

Herald 861

Chapter 861 The King's Negotiation

Alexander could sense the slight dissatisfaction the man had felt about him refusing his marriage offer.

So in return, Alexander then attempted to marry one of his retainer's daughters to Lord Theony's newly made legitimate son Gnaeus.

But the Tibian lord had found those people's status to be either too low, like Menes, Melodias, etc. who were all mercenaries and common people, or too distant to Alexander, like Lord Tikba, Yuusiq, etc.

Hence later, Alexander came up with a better compromise.

He promised that one of his daughters or even granddaughters could be allowed to be Cambyses's lady in waiting, and if Lord Theony wished, they could also discuss Alexander's son- Philip taking one of Lord Theony's granddaughters as a concubine after the boy grew up a bit.

This promise came as a great joy to Lord Theony, who had been a bit peeved that nobody like Lapitus had managed to get his daughter hitched with Alexander when he could not.

Although that could be said due to Lapitus being bold enough whereas Lord Theony then was not even sure whether Alexander was going to win.

And Alexander might have indeed lost if not for Menes's prudent battle techniques.

Thus the current result was really the most optimum outcome he could have wished for.

With that task out of the way, Alexander then at last turned his attention to the matter of Perseus, as he set about bolstering his army.

To do this, first of all, he made use of all the new nobles swearing their fealty to him, as he asked them each of them to contribute however many men they could to his cause, swelling his numbers.

Individually, each noble's contribution was not much- only around 50 to 100.

This was the most they could spare given all they suffered.

But like how little drops of water join together to form oceans, by siphoning off all that they had, these small packets of men, given by 60 to 70 small and big houses, managed to add up to around 5,000 men!

And when combined with Lord Theony's 4,000 men, and Alexander's original 31,000- the total army added up to 40,000 men, or 5,000 to 8,000 more than Perseus.

This time, Alexander also did not have to place any additional men garrisoning the capital, as he was able to withdraw some of the 3,000 troops garrisoned across various scattered cities, and moved them to the capital

Since the nobles in charge of those cities had already sworn loyalty, Alexander did not see any reason to place them there anymore.

As Alexander was putting the last touches to his army, he then soon got the news that Perseus had at last stopped moving, garrisoning himself at Lilybee- the original port city that Manuk had initially suggested.

And from there he even sent a messenger to Alexander, but it was not either Mithriditus nor Philips.

It was one of his Perseus's sons and the conditions he brought were quite generous.

"Lord of Zanzan, the king understands the situation he is in."

"His Majesty is willing to offer the following conditions."

"He will give over half of Tibias to you, Esteemed Pasha."

"He will agree to make Tibias a protectorate of Zanzan, giving you yearly tribute, an amount which can be discussed."

"One of His daughters will be given to you as a mistress."

"And lastly, the Crown Prince Philips will be sent to Zanzan as an envoy for Tibias, attending the senate meetings on behalf of His Majesty and representing the interests of Tibias."

As it could be seen, the concessions were quite generous, especially the one about Philips being sent to Zanzan, which basically was Perseus sending his successor as a hostage, proof of his sincerity towards the proposed treaty.

Alexander was at first surprised that the other side was even aware of the senate representative system that he had started.

Furthermore, the penultimate condition, the one about marrying the princess was not a bad one either as Alexander had indeed seen the two unmarried daughters and both of them were quite nice.

A fact easily explainable if one saw their mother, who was certainly a beauty, a consensus shared by all.

Both the daughters had inherited her best genes.

Up until now, none of them had been touched, even though Lord Theony had openly offered them to Alexander.

And when first presented, Alexander did want to eat the three delicious candies presented to him then and there.

Especially the most mature one who had stood in the middle, her shy face flushed a deep red, her sexy body appearing to drip lasciviousness

He could only describe the woman with that four letter word that started with M.

But he ultimately refrained.

Alexander had felt these gems were much more valuable untouched and only kept them under house arrest, reasoning that if he really wanted to keep them or even just know how they tasted before discarding them, he would have plenty of time to do so after Perseus was defeated and these three had little more uses other than gifts or playthings.

So ultimately the allure of the marriage was not enough to move Alexander.

As for the first two conditions, which should have been the most lucrative, they did not impress Alexander at all, as he haggled,

"I already control half of Tibias. So what is Perseus really giving why saying that?"

"Do I need his permission to administer the lands I have rightfully taken?" He sneered, before waving his hands breezily,

"As for the tribute, given the devastation I have seen Tibias suffering from, clearly Perseus is not a great statesman. How much can he tribute even if he wanted to?"

But these were not the true points of contention between the two sides.

No, what really broke the negotiations would be the last point that Perseus insisted on fulfilling, as his youngest son read out,

"But in exchange for all these concessions, Lord of Zanzan, we want that criminal handed over to us!"

"That criminal who betrayed his country."

"That criminal who betrayed his liege."

"That criminal who killed the future queen of Tibias, daughter of Lord Mithriditus, the daughter in law of the king."

"The traitor Lord Theony!"

The death of Philips's full family had by now gotten out, and it seemed it had managed to travel as far as the further point of Tibias, reaching even Perseus's eyes.

Alexander and Lord Theony of course had given an official statement regarding this unfortunate incident- claiming that it was the lady who was too hasty, she had decided to commit suicide upon simply hearing Lord Theony's takeover of the palace and mistakenly feared the worst case.

According to Alexander everything happened simply due to a misunderstanding.

This was only half true and regardless Perseus did not buy, as he demanded justice for this as a condition for peace.

One because he knew those infants killed were not just his grandchildren but really his children, a fact that made him furious.

Two, and perhaps likely much more importantly, because of how enraged Mithriditus was.

That daughter was his favorite, that was why he had poured his blood and sweat into convincing the king to match her with the Crown Prince.

The old man would even regularly smile in his dreams thinking of seeing his 'princesses' take the seat beside the king's throne, becoming the queen.

So to hear that she had died, and so tragically at that, dying with her son and daughter, it drove the old man nearly mad.

It was even to the point that upon learning of his daughter's fate, but seeing his son in law, Philips not missing even a hair, Mithriditus had not only rebuked him with words unfit for even most slum fights but even started a fistfight, wanting to beat Philips up for not protecting his daughter and grandchildren.

The fight was luckily stopped by a few nearby guards.

After that incident, Mithriditus had made it clear to Perseus, that unless Lord Theony was punished as part of the peace treaty, he would take his men and leave the army and even take a lot of liked minded nobles of his faction with him.

That was a heavy threat to Perseus and thus he had to make that demand.

But when the extradition request for Lord Theony was said aloud,

"Hahaha," The first one to respond was Lord Theony, who had broken out into a burst of uproarious laughter, like he had heard the funniest joke.

And Alexander too replied that such a thing would never be on the table.

Though in secret, he had offered the following counterterms to Perseus-

'Perseus will be required to give up all claims to the throne as well as would all his descendants, transferring them all to Alexander.'

'They would renounce all connections with politics and cut off all ties with any relatives who might be nobles in Tibias.'

'They will be given a proper estate to live in Zanzan, as well as a healthy stipend.'

'In return, Lord Theony would be put under house arrest and barred from participating in politics ever again.'

However these conditions were not acceptable to the other side, and so around late July, Alexander found himself facing Perseus's army.

The ultimate battle to decide the fate of Tibias was about to begin!

Chapter 862 Perseus's Last Stand

Alexander's slight concern about Lord Theony was naturally poked at by Perseus's son during his speech.

Upon hearing Lord Theony's bold, unconcerned laughter, he had addressed Alexander,

"Pasha of Zanzan, are you really comfortable having such a traitor by your side? Do you think it is wise? Will he not betray you when the opportune moment comes just like he did to my father?"

But although slightly concerned, Alexander also made sure to remind the other party that they were no innocent fawn either and that Lord Theony had a real reason behind his betrayal.

"Lord Theony only betrayed you because he was betrayed first- by your father and his court. Don't tell me you forgot how you tried to pin the blame of losing Thesalie to him instead of the actual lord of the city, Lord Ponticus?"

"Why? Just to save a dead man's reputation. Just because he was part of the royal family."

The quick response was something that quite pleased Lord Theony.

While actually behind closed doors, Alexander did consider the offer more thoroughly, sitting with some of his council members to try and think of the best outcome.

Because if possible, the best steward to rule Tibias would undoubtedly be Perseus.

However, the consensus reached in that meeting was that Lord Theony and his family were too important for the immediate future to be exchanged for the terms offered and the only way Alexander could agree was if Perseus were to abdicate and surrender the whole of Tibias.

And even then it would only be Lord Theony being placed under house arrest.

Such a lukewarm offer was ultimately not acceptable to Perseus and thus with negotiations broken down, both sides prepared for battle.

Alexander's side, now 40,000 strong started their march for Lilybee once the men were gathered and given some basic training.

This took around twenty days, and the entire journey was pretty eventless.

Given Alexander's army size and reputation by now, no city foolishly tried to defend itself till the very last breath.

But all accepted Alexander with open arms, letting him into their city and making available the best accommodations they had to offer so that he did sack their settlements.

