.

The Sissillpond Ridge they were in was half a day's ride from the banks of River Diannu, and given that the battle had started literally at dawn, it was only approaching midday by now.

So quickly having a short meal at Menes's camp, the group of now forty men were hastily on their way, riding on fresh horses that Menes had gifted them.

Officially- they were given so that Manuk would deliver his message faster.

But non officially- it was really a show of gratitude for saving his life.

Because they were on opposite sides, Menes was unable to show such goodwill too openly, and thus the employment of such covert tactics.

Hence, using these prime stallions imported directly from Pasha Farzah's province of Matrak, the men were able to reach a small town situated on the banks of the Diannu that was currently being used as a major supply hub for Menes's army just before dusk.

The group spent the night in the town, for they were exhausted by the long ride, and boats did not sail during the night.

And it was only in the morning that by using Remus's authority, Manuk was able to finally get five large boats, enough to transport them and their much bigger horses.

Though even that endeavor was not easy, but not for the reasons you might think.

The reason why Manuk had trouble finding suitable boats was because given this town was the main supply hub for the food and ammunition such as pillas and arrows for 30,000 men, there were so many boats that were literally traffic jams, as vessels laden with goods from Thesalie lined up one after another to unload their cargo.

But ultimately the forty men were indeed able to board and make their way towards Thesalie.

But they would never reach it!

For remember, Manuk had no intention of going to Thesalie.

Thus, once the boats were around half a day's distance from the city, Manuk called all his men onto his boat and informed them that that night, they would be given a particular light signal through the oil lamps.

And at that point, all of them were to kill the 10 men and 15 sailors scattered across the five boats.

And that was exactly what happened.

Those poor 25 men did not have the slightest idea what was coming, and even as their throats were slit literally in the middle of their sleep, they could not grasp what had happened, but less why it did.

The complete unexpectedness of the attack and the fact that the 25 were scattered in various parts of the 5 boats made them easy picking for the grouped together band of determined killers, as they were able to strike from the shadow stealthily against these isolated targets and take them out one by one.

And once they had done so, able to kill everyone without raising any alarm or letting them escape by jumping into the water, they waited till the morning to moor their boats on the shores of a nearby secluded part of the forest, and taking the forty, exquisite horse breeds as their prize, the men set fire to the boats and the bodies witing before simply leaving!

"Hahaha, to be able to get such prime horses. This trip was not a complete waste."

"Yes. That black idiot is really something haha."

"I was getting a bit worried back then. But everything worked out better than I expected. Praise Ramuh."

And as the men galloped through the woods on their new prizes, such were their conversation.

Mocking Menes for showing gratitude.

And these were supposed to be priests of a god.

How lamentable!

Chapter 819 War Casualties For Menes

The value of the gift Menes had given Manuk was truly immense.

Just a normal horse in Adhania was worth 800 to 1,000 ropals, a good, strong workhorse like the one given to Manuk went for 3,00 to 5,000 while a specialized war horse could go as far as 10,000 ropals.

So when Manuk stole all of them, they not only managed to recoup all their losses but even made a healthy profit.

Forget counting the lesser boons like the supplies and the free boat ride.

Menes lost all of that.

As for feeling even a tab bit sorry for doing all this, well of course they weren't.

If Manuk could have gotten away with it, he would have very much liked to kill even Menes, knowing that he must be a capable retainer under Alexander.

As for qualities of virtue, sincerity, and honesty that a priest should have, never mind the Archpriest-

Joke! These infidels deserved nothing but to be burnt at the stake.

It was with such xenophobic thoughts that Manuk crossed Tibias into the Zanzan province and was able to quickly enter friendly allied territories.

While back at the Sissillpond Ridge, Menes, never even having such a thought cross his mind, was instead busy preparing his men to finally attack the capital.

And to that endeavor, currently, he was inside his tent listening to Remus's report.

"In this battle, we lost around nine hundred, 900 dead! Almost all on the side, you commanded."

"With around seven hundred 700 more wounded." The young captain had a grim undertone to his voice as he pronounced these numbers from a paper, for they were truly large given they were the victors!

Casualties during combat in formations rarely exceeded two to three percent, whereas here, given there were 30,000 men, that number reached more than five percent!

About double!

And understanding this, Menes first revealed shock and then a somber countenance, while Remus continued,

"We found around 700 bodies right where the battle lines you commanded were, all with clear spear wounds on them."

"They had been killed in battle."

