

Perish 181

Chapter 181: Openly Repairing the Pathway

After Rome became powerful, they began to address the threat from the north. They repeatedly sent troops to advance towards the Po River Plain, successively eliminating the largest Gaul Tribes, such as the Insulbrians and Senones, and drove the Boyi people to Pannonia, subjugating the Veneti and Ligurians... Meanwhile, they also began immigrating in large numbers to the Po River Plain, not only Romans but also Ladimans, Umbrians... and even Great Greeks from the south.

After a hundred years of governance, this area has completely submitted to Roman rule. Even during the Roman Alliance War more than twenty years ago, when the Italian political situation was turbulent, the Northern Italy Province still maintained stable order and did not participate in the war.

Even in recent years, when land annexation and large farm plantations became increasingly rampant in Italy, it rarely affected the Northern Italy Province, which has become the most stable and affluent region on the peninsula.

This worked to the advantage of the Maximus Army, as fields stretched endlessly everywhere, filled with herds of cattle and sheep. Being midsummer now, the wheat crops were almost ripe, and the rebel soldiers directly harvested wheat from the fields or rode horses to catch cattle and sheep, making wheat cakes, porridge, or stew, essentially without needing to consume the stored grain of the Supply Camp.

However, Maximus had ordered: Do not harm the citizens of the Northern Italy Province unless necessary, or face Military Law punishment!

Many soldiers did not understand this, but Military Law is ruthless, so they could only comply.

The Po River Plain is crisscrossed with rivers and numerous swamps. Even though the terrain is flat, it is not very favorable for military marches. However, due to the presence of the Romans, many roads and bridges have been built over the past century, greatly facilitating the rebel army.

Five days later, the Maximus Army arrived in Bologna (Bononia).

"Maximus, why did you call me here?" Torquato rode up to Maximus, speaking with an unfriendly tone.

After all, yesterday Torquato had just had an argument with Maximus because his soldiers violated Maximus's military orders, killing two farmers while looting supplies. They were caught by Military Judge Sidonius and were about to be punished by Military Law, which led him to cause a big scene after rushing over.

Maximus's expression was calm, as if yesterday's events had never happened, and he said softly, "Torquato, I regret to tell you that we have to part ways here."

"What do you mean?" Torquato stared wide-eyed and asked.

"Exactly what I said," Maximus replied unhurriedly, "my people will no longer take this route to cross the river to Piacenza and then to the mountain pass north of Milan to cross the Alps. They will go here—"

Maximus pointed to another road running through Bologna City in front of them, "turning northeast, crossing the Po River... so we will not be taking the same path, and we have to part again."

Torquato was stunned, "Weren't you leading the troops to leave Italy and then go to Gaul? Are you now changing the marching direction because you're still mad at me?"

Maximus laughed heartily, "Torquato, both you and I are leaders of men, bearing heavy responsibilities. How could we recklessly change plans because of a trivial fight, treating the lives of all the soldiers as a joke! In fact, before the army set off from Rimini, we already planned that we would leave Italy but not through the Milan Pass to Gaul."

"Where are you planning to go?" Torquato asked subconsciously.

Maximus smiled and said, "To ensure the safety of the journey and prevent accidents, even my soldiers don't know our destination yet, so I won't tell you either. All you need to know is that no one will bother you anymore, and no one will quarrel with you. You can lead your troops forward easily, isn't that a good thing!"

Leading troops forward easily? ... Torquato looked at Maximus's false smile and really wanted to punch him in the face.

Under Torquato's command, there were only over 2,000 soldiers, most of whom were former troops of Cross. They were unwilling to join Maximus's army and instead followed the loyal Kotorkwado under Cross's orders, leading them back to Gaul.

However, with just over 2,000 men planning to march independently for thousands of kilometers and then cross the Alps, how is that so easy! Not to mention, the logistics and camp management are not simple matters. Despite some conflicts with Maximus's army recently, Torquato clearly understood that he had gained a lot because Maximus's army was extremely well-organized, with all departments functioning well, thoroughly considering every aspect of the march, including their troops. This was the first time he had enjoyed such an easy march!

Furthermore, this is the Northern Italy Province, where a regular Roman Army is stationed to guard against northern Gauls. They have never been weak in combat power. The Northern Italy Province army that fought fiercely with them in the battle on Sarabian Way is proof. Without relying on Maximus's army of more than ten thousand soldiers, could he lead over two thousand men past the Roman Army's blockade, cross the river, and return to Gaul alone? ... Torquato had no confidence in this.