Some cities even extended their hospitality to the point they sent carts full of food ahead of the marching army, hoping that this way the huge number of armed men would not go out foraging for food and destroy the surrounding crop fields, but instead quickly leave.

Alexander was of course all too happy to accept all this.

Along the way, he also got to see the countryside scenery of Tibias, and although the scenery here was much like the scenery anywhere else around the country, he did find it very beautiful.

Meandering earthen pathways with forests and woods on either side, Alexander found nature unfolding at its finest- in a symphony of sights, sounds, and scents

Given it was summer, the air was filled with the earthy aroma of soil and the fragrance of wildflowers that danced in the gentle breeze.

When Alexander passed through the forests, which were uncountable years old, he found them to be adorned with towering ancient trees, gnarled branches reaching skyward and creating a dappled canopy overhead, which cast intermittent shadows on the well-worn dirt trail left by the marching men.

A very memorable wood that he passed was an ancient olive grove, where he marveled at all the twisted trunks standing like sentinels, adding a sense of timelessness to the panorama, while on the ground many small critters littered the ground.

Vast swathes of land planted with tall, green wheat, yet to ripen, swayed gracefully in the fields, their rhythmic movements accompanied by the rustle of leaves and the occasional trill of distant birds.

Stone fences, weathered by centuries of weather and time, many times lined the edges of these fields, guiding Alexander through the undulating landscape.

Here and there, patches of vibrant moss cling to ancient rocks, adding a touch of vivid green to the scene.

The countryside was even dotted with some remnants of forgotten civilizations as at one point Alexander came across the ruins of an abandoned settlement, its inhabitants supposedly wiped out more than a century ago by some nearby elder's account, the cause long lost to time.

Thus the only things that remained of that once vibrant town were a crumbling stone archway, the remnants of a weathered amphitheater, and a moss-covered well whose water had long turned poisonous,

There were a few more of these types of ruins that Alexander came across on his way, all standing as silent witnesses to the lives of those who once inhabited these ancient lands, their stories whispered through the rustling leaves and the ageless stones.

But the most regular scenery for Alexander was the sight of the straw or terracotta rooftops of small villages arranged one after another along the banks of the mighty River Diannu, smoke rising lazily from

these small settlements, the distant sound of hurried shouts of farmers, the low cries of farm animals, the high pitched cries of housewives going about their chores and the distant giggle and laughter of children playing in the fields all drifting through the wind into Alexander's ears.

Occasionally, the army would have to get on a boat to cross a large river, as there would be no bridges.

And as Alexander was rowed, he found the waters so pristine that he was able to see the fishes swimming around and even saw some soldiers simply catching some for themselves by hand, and simply storing them in their bags, unconcerned about the smell.

Facing all such picturesque scenery, even now Alexander would sometimes feel that the landscape unfolding before him was like the pages of a history book, like he was an alien coming to visit these unfamiliar sights.

Now Alexander did not only spend his time taking in the pristine looks of a past untouched by the pollution of civilization.

As he went on his way, he also made sure to make note of all the infrastructure that would need improving.

Like all those rivers he had to cross by boat because no bridges existed.

Or how even many of the main roads between major cities were simply unpaved earthen roads that had been flattened by the foot through regular goings of people over decades if not centuries.

Or how some of the farmlands could use new canals for a better irrigation system.

At the same time, Alexander also got to see the terrain around here as well as the natural resources he might be able to exploit- which mainly meant good farmland, nice timber, and metal mines.

And along the way, he found all three.

The fertility of the land along the banks of the Diannu did not need to be said, there were many tall forests which were prime timber and he even spotted a few iron, copper, and gold mines, although those sizes were still quite small.

And lastly, Alexander's almost three week travel helped him see the lifestyle and prosperity of the people living in these parts, as well as witness the scars the wars had wrought upon them.

So with those vicissitudes all along the way, Alexander at last arrived at Lilybee and set up camp about five kilometers away from the city.

Then he first and foremost ordered,

"Send messengers to the walls. Tell them that if they open the gates, no one will touch even their hair. But if they decide to resist, they will be killed to the every last man."

The messenger would indeed recite this, as well as the condition Alexander had given Perseus prior, i.e.- abdicate to save his and his family's life and live a cushy life in Zanzan.

Shoo

But to this, Perseus's only response was shooting an arrow at the herald's feet as from the top of the wall, the king shouted his response regally, addressing himself with the royal 'We'.

" 'We' have been handed the duty to defend Tibias from 'Our' father, who received it from 'Their' father."

"Entrusted in this fidelity by the sacred ancestral spirits, 'We' have been the bulwark of Tibias for countless generations, repelling countless invaders just like you."

"So how can 'We' accept simply abandoning our duty now just because things have gotten bad?"

"Win or loss! That is in the hands of the fate."

"But me Perseus- the first of his name will never surrender!"

"True Tibias never surrender!"

Perseus swung his armored fist high into the air as he shouted this and the speech was way more than just a reply to Alexander.

It was also a way to galvanize his 35,000 men who, upon seeing the well armed and numerically superior enemy had begun to lose courage.

And so hearing Perseus's very charismatic speech caused many shouts such as,

"Whooooo..."

"Yeahhhh..."

"Fight to the death...", enabling them to recover their morale.

And then knowing that defending against Alexander was futile, Perseus began to march out of the gates, deciding to throw everything at this one last roll.

Some of his generals had instead urged the king to defend, reasoning that other powers might send even more reinforcements if they could hold on a bit longer.

But even if Perseus was not highly skeptical of such a claim, even if he wanted to defend, the walls of the city appeared too inadequate, being only 3 meters high and about 2 meters thick.

Which were not shabby, but given Alexander's access to catapults, Perseus had no confidence in being able to withstand the attacks.

Hence the decision for a pitched battle.

Use code <ABDHYXQ7QU33QSDBB> to get 10 FP (First 10 Users).

Chapter 863 Perseus's State Of Mind

The fortifications of the city of Lilybee could not be said to be bad based on the time when it was built.

At a time when catapults did not exist, the almost two story high, two meters thick walls could indeed pose quite a significant threat to any attacking enemy if they were properly manned and garrisoned.

But unfortunately, this furthest port city of Tibias had been unable to keep up with the times.

Defenses that were once considered pretty decent now seemed to be lacking in luster.

It was because of this that even though one of the reasons why Perseus had come here was indeed due to the city's famed defenses, upon actually seeing the state of it for himself, he could not help but lampoon its deficiencies when compared with a city like Thesalie.

And even that city had fallen despite it being a few times bigger and there even being two walls instead of Lilybee's single one.

So Perseus would have indeed been foolish to try and frustrate Alexander with simply such rudimentary fortifications.

"If we defend using the walls, we will simply be ground to dust by Alexander. And this is if we are lucky and do not starve ourselves to death first!" Perseus shot this to the few officers and nobles who were in favor of such a strategy.

And the latter was indeed another reason why Perseus could not afford a long siege.

Because if one recalled, his camp was broken into and looted by Menes in the previous battle, meaning Perseus had lost all his supplies in one fell swoop.

Fortunately, it was around mid spring when that loss had occurred, meaning the earth was filled with life by then and so Perseus had been able to live off the land by simply foraging, asking the nearby towns and cities to contribute, as well as receiving some grains from the capital.

The problem of food still existed but it was not that extreme.

But the other matter that certainly was extreme, one that Perseus decided not to bring up openly- was the matter of pay.

Especially the mercenaries pay!

Because the camp had contained not only food and gold too!

Gold that was meant to be paid to the soldiers and especially the mercenaries as their salaries.

In fact, during the sacking of the camp, MN found not only the gold that was meant to be paid in the future, but also the gold that had been already paid to the soldiers, as almost all the men stored their pay in their tents, which was also inside the camp.

Hence not only had the soldiers lost all their previous months' pay but they were also told that they were going to have to keep fighting for several foreseeable months without any sign of coin.

The fact that this produced an unpleasant reaction did not need to be stated.

The situation with the regular grunts was still manageable, even if it was exactly easy.

Perseus was able to use his authority as king and as well as by asking the men to devote their lives to their country to keep dissatisfaction to a minimum.

"Men! Remember what you are fighting for. It is not gold! It is your family! Your land! Your king! Your ancestors!"

"Remember what the enemy will do if they conquer us! You will lose everything!"

Inspiring speeches like this given by Perseus had those good natured countryfolk fooled.

Besides, they truly did fear what Alexander's men would do once they were conquered as the gossip about the fate of Thesalie had spread far and wide, some accurate, but most of them hyperbolics- like how Alexander was a devil who had slaughtered the entire city and then roasted the corpses over a fire before eating them as barbeque.

Most of the stories were idiotic, but they did work, as it made most of the peasants turned soldiers very afraid of Alexander, and thus conversely very obedient towards Perseus.

However, although the fifteen thousand, 17,000 peasants were easy enough to swindle, such patriotic sacrifices were far harder to ask for from the two groups of mercenaries- Kaiser family mercenaries who numbered around two thousand five hundred, 2,500 and Petricuno and the other Thesians who were currently sitting around eight thousand five hundred, 8500.