"But another two hundred, 200 men were found scattered all across the ridge, particularly the left side. They were likely killed when the men broke rank and started to chase the running enemy and were counterattacked by the rear guard. *Sigh*, what a waste!" Remus sounded very bitter at the needless loss as evidenced by the shaking of his head, and then quickly finished that page of the report by saying,

"The number of deaths around General Melodias's side was almost negligible. But he did suffer a few wounded during his own chase and quite more so while breaching the enemy camp."

"The good news is that the doctors at the clinic said that most of the wounded will be able to rejoin the army. At most 200 will be lost, with most losing their thumbs."

"....." Hearing Remus finish and then stand quietly in attention, Menes took the time to think about the numbers, and as time passed, his somber, placid face slowly started to frown and turn angry.

"Those 700 men fought bravely and deserve to be heroes. They fought for hours and never took a step back. I praise them" Menes began with a deep voice but then his voice turned enraged,

"But those 200!"

"Idiots! It's good that they died. Or else I would have hung them for insubordination."

Perhaps more than the number lost, what really stunk Menes was how they were lost and at how quick of a pace.

It had taken hours for the 700 men to be killed, while the 200 were lost in less than one third of that.

All because they refused to follow simple orders.

Thus, following this venting, Menes's voice then turned serious as he decreed,

"This is the second time the soldiers have disobeyed direct orders from their officers to go after loot."

The first was of course during the fight with Lord Ponticus, as he then continued,

"This cannot be allowed to continue. We must show there will be consequences for disobeying military commands."

Saying so Menes's eyes flashed dangerously causing Remus to become cautious.

"What would you like to do?" He probed.

"Confiscate all the loot the soldiers have taken in this battle. All the gold, jewelry, wine, and slaves. Everything! That will teach them." Menes loudly proclaimed.

"What!" And hearing such a drastic move, Remus cried out in alarm, instinctively blurting out, "Menes, that's too extreme! We can't punish the entire army! The soldiers will surely rebel!"

Such was his shock that Remus forgot to address Menes by his title and indeed, his objection was justified.

For almost the entire army had engaged in that looting, and as the saying went- 'It's not a crime if everyone is doing it.'

So Remus tried to reason with Menes,

"General, if a small group is punished, it sets an example for others to follow. But if everyone is punished, well then it just makes everybody angry." Remus recited philosophically, and then pleaded,

"Please think of another disciplinary method."lights

And being reminded of this, the tall general indeed felt a bit taken aback.

Remus was right, he could not do that.

Punishing every single armed to the teeth men was very dangerous.

He had heard the large number of troops he had lost and let his emotions get the better of him.

"Okay, then make it one tenth!" So Menes immediately decreased the punishment by ten times.

But this number had the opposite problem, as Remus felt it was too low.

And he could sense that Menes was having trouble coming up with the optimum level of punishment that delivered enough spice to remain fresh in the soldiers' psyche even during the frantic frenzy of a battle, but not so much that they held permanent resentment for the high command till they died.

There had to be a delicate balance and Remus let Menes know this.

"If we only take that little, it will not be too effective. The men will mourn for a while, but when the opportunity comes, they will forget it altogether." Remus claimed by pointing his finger, reasoning,

"Because even if they lose the one tenth, they will still have nine tenths left. To be able to commit insubordination by simply giving such a paltry sum, everyone will find it completely worth it."

"And such a thing will continue to happen." Remus hypothesised in a sure tone.

So, to that, in a furrowed tone, Menes then posed, "So how much should we take? Half?"

Shake, shake.

Placing a knowing smile on his face, Remus shook his head to the query, and then in an almost lecturing tone replied,

"Recall that I told just a few moments ago, General- 'If a small group is punished, it sets an example for others to follow. But if everyone is punished, well then it just makes everybody angry'."

"So instead of punishing everybody equally, I propose that we make examples out of a few scapegoats." Remus's voice by now sounded very pleased with himself, delineating,

"We should choose one random soldier from each of the eight men squad (Squad- 8 soldiers, 2 servants) and take three fourth of his loot."

"So in essence only punish one tenth of the army."

"That way, there will be much much resentment."

"And we should also supplement this by clearly explaining to the whole army why we are punishing them."

"The 200 deaths should be made to look irreplaceable like we lost 2,000... no 20,000 men!"

"If we do it that way, the men will not only feel the material loss but also remember the loss of life that they inadvertently caused."