Chapter 182: Repairing the Plank Road_2

As he was hesitating, Maximus spoke again, "I have already looked into this: there are only two permanent legions in this Northern Italy province of Rome, used to guard against the northern Barbarians. Previously, the governor here led these two legions south in an attempt to assist their Governor in exterminating us, only to be surrounded and annihilated by us on the Sarabian Way..."

This means that there are no regular Roman troops left in the Northern Italy province, and in such a short time, they couldn't possibly rebuild those two legions. What remains on this plain are merely the City Guards of each town. We are well aware of the combat effectiveness of these City Guards, and as long as we march swiftly enough, the governor here will have no time to gather these City Guards together..."

As Maximus spoke, he smiled, "The current situation is extremely favorable to us. In such circumstances, Torquato, don't you have the confidence to lead those Gaul brothers home by yourself?"

Torquato felt that the smile on Maximus's face was silent sarcasm, and a surge of hot blood rose straight to his head. He shouted, "Maximus, even if I, Torquato, do not accompany you, I can still bring all the brothers back to Gaul!"

"In that case, we shall part ways here." Maximus immediately continued, speaking quickly: "After all, we have been comrades in battle. I will gift you ten Carriages, filled with bread and smoked meat, along with tents needed for camping..."

As he spoke, the Supply Camp brought over the Carriages directly.

At this point, Torquato fully understood that Maximus was well-prepared. Despite being angry, the inherent pride of the Gauls prevented him from behaving pettily. He spat a thick glob of saliva on the ground with a "pah" and turned his horse's head back the way he came.

Not long after, he led his disorganized group of over 2,000 Soldiers past Maximus, holding his head high and without giving him another glance.

"Leader, it seems he resents you greatly," Quintus whispered.

"So what? We won't meet again anyway." Maximus replied indifferently, speaking softly: "Let's camp here for a day first. Based on their previous acts, Torquato and his men will surely plunder along the way, attracting the attention of the Roman Army. At that time, we'll march faster and cross the Po River."

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The atmosphere in the Roman Senate was heavy. The Elders were not exchanging casual conversations as usual but were sitting with serious expressions, eagerly waiting for the meeting to begin swiftly.

Once all the Elders were present, Chief Elder Catullus stood up and walked towards the center of the hall.

Facing the numerous Elders, he said gravely: "My colleagues, I'm sure you're all aware by now that the news from Pisenum reports another defeat for Crodianus. Not only have his forces suffered heavy losses, but two Northern Italy Legions have also been lost..."

As of now, the two Governors' campaigns against the rebel army can be described as complete failures! What should Rome do next? I hope after our discussions today, we can come up with a reasonable solution to the current predicament."

Catullus' words were like pouring water into a soon-to-boil pot of oil, and the hall instantly erupted.

"Crodianus is utterly incompetent and should be held accountable!"

"The same goes for Publilius! They both commanded eight well-trained Legions and had so many Citizen Soldiers from various towns, yet they were defeated by a group of starving slaves—this is a disgrace to Rome!"

"It's not only a disgrace to the Romans but also to us Elders! Now there's widespread public discussion throughout the city, questioning why such fools were elected as Governors!"

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"Quiet! Quiet!..." Catullus waved repeatedly. Though elderly, his voice was quite loud, and coupled with his high prestige, the Elders quickly ceased their bickering.

Catullus frowned as he criticized, "You are the elite of Rome, not foolish peddlers! How dare you quarrel like shrews in this sacred place! Have you forgotten the order of the Senate? From now on, if anyone shouts carelessly, I'll have them expelled!"

He swept the hall with a stern gaze. Only when everyone was completely silent did he continue: "Now, according to the protocol of the meeting, everyone should present their suggestions."

The first to stand was Ketegus, who was seated second from the left in the first row. Bowing slightly, he spoke: "Colleagues, Rome has transformed from a small City State in Italy to a mighty country controlling the entire Mediterranean. In these hundreds of years, countless wars have occurred; we've achieved many glorious victories but also faced many defeats. Have the losing Governors and Elders ever been severely punished? We all know that hasn't happened!"

Rome has never demanded that defeated generals accept punishment, so today we shouldn't start such a precedent. Otherwise, we will be remembered by future generations, and that would be the true disgrace!"

Whispered conversations arose in the hall, but no one voiced objections.

Changing his tone, Ketegus continued: "We must be cautious! News of the army's defeat will soon spread throughout Rome, and the citizens may gather outside to protest at any moment! We must take measures to calm the public's anger before things escalate.