Not to mention the remnants of Matbar (Marquess) Kyaum's forces.

Among those 8,000 men that Manuk had brought, there were still about 7,000 of such men with Perseus, as they were still not made aware of Manuk's falling out with Perseus.

Manuk did not have the means to reach them, and Perseus saw no reason to reveal this and lose so many highly experienced men.

So he just kept them, simply telling the men that due to their loss, Manuk had gone to try and get more men.

However, Perseus did not know how long that ruse would last and thus was even somewhat fearful that if he were to try and outlast a siege with Alexander, these men might somehow get wind of the real situation in the meantime and rebel against him from the inside.

That would truly be disastrous.lights

But that really was a secondary concern as Perseus's true worry came in the form of their pay, as these eighteen thousand 18,000 demanded a fair bit of pay, with the average cost coming up to 300 ropals every month per head.

This was close to five and a half million ropals, and although that value included food for the men as well as the feed of their horse or draft animal, meaning Perseus did not have actually produce so much in pure gold, it was still an astronomical sum to the pauper king.

But he also could not 'not pay' literally half his army.

So Perseus really had only one trick up his sleeve.

Beg!

He revealed his current difficulties and promised the three parties very rich rewards if they fought for him, even swearing land and titles for some of the higher officers.

And this mostly soothed the higher ups

As for the rest of the more than seventeen thousand, 17,000 regular footsoldiers who were not promised such guarantees, well, Perseus let these bloodthirsty men sack a few nearby cities as they passed along the way, turning a complete blind eye to the atrocities being committed in front of him.

Thus the mercenaries were allowed to recompense themselves by taking the coins from the people and sating their greed as well as enjoying the surrounding women to sate their lust.

It was an act that Perseus felt ashamed even thinking about now and the guilt of how he had turned a blind eye towards such an act being committed on the very people he was meant to protect ate him up from the inside.

And it was not just him shedding crocodile tears either.

For the guilt, combined with all the stress over so many problems and worry of losing his throne and everything he held dear literally changed Perseus physically.

He currently looked, much slimmer as the man had lost quite a bit of weight, and much haggard, with sunken eyes and gaunt cheeks, emitting an aura of desolateness.

So adding to the lack of fortification, inadequate stock of food, and no money to pay his soldiers, there was also Perseus's current mindset, which simply did not want to engage in a prolonged battle.

Whatever happened, he wanted to be done with it as soon as possible.

It was due to all these combined reasons, that pulling his spine straight, he had sworn with a martyr like voice, "If I'm destined to die, I'm going to die on the battlefield! Not like a coward hiding behind a wall!"

"Let us go out in a bloody, blaze of glory!"

And in his decision, the king received the unconditional support of his sons and his closest and biggest retainer Mithriditus.

Thus it was this last roll of the die that was chosen to be their final move.

As for what would a defeat here mean for them here?

Well, Absolute annihilation.

And what would a win here mean?

Well, certainly not the end to the war and complete recapture of all territory.

It would be foolish to even think so.

For even if Perseus was able to pull off something incredible like Hannibal did at Cannae and virtually destroy Alexander completely, it was unlikely the latter was going to simply pack up and leave Tibias, abandoning his all gains.

But perhaps if Perseus managed to win and it was grand enough, he would be able to obtain another fighting chance, another chance to fight.

And if he could snowball from there, well perhaps the situation would develop to a point that it would force Alexander to the negotiating table and enable Perseus to extract some sort of concessions from the man.

Because up until now, Alexander had seen no reason to negotiate, for he had not lost any battle and genuinely he thought he could take all of Tibias.

And this was Perseus's one last chance to change that.

Thus it was with such great optimistic hopes and with their backs to the walls thoughts that Perseus started to prepare his army, eyeing the 40,000 opposing mass with infinite hostility.

Chapter 864 Perseus's Battle Plan

Perseus and Alexander's venue for the battle was right along the banks of the River Diannu, near the estuary where the river met the sea.

It was after all where Lilybee was situated.

The terrain was a piece of pristinely flat land, perfect for the use of heavy cavalry on Alexander's side and the phalanx of Perseus's side.

Personally, Alexander did not like this setup and would have of course preferred much rougher grounds which would more disadvantage the phalangites.

But unfortunately, he was unable to employ that technique here.

Mainly because there was no such terrain nearby.

The southern half of Tibias was in general very flat, devoid of almost any hills.

This made the whole place perfect for agriculture, and indeed on his way, Alexander had seen vast swathes of very fertile land, fields full of wheat, oats, and other produce.

But although that was very good news for Alexander in terms of obtainable booty, it was not that great for using the type of battles Alexander wanted.

Especially around the vicinity of Lilybee, Alexander did not find even a small mound of ground around a 10 kilometer radius.

But it could be argued that even if there were hills nearby, Alexander did not think he would have been able to bait Perseus into giving battle after his last defeat.

The king had to have learned his lesson by now.

And this time, their roles were reversed.

It was now Alexander who was looking for a fight, so he knew he had to face Perseus on his own terms, with the court disadvantage now on his side.

It was also because he had taken into account such a possibility that he had wanted to bolster his army numbers before assaulting Perseus, wanting to have superior numbers to offset the phalanx's inherent advantage in open terrain.

And now that he had that, Alexander felt prepared.

As the two lines prepared, neither side sent any last minute messenger to urge the other side to stand down.

With his peace proposal rejected, by now Alexander decided that he wanted to kill Perseus and destroy the royal family line, while Perseus believed if by some miracle Alexander could be 'taken out', he might yet be able to regain his kingdom.

Thus both men began to form their lines.

In the case of Perseus, he organized his line according to the strategy he had discussed the night prior with his generals.

"We will thin the center and thicken the wings. The strategy will be to hold on in the middle until we can crush the wings and then swing around the enemy and destroy the middle, thus getting us ultimate victory."

Perseus had claimed.

And credit where credit is due, this tactic was indeed a valid strategy and was very much like what Hannibal had managed to successfully do at Cannae.

There the Roman cavalry lost in their exchange to their Numadian counterpart and fled the battlefield, leaving the legionaries to be outflanked by the now free enemy cavalry, who surrounded and killed them to the last men.

So on paper Perseus's very similar strategy seemed very good and plausible.

But it had to be remembered the reason why the Battle of Cannae was famous was because it was the Battle of Cannae, because it was a one time thing that was never repeated in its full grandeur ever again.

Very few successive generals ever managed to pull off a victory using this method.

And why so, you ask?

Well it was not because all of them were incompetent, or simply unaware.

Instead, they did not try it because of how dangerous of a strategy it was, and how easily it was disrupted

The main concern with the strategy was the task asked of the thinned center- to hold back the furious onslaught of the enemies until battle on the wings could be decided.

This was of course very hard to do, as all the troops in the center knew they were bait and that there was a very real possibility that the troops on the wings would fail to rout the enemy and the battle would develop into a stalemate.

And if that happened, then what awaited the 'bait' was clear to all.

Thus many times the center tended to crack way before the enemy flanks did, destroying the strategy.

Even Hannibal was aware of that risk, so to bolster the morale in the center, the Carthaginian general had even placed several of his sons on the frontlines, to show the troops their general was fighting alongside them.

And even then it could be seen that this was really not a reliable strategy as the precondition of routing the enemy flanks were hard.

Hence it was more of a desperate gamble- a one last move that you only made when your back was stuck to the wall.lights

And at that time, Hannibal's back was indeed stuck to the wall.

The Romans had raised an army the size of which they had never seen before- eighty thousand, 80,000 strong, while Hannibal numbered only around forty five thousand, 45,000 to fifty thousand, 50,000.

Almost a 2 to 1 disadvantage.

So for the man, it was either this worked or they all died.

And luckily for Hannibal, it worked.

And perhaps the same could be said for Perseus- that he was in a very similar situation, with this throne and even life on the line.

This was also why this strategy was not contested even though the many experienced officers and soldiers knew exactly how dangerous a move it was.

This was the only move they realistically had left.

Thus they nodded in acknowledgement at Perseus's proposed idea and quietly listened as Perseus delineated,

"I will have all my seventeen thousand, 17.000 Tibian phalangists in the middle. They will be led by my sons, with the Crown Prince Philips being in overall command."

Like Hannibal, Perseus too had recognized the major weakness in this strategy and unsurprisingly chose the same method- use the princes as anchors to boost morale and try and prevent the section from crumbling.

And knowing what was at stake, although some of the sons who had been brought up in the lap of luxury felt their hearts squirm, they ultimately chose to follow their father's instructions.

While Perseus continued,

"The wings will be led by the most elite troops we have. They will be our talons!"

"Lord Taaraf- you lead the right flank with your seven thousand, 7,000 men." Perseus placed a noble under Matbar (Marquis) Kyaum in charge of there.

"And I will personally lead the left wing with the Kaiser mercenaries, the elephants, and Petricuno making up another seven thousand, 7,000."

To show that he was not asking others to simply die for him while he stayed back, Perseus decided to put himself on the front lines too, then pointing out the true coup de grace of this attack-

"It will be the left flank that will contain our greatest strength. Alexander will most likely have his cavalry deployed in the wings- like it is tradition."

