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The Battle of Kuith

Youmacon 2012 Preview

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From a distance, it looked like a heavy rain descending upon his men. While Kuith perhaps hadn't thought heavy weapons to be a worthy investment, it seemed quite sufficiently stocked on arrows.

It concerned Largo little. The barrage was of little danger to anyone who knew how to properly hold their shield as they advanced, which is why he was dismayed to hear the occasional scream reach his ears from the ranks. It was disappointing to have casualties so soon.

Disappointing, but not unexpected.

Hirodes again approached to report to the Legionnaire, which Largo accepted with no pleasantries. "How many injured?"

"Forty-one, my excellency. None are serious," Hirodes offered. "Should I have the medics tend to them and send them back to the field?"

"No," Largo answered. "Any that can march are to receive field dressing and no more. Those that can not will be treated to preserve their lives and no further. Perhaps pain will teach them the lesson drills could not."

"Understood, my excellency," the officer said, relaying Largo's words to the waiting medic. Hirodes then wasted no further time getting to the meat of his report. "As you expected, excellency, we will have to break down the gates in order to proceed further. Our climbers will be in position within the hour, but without a breach to draw the attention of the archers at the battlements of the keep, they would be easy marks."

The lieutenant pointed towards the keep at various points along the outer wall and higher buildings past it. "As you can see, they have their archers aligned at several levels on the battlements as well as the Witch Queen's tower. Anyone trying to scale the wall is exposed to their lower levels, and they have enough manpower situated high enough to rain arrows down upon us even if we're pressed against the wall."

Largo was expecting this development, as Hirodes had noted. Kuith had well planned its defenses and strategy. "Is the ram ready?"

"Yes, my excellency. It has been pared and grooved, and is in position at the top of the canal. Do you think it will be enough to break down the gates?"

Largo grinned as he heard the sounds of exertion from the siege personnel finally working the battering ram through the narrow passages allowed by the peninsula. He hadn't brought any siege weapons with him on the trip northward, so once his scouts delivered information on Kuith's defenses, he improvised accordingly.

The order had been for a siege team to break off into the wilds, then find and fell the largest tree they could find. The end result was nearly a hundred feet of useable trunk from a massive hardwood, almost thirty feet in diameter at the broadest, then cleared of branches and gouged with hand holds for roughly two hundred men. And Largo had no doubt they'd need damn near all two hundred to generate enough energy to get that titanic slab of timber moving with the force necessary to crash down the thick stone gates of Kuith.

Largo was quite pleased with the efforts of his men. He wondered if the Witch Queen saw *this* coming. "Oh, I do believe it will be, Lieutenant," he finally predicted, the triumphant gleam in his eye anticipating a mighty victory for Reaht. "Recall the back lines to provide shield cover for the siege team. And have the front lines make way," he then ordered.

"Yes, my excellency," Hirodes accepted with another respectful bow, and rushed to rejoin the battle.

Largo regarded the field one more time, then dismounted his horse and called for the beastmaster to stable it at the base camp. He made sure his broadsword was secure on his back, and called for Hirodes to inform him that Largo was now taking charge of field command.

This didn't surprise the lieutenant. Largo was a very hands-on Legionnaire, more than

willing to join the battle, and his soldiers respected him greatly for it. The only thing that upset Hirodes about the decision was that he would have won fifty gold pieces from the betting pool if Largo had joined the fray thirty minutes sooner.

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Largo had noticed the archers pulling away from the battlements along the outer wall as the ram approached. He did not like it when enemies surrendered ground without a real fight. It either meant they were cowards, or that they had some scheme cooking to lure their foe in.

"I have a bad feeling about this," he finally admitted, stepping away from the ranks in the hopes that he could get some sign of what they were plotting over that damnable wall.

"About what, my excellency?" Hirodes queried, startling Largo with the silence in which he appeared at the Legionnaire's side.

Quickly regaining his composure, Largo gestured to the wall. "This. This was too easy. After all those barrages, they're *letting* us have this position? Something is not right."

A clue reached his ears nary a moment later, the tune of grinding metal and stone to his north. Below the flume, massive doors began to open, and the mechanisms of the canal rose, the sound and sight of rushing water filling his ears and eyes as it bore down upon the flood plain.

"Brace yourselves!" Largo bellowed, hoping that his voice carried over the rushing wall of water. Despite his best efforts, the wave took him off his feet and carried him nearly halfway across the plain. It was fortunate the tide was still low, he had no doubt he would have been carried out to sea otherwise.

The torrent left him without his helmet and soaked him in near-freezing water, but Largo could not allow himself to worry about either: he had to return his soldiers to formation. He jumped to his feet, sputtering and spitting out salt water, making no effort to hide his rage at this indignity. "Stand up! It's only water! Stand up and continue the assault!" he bellowed in fury. "Scoutmaster Troius, send your men up the embankment to find similar structures! If the Witch Queen has more of these floodgates, I want to know about them in advance next time!"

"Yes, my excellency!" came the response from the rear of the scattered formation.

An officer's voice then cut through the fog of war, bringing warning. "Shields up! Barrage incoming!"

Largo groused. He did not carry a shield, as his large sword required both hands to wield, but he was more than capable of swatting away two arrows that had drifted in his relative direction. "Get the siege team back on the ram and get this wall down! No more delays! Let the ocean spit upon us! We are Reaht! We will fight the land and sea itself to win the day if we must!"

His men were trying... they really were. Perhaps their battle cry in response wasn't as enthusiastic as the one to start the charge, but he could understand their greater concern for getting back in formation and not freezing to death.

A second wave battered the legion. I wasn't as strong as the first, as the canal likely didn't have as full of a reservoir to draw from, but it was enough to complicate matters. Holes had been formed in the ranks that allowed arrows from above to make better purchase on unshielded flesh.

"Lieutenant! Call our medics forward, and arrange for the wounded to be properly treated! Lessons will have to wait for another day!" Largo ordered, but as Hirodes relayed the order, the Legionnaire's eyes caught something out at sea. A fog from the deeper waters obscured it at first, then it formed into the definitive shape of a large galley ship's mast and bow.



Largo retreated from the field, back towards the higher ground in an attempt to get more stable footing. By that point, several more ships of varying sizes had appeared through the mist. He still couldn't get a good view of the standards they flew, but he had a pretty good idea of what those would be.

“Lieutenant!” Largo called out, beckoning Hirodes over to him while a third wave from the canal momentarily delayed the officer. Once he reached the Legionnaire's side, he was quite out of breath. “Do you see that?”

“See what?” Hirodes asked before he had fully looked up, then his eyes bulged in surprise. “Coders save us... that has to be at least a hundred ships! The Witch Queen was in diplomatic discussions with Aramathea. Could they have sent aid?”

Largo shook his head. “We would have noted Aramathean movement long before we left Reaht for that to be the case. No, these are pirates, I would wager. Too many different styles to be a navy. Could the Witch Queen have hired them?”

It was Hirodes turn to be skeptical. “Kuith doesn't have the money to afford that size of force, do they? Maybe the pirates are seeking to loot Kuith themselves, and are planning to use our invasion as cover?”

“Perhaps. Perhaps not,” Largo answered, accepting the possibility. “Prepare our men for a second front, just in case the taste of Reahtan blood suits the brigands as well as Kuithan. Make sure the medics work double time.”

“Yes, my excellency,” Hirodes accepted, moving his tired legs as fast as he could to relay those orders while Largo watched the approaching fleet warily. He didn't like this one bit. Even if the pirates were on their own side, it would still have his legion confronting a second force.