"That! I believe will be a good punishment!"

As Remus finished by clenching his fist, he sounded joyous.

While Menes first of all was surprised and shocked as he whispered, "That..." before trailing off.

He certainly did not disapprove of the method.

In fact he was very impressed by it.

It was just that he was overwhelmed by how Remus was able to come up with this great method on the spot, when he, the far more experienced of the two could not.

It wounded his pride a bit.

"Also..." While, Remus, seeing Menes's look of appreciation, decided to add more, as he was not yet done.

"When we attack the capital, we can punish some of the squad leaders and sergeants (100 man team leader) by ordering them to guard the camp and thus not let them take part in the looting."

"This will certainly stay with them far more than any beating or whatnot and remind them to drill much more discipline into their subordinates."

"Great!" As soon as Remus finished, Menes let out his great cheer, as he then delegated with a large, happy smile blooming on his face.

"Then I will leave it to you. And do not worry, I will be sure Alexander knows about your contribution." Menes further added in a reassuring tone, placating any worries that Remus might have about Menes stealing credit.

"Hahaha," And Remus did not reject only proudly chuckling.

While as a throwaway comment Menes frankly added this, "Mmmnn, I can see you truly live up to being Alexander's student. I really am no match, haha."

Chapter 820 Thesalie After Six Months (Part-1)

Remus had joined Nestoras's group around the age of 14 and it was Alexander who had shown the boy the ropes, taking him under his tutelage and teaching him the various skills needed for the job.

And it was a status that stuck even five, almost six years later.

"Haha, do not be too humble yourself, Menes," To Menes's wholehearted praise, Remus chuckled politely, replying,

"I heard the men singing about your bravery too. How you stood at the very front lines fighting side by side without a care for your life."

"If it was Alexander, he would have surely run, hahaha." Remus jokingly chortled with a nasal groan.

But Menes did not certainly find it even the least bit funny.

"*Bang!* Who said that!" He boomed, smashing his enormous fist into the hard oak table and

destroying the amicable atmosphere with a thundering roar and unending fury.

"...." Add Remus immediately clamped his mouth shut.

"Who said that!" Seeing the other side go quiet, Menes again boomed, this time sounding even more engaged.

"It was nothing. Just drunk men talking. They did not mean anything by it." Remus instinctively blurted out, quickly waving his hand to demonstrate the triviality of it.

"Who said that!" But Menes only shouted this, bloodthirstily searching for a name.

"It... I forget! I was drinking with Melodias and everyone and I can't remember!" Remus felt it would be really no good to reveal any names, for that person's sake.

So he brought up Melodias and indicated the presence of other high level officers in the midst as he lied.

That way Menes would not dare to do anything to do them.

At best, he would tattle to Alexander about this.

But during all this time, Remus could not figure out what he had said to engage the usually amicable man so much.

While Menes, hearing Remus's answer finally ceased his outburst and leaned back on his chair, but the man was still smoldering.

Tap, Tap, Tap.

And then Menes in a grim but monotone voice revealed, "Alexander is not me. He cannot be allowed to face any risk that endangers his life."

"Because if I die, there will be many replacements. But if he dies..... everything we have will fall apart."

And that was when Remus was enlightened to the reason behind Menes's rage.

"You fear that if these soldiers talk like this, Alexander will be pushed into fighting more and more in the frontlines to earn the soldiers' trust." Remus pointed out.

"Yes." Menes heavily nodded, "That's why I want the names."

"..." Facing Menes's placid glare, the cogs in Remus's head started spinning.

Of course, he could reveal some names.

But he feared what Menes might do to them.

Especially given some of them were among the 112 men that served him.

So Remus cleverly posed, "Let me handle this with the other punishment too. I promise they will not speak like this ever. Not even when they are drunk."

".....Mnnn," And to this Menes curtly nodded, before dismissing the man.

Alexander would be informed of the result of the battle not on that very day but the day after, at around midday.

The reason for this almost 24 hour delay was because Menes had dispatched the messenger bird at only around midday after the battle was over.

And dusk had fallen before the bird could cover the nearly 500 kilometer journey.

So the little animal took refuge on a tree branch for the night, which was a good thing because at around dawn, just as it was about to set off, a torrential rainfall with almost gale force winds soon hit the area, one that lasted for hours.

Thus, it was only after the weather had cleared that the small bird was able to cover the last leg of the journey.