"So we will use our elephants to scare them away and easily destroy the right flank just like we did before (because they would be facing each other, Perseus's left wing would face Alexander's right), before swinging around to smash the defenseless center!"

Perseus clenched his fist in hope, and finished by saying,

"While Mithriditus will lead a reserve of four thousand, 4,000- consisting of the remaining Thesian units. His main job will be to plug any gaps in the center if they appear and repel any breakthrough attempts by the enemy!"

Perseus sounded more hopeful than confident as he finished laying out his battle plan.

"The elephant charge... won't the enemy just use arrows and other projectiles to their charges... like they did with Lord Ponticus?"

However, the king's own favored son- Philips was quick to point out the flaw in that plan, adding the ominous warning,

"If those beasts start rampaging like they did in that battle, it would be our flanks that would be smashed, not Alexander's! What to do about that?"

Philips turned to face his father with a skeptical look.

"Of course, I thought about that!" But Perseus was not stumped by this.

He would not be called a legendary general if he had forgotten to take into account such a crucial lesson.

So he frankly revealed,

"That is why I have placed the elite Kaiser and Petricuno mercenaries on that side."

"They will first engage and tire the enemy, eating their stocks of javelins and short spears and if possible even rout them with their sarissa."

"Remember those huge spears are deadly for any cavalry!"

"If they can do it by themselves, then it will be the best for us. We can then simply send the elephants held in the back into the empty flanks and smash the enemy easily."

"But even if the enemy cavalry still persists, they will surely be tired out after a while, and we will time the elephants' charge such that they will neither have their stock of projectiles, nor the time and space to launch them."

"Haha, I can't wait to see how they handle this out of the blue attack," Perseus revealed a cunning smile.

Chapter 865 Alexander's Battle Plan

Perseus's proposed battle plan was accepted by all of his generals, who set about placing their troops like that.

Although in private, his son Philips had once come to raise the following worry with his father,

"Will our wings really be able to destroy the enemy's flanks in time? The way you father discussed it sounded like it might take too long. What if we can't? What if ..."

The man trailed off, his voice shaky and fearful.

Philips might not have shown it before others, but he was scared, very scared.

The thought of losing everything was of course enough to terrify anybody.

"Don't worry my son! That's why I will be there. To lead the men on! It will not take long at all!" But Perseus did not seem to share the same concern and easily brushed the concern off as such, pulling a very confident, reassuring face.

Whether or not he was feeling the same pressure, Lord Theony was not showing.

And this was indeed the correct move, as the king's confident and candid demeanor helped to set everyone's mood at ease.

And thus on the battlefield, that was what was how Perseus started to line up his men-

Seven thousand, 7,000 on either wing for a total of fourteen thousand, 14,000 men.

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Seventeen thousand, 17,000 in the center, and

Four thousand, 4,000 in reserves.

While Perseus's strategy was to strengthen his wings and weaken his center, his opponent could be said to have done almost the opposite,

"Here in the battle plan," In his war tent, standing before a large oak table was Alexander, with a few large chess pieces like metal carvings of various animals like horses, oxen, dogs, etc, elegantly laid out on the table in front of him.

Each of these five to six inches high ornamental pieces denoted a legion, and Alexander regularly used them to easily show his generals the kind of troop deployment he wanted.

And this time, he wanted the following arrangement, as he took each piece and positioned them accordingly while he revealed:

"The plan is simple. We will lighten our flanks and thicken the center."

"The men at the wings will simply have to hold the line while we will use the full might of center to directly smash through the enemy's middle and snap them right like a twig!"

Alexander waved his fist as he grandly declared, making it appear victory was simply a fingertip away.

And as he made his intentions clear, he then looked around for the other's thoughts on the matter.

He quickly received lots of silent nods and looks of approval, as no one found anything to outright object to here.

For this was a pretty commonly used tactic, especially used by those who possessed a numerical superiority- to crush the enemy where he was thickest and hence destroy him completely.

So facing no query for now, Alexander continued, now elucidating his reason for doing this,

"Given the very even terrain, our legionaries will be facing the much stronger and deadlier phalanx who will be in their element."

"Hence I believe this is the way to go. A thicker mass in the center will not only be able to better withstand the phalangists' powerful attacks but also crush them through sheer battlefield exhaustion and casualties!"

"Remember! Not only do we not outnumber them, but also they cannot rotate their soldiers off the frontlines as easily as we can."

"We will win a war of attrition." Alexander loudly pointed out with a light grin on his face, before resuming,

"As for placing heavy cavalry on the wings, the enemy has elephants. So committing to heavy charges seems too dangerous to me."

"Instead I intend to keep them in reserves and have the infantry be the main force in this battle."

"Does anyone have objections?"

Alexander turned his head to scan each of the faces of the officers present there.

"No, my lord."

"I think it is in a fine plan."

"Great! Perseus dies tomorrow!"

And received many such hyperbolic adulations.

"Thank you," Accepting such praise with a curt nod, Alexander then quickly went on to reveal the exact numbers each section was to possess, as well as delegate the commanders of each unit,

"The center will be six legions strong, thirty thousand 30,000 men strong led overall in command by Melodias."

"The three legions at the front row will be led from in the order of left to right by Jamider (Earl) Tikba, Talukder (Viscount) Prantik and Jamider (Earl) Yuusiq."

Alexander decided to put all the Zanzan nobles right at the frontline, including one of his newest Zanzan retainers- Lord Yuusiq.

This was done both as a way to make it easier for them to earn more glory on the battlefield and also to make them experience the trials and tribulations of life and death with Alexander and bond in the process.

"Yes, my lord." And none of the three expressed any dissatisfaction at this deployment.

Instead, they actually appeared elated at the opportunity.

They only imagined what it would be like if it was their units who were to break through the enemy first, and perhaps even capture Perseus.

Now that would be a dream come true.

Thus they appeared very enthusiastic at the given chance.

"Mnmmn," responding to the reply with a curt hum, Alexander then continued,

"The second rows legions will have Menes, Grahtos, and Remus as their commanders."

"I will take the reserve force of 2,000 cavalry, while the two flanks will be relatively lightly manned- only about four thousand- 4,000 on either side."

"Since they will be only tasked with holding the line and be even able to make use of the obstacles we have brought with us, I am sure even this smaller number will be enough to prevent the enemy from breaking through."

The 'obstacles' Alexander mentioned here were mainly oxen carts and wagons that he decided to bring with him.

To use as barriers to foil any elephant charges.

This new tactic came about because after the battle with Lord Ponticus, although Alexander had been very impressed at how well the simple act of throwing sharp things had worked at stopping these behemoths upon nitpicking on the strategy for a bit, found a few, unlikely flaws in it.

To be precise, the main point of worry for Alexander was that this simple tactic could be foiled if a few elephants went completely berserk from the hits and instead of swerving to avoid the withering fire, charged straight into the formation, thus possibly smashing the formation to bits.

Such a thing would truly be a tragedy for Alexander, as the death of one or even several elephants would certainly be worth it for the enemy if they could destroy an entire wing of Alexander in the process.

So to guard against that Alexander upgraded the original tactic and came up with these portable solid, wooden barriers, to be used at the very front to act as a kind of barricade, from behind which the men could throw javelins and arrows in safety.

The presence of a solid object could even act as a morale boost for those inexperienced men who had never seen elephants before, reassured by the fact these black giants would not be able to just come and skewer them.

It was a tactic that had even gained Alexander quite a few cheers from his generals upon reveal, who truly found the idea very innovative.

As for choosing the commanders of the flanks, well turning to his newest 'general', Alexander addressed,

"Lord Theony, you will be in charge of the right flank with your four thousand 4,000 personnel. Your men will mostly be crossbowmen and it should not be too hard a task. But still. we are all counting on you!"

Alexander's eyes had a very hinted glint to them as he said that last bit, like he was sending the other some coded messages.

And it was indeed the case, as Alexander wanted to say- 'I'm giving you the easiest and most basic task in the whole plan. To make it easier for you to increase your reputation in the army and not be seen only as a traitor. Don't muck it up.'

"Umm.... Yes, my lord!" And Lord Theony appeared to have gotten the memo.

For at this order, although the man had at first appeared he wanted to say something as evidenced by how his Adam's apple shook move up and down, but ultimately it seemed whatever the man wanted to say, he kept it to himself, perhaps wanting to reveal it later.

And so seeing he was not interrupted, Alexander at last turned to Heliptos and ordered,

"The other left wing will be commanded by you. Take control of the four thousand, 4,000 Tibian men and defend."

Alexander's meeting would come to an end with that.

Although early morning, just before the battle, Lord Theony would surreptitiously ask for an audience with Alexander and ask him of the following,

"My lord, my son Gnaeus. He is not very well respected by my retainers. Would it be possible for him to lead the flanks! You said it yourself, it will be easy."

This was what the man had wanted to talk about back then.