Although we will not punish Crodianus and Publilius, their continual failures have put Rome in peril, indicating their lack of military talent. Therefore, I propose — revoke their military command and appoint someone with stronger military capabilities as Commander to swiftly eliminate the rebel army, restoring peace to Italy!"

"I agree with Ketegus's proposal to revoke the military command of Crodianus and Publilius!"

"I agree too!"

"This order should have been issued long ago!"

"They must also return to Rome immediately, so we no longer bear the shame of defeat!"

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The Elders almost unanimously supported Ketegus' suggestion, reflecting the severe impact Rome's military defeat had on them.

"The proposal to revoke the military command of Crodianus and Publilius is approved!" Catullus confirmed, then asked, "So who will serve as the new Commander, to organize the army and eliminate the rebel forces? If anyone has a suitable candidate, feel free to recommend them, or self-nominate."

Following Catullus's remark, the Senate fell into a poignant silence. The Elders exchanged glances, most appearing cautious, some even shrinking back.

Though they outwardly expressed contempt for the rebel army, over a year of relentless suppression attempts had left the Roman Army continually defeated, with one Legal Officer dead, one fled, two Governors ruined, over 100,000 troops and eleven Legions failed... This was no mere suppression; it was a massive-scale war! And the enemy was extremely powerful. Without strong military capabilities, better not get involved, or one could easily end up in ruins, just like Crodianus and Publilius.

With a sharp understanding of themselves, the Roman Elders remained silent in their seats. In contrast, Catullus, standing at the center of the hall, grew anxious: "What, none of us dares to lead troops into battle?! Do we need to recall Pompey from Spain and Lucullus from Little Asia?"

After Catullus's words, finally, someone stood up. It was Little Sulla, the nephew of the late Dictator Sulla.

Chapter 183: Crassus Emerges

"Distinguished colleagues, after more than a year of war with the rebel army, I believe we are all very clear that the enemy we face is not an ordinary band of rebels. They are cunning and fierce, numerous, and have defeated us many times before, so their morale is high and their combat power is not weak. Indeed, they are a formidable enemy, and only a commander with strong military capability can hope to win!

Moreover, according to the information we now have, the number of the rebel army has exceeded one hundred thousand, one hundred thousand! This is by no means a number that can be dealt with by sending one or two legions. We need more soldiers, more legions!

However, over the past year, we have spent a vast amount of gold and silver from the treasury, and now we may not be able to come up with enough money in a short period of time to form enough legions. Therefore, we need this commanding general to also have excellent fundraising capability, to be able to independently solve part of the military funding, alleviating the tension of the treasury—"

At this point, Little Sula intensified his tone: "After listening to all of this, everyone should be very clear that the most suitable person to take on the new command and set out to annihilate the rebel army can only be—Marcus Licinius Crassus!"

The elders followed Little Sula's direction, looking at Crassus, who remained indifferent in the crowd, with mixed feelings. They indeed detested and even feared this man a bit, but just as Little Sula said, they could not deny that Crassus was indeed the most suitable candidate for commander among the Senate at this time.

"Crassus, Sulla has recommended you. Are you willing to lead the army to annihilate the rebel army?" Catullus asked solemnly.

Crassus stood up, his face serious, and said: "Honorable Catullus and dear colleagues, the rebel army is ravaging Italy, and Rome is in peril. Any Roman citizen should contribute their strength at this moment! I am willing to take on this heavy responsibility! I am also willing to use my own money to support the army at this time of treasury tension! But I have two conditions, which I hope the Senate will agree to."

"What conditions?"

"First, because the rebel army is strong, the army I lead must not be less than eight regular legions; second, during the period I lead the army to annihilate the rebel army, the Senate must not transfer me away halfway, nor interfere with any of my military actions."

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After Roman Governor Crodianus suffered a disastrous defeat on the Sarabian Way, he fled in disarray with the Governor of Northern Italy Province, Casius, all the way north until they entered the provincial capital—Verona City, where they finally settled their minds, and then received the news: the rebel army continued northward, and the vanguard had already approached Rimini.

Crodianus immediately requested Casius to dispatch troops to intercept the rebel army from crossing the Po River, preventing them from escaping Italy, while also buying time for the Roman reinforcements to arrive in the Northern Italy province.

Although Crodianus suffered consecutive losses, as a governor, he was still trying to fulfill his duties.

But now Casius became somewhat reluctant.