And around the time the message landed on the coup, Alexander was accompanying a guest in his room- Lady Felicia.

The duo sat around a very small table, with a basket of various assortments of fruits such as pears, figs, grapes, cherries, nuts, etc. placed at the center of it, along with a wine jar and two ornate goblets.

The pair's eyes were not directed at each other, but towards the large open balcony, for there were five children playing there, accompanied by various toys.

The biggest one there was Alexander's official mistress- Fabiyana, who today wore a deep blue full piece frock, and seemed to be acting as the leader of the group, asking everyone to follow her example as well as showing Alexander's two girls and two boys how to play with the various toys.

Among these paraphernalia were wooden toys like horses and chariots, wooden and wollen dolls of various shapes and sizes as well as beautifully colored blocks with slotted carvings that could fit together like a puzzle.

And that was the five were mainly playing with, trying to build a tower as high as possible without crashing it.

Overseeing them were two middle aged nannies, making sure none of them got hurt or into any fights.

Something that the two 1 year old brothers and sisters, Afsan and Ophenia seemed very eager to engage in but was mostly prevented by the much larger Fabiyana.

"Please accept my sincerest gratitude my lord. Even since Fabiyana started coming here, she has been so much happier." Gazing at her giggling daughter playing in the sunlight, Lady Felicia sitting inside the room expressed this in a very sincere motherly tone, adding,

"Even since she was little, without any brother or sister to play with she had been very lonely. But now, every day when she returns home, all she talks about is you and Alexandria and all the things that had happened that day."

"Even I have not seen her smile like this ever." The lady, dressed in a pure white frock with a caramel shawl draped over her upper torso smiled at Alexander saying so.

"That's good." And Alexander lightly nodded, before adding with a joking smirk, "Though looking at her Fabiyana like this makes her feel more like my daughter than my bride, wouldn't you say, Lady Felicia, hmm?" He hummed.

"...." To this, the raven haired lady first produced an awkward smile, but then quickly blurted, "My lord..... Fabiyana... Fabiyana is just a bit immature. I'm sure she will quickly grow up to meet your liking."

She was afraid Alexander might not favor Fabiyana anymore.

But it was only at that point that she noticed that there was a teasing undertone to Alexander's voice and she froze for a moment.

Before quickly recovering herself and lightly chucking, "But then again, perhaps my lord prefers her like that. I heard you asked Fabiyana to call you big brother."

Lady Felicia's beautiful eyes narrowed as she delivered this wagging jibe.

"Hahaha, well hearing her call me Lord Husband sounded too sinful. So I tricked her by saying that all the others call me husband, but because I favor her so much, I will let her call me big brother, hahaha." Alexander very amicably revealed the process, while internally musing, 'At least I did not make her call me Oni chan. That really would have been too degenerate.'

"Yes, Fabiyana told me."

"Aiya! To think my daughter would be tricked like this by her own husband. Ohhh... as a mother I can't help but worry." And hearing so Lady Felicia exaggeratedly reacted so, playfully smacking her forehead with her palm and ruefully shaking it.

The two were not really discussing anything important but simply bantering.

Until now that is, as Alexander's tone suddenly turned a bit more strong and serious,

"How is the city doing? How are the people? Has trading in the city started to pick up? Have the projects I wanted started?" Alexander took a sip of the sweet wine as he posed so.

"The city is recovering rapidly my lord, all thanks to you." And at the question, Lady Felicia bolted up straight, wiping away the leisurely air.

This was the real reason why she was invited to the room and she tried to be as professional as possible when questioned regarding this, as she delineated,

"The city has been mostly rebuilt, my lord. The men and money you have provided proved crucial and it was only because so that we able to complete that endeavor during the winter."

"That really helped the people given the cold winter we had. If not for you, a lot of them would have died."

"All of us here in the city are very grateful for that." Saying so, Lady Felicia shortly bowed, while pulling a light smile.

Before continuing,

"The people are also mostly happy. The money and food that you gave them really helped change people's perception, and because you let them continue to worship their ancestors, many would be agitators found themselves without much support."

"Oh?" And it was at this point, that Alexander decided to interject with a surprised hum, "Weren't the people angry that I replaced their ancestor status with an idol of my own?"

This of course referred to that impromptu assassination attempt at the main temple and the subsequent demand.

"Hahaha, no." To which Lady Felicia gave a kind of forced hollow chuckle like she was hiding something.

And this caused Alexander's eyes to narrow.