Chapter 866 Perseus Vs Alexander (Part-1)

Lord Theony met Alexander in private to ask him to let his son Gnaeus lead the right flank of the army, and thus help the man obtain some much needed military accumulation.

"My lord, I have been training my son since childhood about warfare. He will certainly prove his mettle! All he needs is a chance."

The man pleaded on his progeny's behalf.

"Mmmm..." And looking at the hopeful, almost glassy pairs staring at him, Alexander put on a pretended thinking hum,

"Okay," before Alexander subsequently lightly nodded in agreement.

Since the flanks' jobs were so simple- just stand, defend, and shoot arrows, Alexander did not find a reason to be too fussed over who the commander was there.

Even if the man was not as competent as Lord Theony was making him out to be, unless someone was actively trying to sabotage the formation, Alexander figured he could put a monkey in charge and the men on the frontlines could still figure out the things on their own.

Alexander's approval was met with a torrent of profuse thanks as Lord Theony's eyes appeared to be almost shining, while Alexander stoically only waved his hand and replied, "Don't mention it."

However, even though Alexander was thinking this was the end of the meeting, it appeared Lord Theony was not done yet.

For instead of excusing himself, Lord Theony stood there and put on a slightly embarrassed face, before once again asking, "Ummm... my lord, if I stay in the same unit as Gnaeus, I believe the men will not learn to respect him. I want to let him grow up on his own."

"That's why I was thinking...." Lord Theony here paused for a brief second as if feeling a bit ashamed to say the next words, but it was only for a second,

"I was thinking my lord if I could lead the other wing!"

The man was truly bold.

He was planning to horde the majority of the acclaim from this battle to his family.

'Man! Why don't you ask to lead my army next next!' And hearing so Alexander wanted to even sneer so.

But intent on still keeping the conversation civil, Alexander only returned a placid deadpan look, as if to say, 'Are you serious?'

While Lord Theony, as if having anticipated this, quickly chimed, "My lord! The Tiban nobles are very proud. I fear that Lord Heliptos might..."

"Okay, you can have it." Alexander was not in the mood to hear and argue about some minor reason that the other side had probably made up.

So intercepting the other party mid sentence, he waved his hand and breezily agreed to Lord Theony's request, finding the man's wants immaterial to the overall situation, as he then promptly dismissed the man.

It was the morning of the great battle and Alexander far more preferred to concentrate on preparing his army for the upcoming clash.

It was after a hearty breakfast, around late morning that the two armies lined up for battle, Alexander on the attacking side and Perseus on the defensive.

Trumpet, *Trumpet*

And seeing his enemy right there, Alexander immediately ordered the men to advance, blowing his war trumpets to give the signal.

This was probably the first time Alexander initiated an attack on his own and a rare instance where Perseus stood passively on defense.

As the defender, the king got to choose the venue of the battle, and the regal man had decided to place his army right in front of the city of Lilybee, placing his back on the city walls.

This was done very intentionally, to try and ensure that the men in the army, whose morale was questionable, could not rout even if they wanted, and thus stayed and fought down to the last men.

Perseus was determined to make Alexander slaughter by hand all 35,000 men if he wanted to claim victory here.

It was with such determination that Perseus watched Alexander slowly advance, his face stoic and devoid of any emotion, while his eyes were sharp and focused as ever.

From atop his horse, he first squinted his eyes to try and figure out the enemy's distribution, and then spotting something very unexpected, he muttered in quite a disturbed tone,

"Something's wrong! The enemy flanks do not seem to have any horses!"

A core component of Perseus's strategy was to use the sarissa wielding mercenaries and raging elephants to destroy the cavalry and thus open up an opportunity for outflanking the enemy.

But if the cavalry did not even exist, what was Perseus going to destroy?

It seemed unintentionally, Alexander had foiled a large part of Perseus's plan.

"Dammit!"

And stumbling on the very first obstacle, Perseus felt extremely frustrated.

But other than cursing himself, there was little he could do right now.

It was already too late to change the battle formation, as the enemy was literally only ten to fifteen minutes away from making contact.

While it might sound not too long, it was not too short either.

And it had to be noted that Perseus's lines were so long that it took literally around that same time to just send or receive any kind of message.lights

'I will have to think of something later!'

Thus it was with that hugely optimistic thought that Perseus decided to currently only focus on trying to survive the initial contact.

Hence, as Perseus's men braced themselves for the inevitable clash, Alexander's legionaries, full of spirit and fighting zeal due to their recent string of victories, charged forward like a freight train, eager for battle and glory, as the sergeants (100 men leader) leading them whipped them into a battle crazed frenzy,

"Charge! Do not falter men!"

"Victory and glory await us. March!"

"Gold! Women! Wine! All fine things await you. All you have to do is take them!"

"The king's head! The one who gets the king's head will get 10,000 ropals!"

The various officers enticed their units like this.

One of the reasons for doing this was because ancient battles were really brutal and many times entire units simply decided not to move forward in fear of dying.

There were many examples of individual units simply remaining in a standoff with another enemy unit but not making any move.

Thus it was a standard tactic to try and convince these men somehow to attack the other side, be it enticement through rewards, reminding them of their duty, or even just the threat of punishment.

Alexander's men covered the required distance quickly, and when they were close enough like they had practiced a million times over,

"Throw!" Came their officer's command.

Shoo, *Shoo*

And a dearth of deadly pilla flew threw the air and peppered the defending phalangites, the hard iron tips of the weapon embedding themselves into the heavy wooden shields and getting stuck in them, making the shield now useless, while a lucky few even managed to pierce flesh and claime a life or two.

"Hold your ground men! Shields up! Shield up! Do not falter! Do not give them an inch! Defend your ancestral homeland!"

At this initial attack, Perseus and his other officers could only shout so from behind, trying to boost morale with their urging.

The phalangites managed to withstand two volleys of such projectiles, and then came the much anticipated and much dreaded clash, as 30,000 men in the center crashed into a number almost half as theirs.

Bang!

As the men locked shields and exchanged heavy weapon slashes, there was a large metallic thud, followed by a chorus of bloodthirsty cries and pained cries of dying men, and Perseus's lines showed signs of breaking right then and there.

This was because what they were facing were not only men twice as many as them, but also quite experienced ones.

By now the men Alexander had placed on the frontlines were no longer green recruits, but quite experienced men out of their own merit.

Many were veterans who had fought their first battle on that hill against Amenheraft, where Alexander had ambushed and almost killed the king.

That was almost four years, and after that, they had fought in quite a few battles.

There was the famous battle for the capital, the almost hopeless battle against Pasha Djoser, taking the city of Jabel, their first loss against Perseus, the siege of Zanzan, the battle for the manor, the siege of Thesalie, the battle of Sissillpond and lastly this.

So this was the tenth time to be on the battlefield for many of them.

And after so many times, that initial fear and doubt that gripped every man upon stepping into the battlefield was no more.

The men almost mechanically approached the enemy phalangites, while some even cockily looked at the enemy and swore under their breath,

"Green!" for they could see many of their counterparts' hands shaking, clear evidence of the other side's lack of experience.

Hence expertly ducking beneath the mass of spears in front of them, or simply swiping them away with their shields, Alexander's men bypassed the enemy's most formidable weapons and once in range, started to engage in close quarters melee.

"Arghhh! No!"

"Ahhh! Too many!"

"Brother! Get up, brother! You cannot die!"

"There is.... no hope!"

And immediately the legionaries started to grind through them like expert butchers.

Chapter 867 Perseus Vs Alexander (Part-2)

The sheer mass of the legionaries attacking Perseus's vastly outnumbered phalangists at the center quickly began to make them buckle.

The legionaries were far more aggressive than their counterparts, and not only were they able to absorb more casualties, but they were also able to exploit far more gaps and opportunities than the opposing phalangists, leading to a hugely disproportionate amount of casualties.

Even Perseus standing way back of his army could clearly see the blue armored legionaries starting to reave through his men like they were cutting wheat, showing very enthusiastic smiles as they did so.

There was not even a twinge of regret in them as they hacked through, instead actually appearing quite elated, for in a battlefield, the best enemy was a weak enemy.

They were easy to kill, and more importantly, facing them it was easier to stay alive.

And although the king had expected such an outcome eventually, seeing such a state develop so quickly, right at the start of the clash, made his scalp tingle.

He did not think his lines would be this fragile, his men this green.

The only thing that was stopping these verdant soldiers from breaking was perhaps the efforts of the princes, whom Perseus could see running back and forth on their horseback, shouting encouraging words to try and raise morale.

There was even one prince who was personally fighting in the very first echelons, his magnificent armor drawing unrelenting waves of attack from all sides, as the legionaries fought for glory and looting his body.

Perseus's center was able to ward off the immense crisis it was facing till now due to the valiant efforts of his sons.

But only 'till now'.

Because this surely could not last long.

Eventually, the morale raising speeches would lose their efficacy and the legionaries would be able to chew through the phalangists breaking them.

So if Perseus wanted to do something about it, he would have to do it soon.

But the question was what?

"Should I let lose the reserves?" Perseus muttered.

But to use such a crucial resource almost right at the start of the battle seemed very premature.

It would be like playing your trump card on your first hand.

So rejecting that Perseus then thought about using the elephant to try and do something, but also found those to be unfeasible.

"Your Highness, the center! They are asking for more men!" And while Perseus was trying to think of a way to get himself out of this situation, suddenly a herald came asking this.

"Dammit!" And at this request, Perseus swore.

Now was not the time.

Where was he going to get more men?

So rejecting the request, he swung his armed arm and ordered in an unquestionable tone,

"There are no reinforcements! Tell them to hold on with what they have."

"The enemy's wings are close to routing the enemy and we just need a bit more time. Inform the officers of this. Tell them they must fight to the last!"

"And then order any deserter is to be executed along with their fourteen generations!"

That last order from Perseus might have sounded very grand and certainly could have worked fine during peace times, but right now its potency rang a bit hollow.

After all, on the battlefield, who was really going to execute these running men?

If they broke, everyone would be busy running away in fear of being executed by the enemy.

But still, the fact that Perseus still said this revealed the dangerous precipice he was in.

"Yes, Your Highness!" The messenger however was not there to argue with his king and accepted the instruction diligently with a military salute, although his eyes had visibly dimmed at the reply.

But before he turned around and left, he did add the following words laced with great concern, "Please ask the wings to hurry up Your Highness. The situation at the center does not look good."

Perseus did not need the messenger to tell him this, that was pretty apparent to anyone.

Some of the phalanx units had been pushed back as much as several hundred meters by now.

So Perseus only silently waved the man away as he then turned to ask another one of his messengers, who was responsible for keeping tabs over the left flank that the king was directly leading and asked in a frustrated voice,

"What's going on with the flanks? Why have they not broken through? What's taking so long?"

And the question really went on to highlight how that the king had been lying to the other messenger regarding the imminent collapse of Alexander's wings and things were not going nearly as swimmingly as he claimed to be.

"We are having trouble breaking through Your Majesty." The reply was filled with reluctance and fear, as this herald delineated

"The wooden carts and wagons the enemy has brought are proving to be a great hindrance. We are finding it very hard to effectively break through them, as behind them, it is teeming with archers that are firing relentless volleys of arrows. It is making progress very hard for even our expert mercenaries." But the man ended on this optimistic note,

"But we making progress. We just need a little bit of time."

The keyword here was time.lights

Everyone seemed to want more of it, but unfortunately, Perseus was running preciously short of it.

The center would not be able to hold on for long.

"Dammit! Did I make a mistake? Will the glorious bloodline of my forefathers come to an end with me? I'm doomed to be such a sinner?"

Hence, seeing the situation on the battlefield not develop according to his expectations and his strategy failing, Perseus felt his heart bleed as many such doubts filled his head and his eyes turned glassy in terror and hopelessness.

While Perseus was on almost the verge of tears, on the other side of the battlefield, the emotions being experienced were quite the opposite.

It was one of elation and expectation, as Alexander was informed by an elated messenger sent by Talukder (Viscount) Prantik, "My lord! Good news, we are very close to breaking the frontlines! Victory is close at hand! Hahaha."

The deliverer was very excited by this good news, as personally for him, a win here would finally mean the end of this long campaign and he could finally go back to his wife with all the loot he had gotten.

And even as Alexander was informed of this, Talukder (Viscount) Prantik's loud joyous shouts rang out among his men.

"Just a bit more men! You see more women than warriors before you. Unwarlike, unarmed, they will soon give away once they have recognized your sword, the sword of conquerors!"

"Push them. Push them harder! Show no mercy."

This noble had a way with words and could really spur the men on.

And the legionaries, hearing such words, and being encouraged by the results they were witnessing, stabbed, thrust, and killed their way forward, producing deadly numbers of casualties for the opposing side.

"Run!"

"There are too many!"

"We cannot hold no!"

"Save yourself."

"My brother! Died! I cannot die here!"

Then it happened!

A section of the frontline broke.

It was not a total rout of the whole line, but around the middle point of the line, where Talukder (Viscount) Prantik was in command, the phalangists found themselves unable to hold on any longer and finally broke, running towards the city gates, screaming and shouting, hoping to be let in.

"No! Do not run."

"Stand and fight!"

And while such impassioned calls from even the many nearby officers, the units could not be stopped from disobeying command and running.

"Oh no!" Perseus, being witness to all of this from the back instinctively let out this low, fearful growl as his eyes dilated.

He could easily see this gap being the center point of a total collapse.

"Mithriditus! Quick! Stop them!"

Thus whatever Perseus might have had in mind, he threw them out the window, and instantly let loose the reserves of 4,000 men, hoping to plug that gap and stop that 5,000 strong legion from exploiting their breakthrough.

As for how well that would work, well it had been only one legion, perhaps Mithriditus might have been able to do something, but it had remembered he was not facing only one legion, but there was another one behind it.

It was 4,000 vs 10,000.

No matter how effective the phalangists might be against the legionaries in a frontal attack, there still was a limit.

So this could really be said to be just a stopgap measure.

"Yes, Your Majesty!" But even if it was just that, even if it was just to buy some time, Mithriditus knew he had to go and help.

Besides, if nothing else, he would at least be able to kill some of the men who killed his beloved daughter and meet her in heaven afterward.

The old man was not afraid of death.

"Charge! Quickly! We need to stop them!"

"Kill! They are exhausted! It will be easy!"

"Do not fear men! Treat death as something as light as a feather!"

It was with such boisterous shouts that Mithriditus led his 4,000 men to a battle that was approaching its twilight years.

It would not be long before a winner was decided.

Chapter 868 Perseus Vs Alexander (Part-3)

Lord Mithriditus's reinforcements consisted half of infantry and half of cavalry, and at Perseus's deployment, it was these men that rode out first, engaging the enemy attempting to break through.

And it would not be wrong to say that it was them who proved critical in stopping Talukder (Viscount) Prantik from winning the battle then and there, for they were able to come to the aid of the damaged section of the lines very quickly, giving the legion commander no time to swing around and attack the surrounding phalangites' flanks.

"*Haaaah!*"

"Come brothers! The ancestors beckon us!"

"For Tibias! For His Majesty!"

"For glory!"

It helped that this entire force consisted mostly of Perseus's royal guards and they engaged the legionaries with nary a hesitation.

These experienced veterans did not fear the battlefield.

Instead, they were almost drawn to it.

Thus after these men made contact, they started to engage with the legionaries in the traditional manner of the time, wheeling in and out of the infantry's range in groups of hundred while throwing javelins and striking them with spear stabs, hence slowly whittling the enemy down and preventing the legionaries moving forward.

The short sword of the legionaries had always been an ineffective weapon against cavalry, their range very lacking compared to the other's long spears.

Thus facing even such a small number of men, the men appeared unable to advance and even started to get pushed up to their original starting point.

And once the slower phalangites had the time to catch up and finally joined the fray, Talukder (Viscount) Prantik's advances appeared to have been stopped for good.

For the time being that is.

Because it was one thing to stop an enemy's advance, it was entirely another to destroy them.

And Talukder (Viscount) Prantik was far from being destroyed.

Although that little consolation appeared to ring hollow to the man personally, as he loudly and very verbally cursed his men for being cowards and not grabbing the opportunity when it presented itself.

It was an unfair critique of the men but fueled by the heat of the moment and the lure of winning the battle then and there, it could be said to be an understandable one.

While Talukder (Viscount) Prantik was only unhappy with the result, Perseus was feeling quite distressed even with the favorable result he had managed to achieve.

It was because he knew that although he had just barely managed to halt the collapse of his army, he had not managed to solve the core part of the issue.

And so he once again sent word inquiring about the state of the flanks, but received the same result- 'They needed just a bit more time.'

To say this frustrated the man would be an understatement, and seeing the flanks going nowhere, Perseus decided to change tactics.

The keen eyed king had noticed some time ago what he deemed to be some kind of flaw in the enemy's flank, and he decided to try it.

"Since we are having such a hard time breaking through the wagon, tell the men to stop trying to reach the archers behind but instead concentrate on destroying those structures." Perseus's plan called for the ludicrous attempt to hit not where the enemy was the weakest, which was what they were trying to do till now by slowly clearing out the archers before preceding, but instead asked to hit the enemy where he was the strongest, which were the wooden barricades themselves.

And hearing so the messenger who was noting all this down in his memory almost jumped in shock, half fearing the king might have gone mad!

But fortunately, Perseus was no tyrant who just said something and asked his men to carry it out regardless.

Instead, detecting the reaction, the latter heard the king provide guidance,

"I spotted those wagons are being pulled by oxen with a trainer next to them. Target those specifically."

"Kill them or force them to flee! The enemy will not be able to protect such vulnerable targets for too long."

"Once the hard shell runs away, the soft inwards will be doomed!"

"Order this quickly!"

Perseus's plan was indeed this- to target the most vulnerable units and cause their deaths, thus breaking the enemy's spirits and initiating a rout.lights

Perseus would see that those animal handlers that were in charge of looking after the oxen and 'operating' them were no warriors but dressed merely like slaves and servants.

So he reasoned that killing them should be easy.

And this was indeed true, as in reality, these men were part of the logistics crew, in charge of the everyday task of hauling Alexander's various camp supplies.

They were no soldiers but had been just temporarily drafted to this new purpose only for the battle.

Thus they did not get any bronze armor or chainmail or even a proper shield, which was the greatest weapon on any battlefield.

Instead, they only wore some leather scraps of armor that those men themselves had managed to scrounge together somehow and held just a small shield and a pointy spear to poke at in the most dire of needs.

So against all the other well equipped men just behind them, they stuck out like a sore thumb.

And as the overall commander of the force, for Alexander to not have properly equipped these men was indeed a grave oversight.

Something that Perseus seemed poised to exploit.

But in defense of Alexander, there were indeed several reasons for him to do this.

First and foremost, was because he simply did not categorize these animal handlers as troops.

To him, these men seemed more like helpers and extras, kind of like the medics, arrow boys, runners, and even other ox handlers who were stationed behind the frontlines to supply the army with various things.

Hence colored by that thought, Alexander simply painted all the men with the same brush and erroneously overlooked those specific men.

There was also the fact that Alexander did not think these men would have to fight.

In this mind, the relentless volley of arrow fire from the crossbowmen arranged behind the wagons should have been so withering that these men on the frontlines would face very little hostility from the enemy phalangites.

Hence, given the minimal danger, Alexander gave them the minimal tools to deal with them.

And lastly, Alexander figured given his strengthened center, he would be able to win the fight way before anything untoward could start to develop.

It was slightly hubristic on his part but after his recent string of victories, who could have blamed Alexander for riding a bit high and feeling confident?

It was also due to the same reason that the man who could be said to have basically invented barding (the act of armoring one's horse) did not bother to armor the oxen, leaving them with no defenses other than their hide, which might be good for keeping safe from the open elements, but certainly not adequate to stave off sharp, pointy spear stabs.

And this was perhaps the most damning, as although those handlers were able to at least nimbly dodge out the phalangites' spear stabs in the worst case scenario, the huge size of the animals made that very hard to pull off in their case.

And when that was coupled with the fact that these oxen were attached to the wagons that made movement impossible, turning them basically sitting ducks, well, as Perseus's order began to take effect, the once solid, invincible right wing of Alexander began to slowly but surely crack.

It was not immediate but it was definitely noticeable, as these men and animals who were unable to retreat back to the safety of the backlines even if they wanted to were slowly being targeted and killed one by one.

The situation was further hindered against Alexander by the fact that in this particular sector, Perseus's 7,000 greatly outnumbered Alexander's 4,000 men.

And these 7,000 were no peasant militia but could be considered one of the best fighting forces in the world, while Alexander's men were considered of poor quality even by peasant standards.

For they had virtually been just plucked off the field by Lord Theony, who handed them a stick and ordered them to follow him, with little to no training.

It was only upon reaching the capital Parthenigh that they received some under Alexander's order, but even there, other than learning what the various orders meant and learning the various trumpet signals, these men mostly learned how to use the crossbow- how to aim, shoot, and reload the thing while standing behind a barrier, the wooden wagons.

This was because given the limited time, it was far easier than learning how to wield a spear.

But although those skills taught by Alexander made them suitable for simply holding on and defending, these 'legionaries' utterly failed in the task being asked of them right now- which was defending the vulnerable oxen and their handlers.

So as time went on, more and more of Perseus's spears found their mark, killing the poor animals or their handlers and causing others to try and flee in fear.

Thus, unbeknownst to Alexander, in a small corner of his army, things were not going so well!

Chapter 869 Perseus Vs Alexander (Part-4)

One of the reasons why Alexander had decided to place the untrained Tibians in the flanks, secure behind the wagons was precisely because they were so untrained.

Given that Lord Theony had simply dressed these peasants as soldiers, Alexander then chose to train them as crossbowmen as opposed to the sword or spear which required keen hand to eye coordination, quick reflexes, and a great presence of mind to predict where a spear thrust might be coming from and respond accordingly.

Alexander had figured that if he were to incorporate these men into his center legionaries, they would do little more than act as hindrances and even might get his other men killed.

But although those were all sound reasons, currently the situation was developing to such that the worrying news was beginning to filter into the ears of even the commander of the right wing- Lord Theony's illegitimate son Gnaeus.

"Lord Gnaeus!" A runner came to the man in his late twenties, his voice slightly pitched, as he informed, "The enemy is starting to break through! Many of the oxen and their handlers are dead."

"And the rest of the living are starting to panic. The handlers are pleading with you to let them retreat! They won't be able to hold on much longer!"

Gnaeus was indeed able to see that things were not going well on the frontlines, especially by the fact that the loud dying cries of oxen were able to reach his ears even all the way back here.

These cries would reverberate across the nearby vicinity, making all the nearby beasts jitter and panic.

These animals might be considered dumb by humans, but they still had the basic survival instinct.

And a group of armed men clad in menacing helmets, waving pointy spears at one did not inspire confidence of survival.

So seeing their brethren fall one after another, the rest of the beasts also tried to run, as they jerked and neighed incessantly, proving very difficult to control even for their handlers.

Not that there were many handlers left there anyway, as most of those who could had already started to run, while the rest lay dead.

And with no one to oversee the beasts, they began to run, taking the wagons with them and slowly opening up gaps in the defenses.

Gaps that Perseus was no doubt exploiting even as we spoke.

"We should ask for aid! Have more men reinforce us!" And seeing this, Jupiter- Lord Theony's right hand man and one who was placed here as Gnaeus's adjutant offered this advice.

To the experienced man, the situation at their front did not look good.

"No! It is not needed." But the advice was overruled by Gnaeus, as turning to the messenger he swung his arm and ordered, "Tell the men they must hold on! Order the officers to rally the men. Ask them to better protect the wagons and shoot more accurately."

"No is permitted to retreat under any circumstances. We are very close to winning. They must not falter."

"Stop the enemy from advancing at any cost. Stand and fight!" Gnaeus was very stern in his ask.

"Yes sir," And the messenger dutifully received the order with a salute, while from the side, Jupiter pursed his lips in disapproval.

He did not think it was possible to stop an enemy almost twice one size and multiple times better trained by just more grit.

It was an action that did not go unnoticed by Gnaeus, who then turned to say,

"Uncle Jupiter, I can understand your line of thinking. You think it will be safer for us to ask for reinforcements just in case."

"But think!" Gnaeus pointed his first finger which was clad in a bronze gauntlet, " asking this for such a small thing would only lower our prestige in front of Lord Alexander. How can we be fit to rule.... administer Tibias if we ask for help for every small detail? We need to prove our worth to him!" The tall, handsome man clenched his fists and shook them as he said so, his stare steely and determined.

Given that Alexander had decided to make Lord Theony and by relation Gnaeus the man in charge of overseeing Tibias, it was only natural that the man would try to impress Alexander as much as possible, to show him that they were competent and able to handle the tasks given to them.

He had been given the chance he oh so wished since he was young, and he was not going to mess it up.

But other than his own, personal ambitions, he also pointed this additionally to Jupiter,

"And besides, the Pasha has only 2,000 men in reserves. It is unlikely he will commit them to us!"

"So by asking this, we will only be dismissed with nothing but our vulnerability revealed."

"So it is more prudent for us to hold on."

This explanation to Jupiter sounded much more palatable as nodding his head, he commented,

"It seems you are right this time, Young Master," before turning his towards the center of the formation and predicting,

"And perhaps we will not need to hold on for too long either. Their center seems to be on the verge of disintegrating."lights

"Finally!" The man let out a sigh of relief as he thought the battle was coming to an end.

And he had good reasons to think so too, for as the swinging pendulum of the time wore on, the inevitable equilibrium began to settle in once again in the center, with Alexander coming out of the top.

A phenomenon that was clear for anyone in the battle to see.

By now Talukder (Viscount) Prantik had been replaced by Grahtos through the process of rotating troops, and when those 5,000 fresh troops hit Mithriditus's already battered units, it would be quite appropriate to say that the exchange was very one sided.

Even when the cavalry dismounted to fight on foot shoulder to shoulder with the phalangites, the numerical mismatch still proved to be too much as they were pushed back again and again, suffering grievous losses.

And it was not just Mithriditus units that were suffering.

By now Alexander had rotated the entire front three legions with fresh ones from the back, and as these fresh men hit the lines, all the units throughout the whole frontline started to cry, buckle, and crack.

"Hemicus, wanna bet? I say they will break in five more minutes!" And seeing the current state, Alexander was so confident and assured of victory that he even turned to his bodyguard to offer the man the chance to gamble over how long it would be till the battle ended, flashing his five fingers as he did so.

"....." However, the stoic counterpart rejected it with a slight shake of his head.

Although he did have a slight curve to his lips, as he too was very happy with the battle result.

Yes, by now Hemicus too had written the results of the fight in his book, as he thought there was no way Tibias could win now.

Their lines were about to break any second now.

However, although Alexander's side seemed to have declared themselves the victor, there was one man who still had not given up on trying to win, and that was Mithriditus.

The old man who was past his mid sixties!

The zealous man still believed they could turn the tide around.

"Bah! How can I die here? How can I show my face to my daughter and grandchildren if I die here a loser?" Even as the situation deteriorated, the old man roared as such, shouting order after order.

But alas!

No matter how much he shouted and screamed, inevitably he and his units were pushed more and more back until they were on the brink of destruction.

It appeared it was the end

But Mithriditus did not think so and even the dire straits were not enough to snuff the old man's fighting spirit.

"Bah! Useless mongrel!" Instead, cursing his own men for running one last, he decided to finally do the thing he had been planning to do for some time now.

He decided to go out in a blaze of fighting glory,

Just before the entire line was about to collapse, and even as some individual units were starting to run and Alexander seemed on the verge of victory, Mithriditus snatched his house's standard from the standard bearers and raised the flag atop his head, before shouting at the highest voice he could muster, addressing the superstitious Tibias soldiers,

"Hear me, men of Tibias! Men inheritors of a thousand year legacy."

"Witness me! Witness my end! Witness how this child of Tibias lays his life for his country!"

"I carry with me the terror, rout, carnage, blood, and the wrath of all our ancestors- those above and below!"

"I will infect the enemy's standards, the armor, the weapons with dire and manifold misfortune! "The place of my destruction shall also witness the destruction of Zanzan and Adhania!"

"For Tibias! For the king! For the ancestors!"

As soon as Mithriditus finished saying those words, he charged his steed with an ear splitting roar- "Ahhhh!" beelining straight toward the part of the line where the legionaries's ranks were the thickest.

And was then instantly slain by numerous javelins and other missiles, both his body and horse turning into a bloody mess, as his standard fell with him.

But that was enough.

The man that done his job.

His rousing speech had almost miraculously stopped the collapse of the center!

Chapter 870 Perseus Vs Alexander (Part-5)

Lord Mithriditus's fearless solo charge into the mouth of the enemy and the rousing speech he gave as he rode to his death reverberated like a thunderclap across the entire battlefield, penetrating deep into the hearts of every Tibian present.

Even many of the Tibians on Alexander's side were affected.

This aged lord was one of the oldest statesmen of Tibias, having served three kings in his lifetime, Perseus's grandfather, father, and Perseus himself.

Having lived the greater part of his life in court, Mithriditus was highly respected by his peers and loved by the people as he was no tyrant.

So when his standard went down with him, many literally shed tears, such as PP.

The Crown Prince could not help but reminisce that Mithriditus, who unfortunately did not have any son, had always treated him like his own and lamented the fact with his death, Mithriditus's bloodline had come to an end, the rule of the family being transferred to his younger brother.

Thus the death of this elderly, legendary figure caused the entire noisy battlefield to descend into a suppressed silence for a brief while and there was not a single man who had even a speck of love for his country who did not lament this loss

But perhaps what they were most affected by was this great man's powerful speech just before he died, which was grand enough to be put on his tombstone.

It resounded greatly in the hearts of every Tibian.

"Come men! Are you going to run even after hearing that? Can your honor allow that? Charge! Get in line and charge! Charge for Lord Mithriditus! Push the enemy back! For victory!"

And very much catalyzed by this great sacrifice, the officers and even many of the grassroots men rallied, turning around with a great, euphoric,

"Hahhhaaa!" as Perseus's buckling frontlines turned solid once more.

The phalangites might have been down but they were not out of it yet.

As a matter of fact, they even started to launch a fierce counterattack, blunting the offense of the legionaries and even forcing them into a defensive posture for the time being as a storm of spear attacks whirlwinded around them.

Thus the battle once again entered a stalemate, with the center being locked in deadly combat for the third time, while Alexander's flanks were slowly eaten through.

"Dammit! We were so close!" And to say that this frustrated the legionaries would certainly be accurate.

The men had been fighting for hours under heavy, brutal conditions and there were multiple instances where they basically thought they had won.

But the dogged defense of the enemy kept denying them that sweet victory each and every time.

Each Tibian in the center fought like lions and gave such a staunch defense that even the better trained and numerically greater legionaries had to pause their offensive

This of course angered many of them, with some of the more impatient men even starting to get desperate and launching foolish attacks haphazardly, causing unnecessary casualties in their ranks.

"Calm! Calm!" While steady commanders like Melodias worked hard to maintain order and soothe the annoyed soldiers, proclaiming, "This is the enemy's last death throes. Be patient."

"Do not falter now! You have come so close. Remain steady and push them."

"They will tire themselves soon. Then you can slaughter them all!"

And it was with such a promise that the frontline once again froze, with both sides devolving into exchanging brutal spear and sword strikes and claiming many lives.

While at the back, Alexander too pursed his lips in annoyance, as he corrected his estimation about the enemy.

He did not think they would be so determined.

By his original estimation, the battle should have been won by now, but it seemed he had underestimated the enemy's tenacity.

"My lord, the right flanks cannot hold on! They are asking for reinforcements!" It was amidst such a state that suddenly a runner sent by Gnaeus came to Alexander in a panicked voice, detailing the situation there.

Given the battle did not end as JJ and Gnaeus had predicted, the latter finally shed his own pride and asked for support.

The Kaiser and Petricuno mercenaries were by now tearing through his ranks and the frontlines were basically cleared of the wagons.

So many of the peasant crossbowmen men had already started running.

A collapse there seemed imminent.

But even before the messenger could finish describing the predicament of their side, the same call came from Alexander's left flank, describing the same problem- the enemy flanks had penetrated deep into their wings and the men were on the verge of being routed.

This came as a much bigger surprise to Alexander as this flank, commanded by Lord Theony was not nearly as badly manned as Gnaeus's, but was instead composed of many of the participating nobles' personal retinues.lights

So in theory they should have been able to hold on longer.

But the messenger informed Alexander that upon seeing Mithriditus's glorious death and hearing his speech, many nobles seemed to have changed their minds.

Many, doubting themselves, had started to put up only a lackluster defense, giving away even at the slightest resistance, while others even began to desert the battlefield.

"Stop! Where are you going? Are you violating your oath?" And this happened despite Lord Theony's great protests.

The mustached, by now plump man seeing the situation developing began to repeatedly urge the nobles to rally their men and push back the Crown Prince who was leading the attack on this front, but many seemed unwilling and started to run with the excuse that the lines were about to be imminently breached.

While a few of the more vocal nobles even brazenly declared,

"Lord Theony. We swore to defend Pasha Alexander. But not attack our once king. We cannot do it. Lord Mithriditus's death will not let us do it. We are retreating from this battle. Think of us what you will."

Then turning around, a large number of nobles deserted en mass, their heart guilty over the choices they made as opposed to Mithriditus over the same situation and what that man had said in his dying moments.

And no matter the urging, reminding, or even threatening from Lord Theony's was able to change their mind.

Even when the matter of the oath was brought up, Lord Theony was only rebuked by the words that he too once had sworn an oath to Perseus, but broke it.

It was only at that point, understanding that his flank was doomed that Lord Theony had decided to ask for help from Alexander.

"Shit!" And hearing the unveiling of the great events on his left flanks, Alexander spat out this curse to himself.

Yes.

He did not curse the nobles for leaving, he cursed himself.

Because he knew he had messed up with the troop deployment in this battle.

He should have anticipated something like this.

In hindsight he should have never let the two wings be purely made up of Tibians, or more specifically of troops he had just conquered.

He should have blended some of his own men within, or at least changed the officers.

But in Alexander's defense, he had chosen to do this mainly because of how Lord Theony had personally reassured him that all the men were reliable and that he would personally take responsibility for them.

Furthermore, there was also the fact all the nobles had sworn oaths to him, which further reassured Alexander, as this was a very big thing at the time, and violating it was basically high treason, cursed by both men and the gods.

And lastly, the Tibians and Zanzanites both spoke different languages, meaning Alexander found it hard to have his officers lead them.

This was why he let the nobles operate autonomously.

And this was also why he did not mesh them in the center as he feared these troops would not be able to properly obey orders, instead opting to give them the much cushier option of defending the flanking with crossbows.

This way, Alexander figured the men would face less resistance and be less likely to break than in the battle intensive center.

After all, if he did put the Tibians in the center and then some run, well then a cascading effect could develop and Alexander might lose his entire middle section.

But perhaps most of all, in Alexander's mind, he did not think there was anything wrong with employing Tibians among his ranks because of historical precedence.

It was prevalent at this time, and even in Alexander's previous world, where the Romans regularly used auxiliaries alongside their own troops to bolster their numbers.

And it had to be even noted that Romans treated these outside troops pretty harshly too.

For instance- their rations were usually of poorer quality and many times they were treated as frontline cannon fodder, used primarily as fighters with the goal of tiring out the enemy before the Roman legionaries swooped in for the kill and all the glory.

Yet, despite all this, there was hardly ever rebellion from the auxiliaries.

So Alexander thought it would be a similar case here.

Thus imagine his dismay, as all of a sudden, even before he could muster his reserves and decide how to help the two sides, he witnessed the simultaneous collapse of both his flanks!