Originally, when Dictator Sulla was alive, he had enacted a decree "provincial armies should not move south across the Rubicon River," but the two governors, upon gaining Senate consent, requested him to march south and participate in the military operations against the rebel army. In Casius's view, with an army of one hundred thousand to encircle a motley crew, victory should be easily won, and he was more than willing to comply, thinking it was a free battle merit.

Who knew when he led the army to Ascoli, he learned of the back-to-back defeats of the two governors, and then under Crodianus's request, he had to engage the rebel army on the Sarabian Way, and in the end, he lost everything he had.

At this time, Casius was worried about how to rebuild the two legions, and upon hearing news of the rebel army continuing northward, he felt incapable of resisting and thought: might as well let the rebel army escape from Italy, which could even reduce losses to the Northern Italy province.

However, Crodianus insisted, and Casius, having become the Governor of Northern Italy province after stepping down as Legal Officer, did not dare to oppose. Otherwise, if Crodianus accused him of "indulging the rebel army," his political career in Rome would be over, for Crodianus is indeed a governor.

In fact, the simplest way to stop the rebel army from crossing the river is to destroy the bridges and confiscate the boats. The Po River is the largest river in the Northern Italy province and the entire peninsula, spanning a length of one mile at its widest point. Without bridges and boats, the rebel army could only stand helpless at the river.

However, Casius did not dare to do so because Rome, in order to facilitate the governance of the Northern Italy province, successively built the Bobilia, Cania, and Emilia avenues in northern Italy, where except for the Bobilia Avenue which mainly used floating bridges, the other two were built with stone bridges spanning both banks of the Po River. These were constructed by Rome at the cost of enormous manpower, material resources, and time.

The Romans' love for infrastructure is deep in their blood. Back then, when King Pyrrhus of Epirus repeatedly defeated the Roman army, he even led his army along the Appian Way across the mountains towards Rome, and the panicking Roman citizens did not destroy the avenue to delay the enemy. If Casius dared to destroy the bridge, he would instantly become a sinner of Rome, condemned by the populace.

Moreover, the Po River traverses northern Italy, stretching nearly a thousand miles. Apart from these three avenues and three bridges, there are multiple floating bridges and dozens of ferry terminals. In the short term, Casius could not completely block the Po River, but of course, he did not express such discouraging thoughts. On the contrary, he had to actively perform to show Crodianus that he was making efforts.

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He urgently summoned two thousand citizen soldiers from Verona and nearby towns, ordering his subordinates to lead the troops to the mouth of the Po River, as the rebel army in Rimini and crossing the Po River via the Bobilia Avenue along the coast was undoubtedly the shortest route.

Soon, news came: the rebel army was indeed moving north along the Bobilia Avenue.

Casius was secretly pleased with the accuracy of his prediction.

But a few days later, he received reports from scouts: the main rebel army stopped heading north, turned south instead, and only a force of about 20,000 men marched northwest along the Emilia Avenue.

The main rebel force no longer advanced north into the Northern Italy Province! ... This made Casius breathe a sigh of relief, but Crodianus became anxious because the main rebel force turning south would continue to ravage Italy and even threaten Rome, so he demanded Casius to quickly assemble a large army to move south to contain the enemy.

This time, Casius refused to comply because the new resolution from the Roman Senate had already been delivered to Verona, stripping Crodianus of military command, effectively ending his one-year term as Governor. As a result, Casius had no fear.

However, as the governor, Casius needed to show the Roman Senate his efforts to make up for previous failures. At the same time, he also needed to be responsible for the citizens of the Northern Italy Province, which was different from other provinces because it had too many Roman immigrants. With the main rebel force absent, leaving only a detachment of less than 20,000, Casius believed he could attempt to intercept and defeat this marauding rebel force on the north bank of the Po River.

Casius judged that this rebel detachment intended to cross the river from Piacenza and then head to the mountain pass north of Milan because it was the easiest route over the Alps to Outer Gaul. Therefore, he dispatched a fast horse to notify the magistrates of nearby towns such as Milan and Piacenza to gather citizen soldiers and prepare for defense. He also notified the troops already at the mouth of the Po River to turn around and accelerate westward to the north bank of the Po River where Piacenza was located.

Meanwhile, he himself led the Personal Guard along the Postumia Road to the same destination (the Postumia Road is a road that runs across the Northern Italy Province, from the west to Genoa, east to Aquileia, with Piacenza and Verona both located along this road), and he prepared to summon the City Guards from the towns along the way.

Maximus's army halted for half a day in Bologna and then continued to march slowly along the Emilia Avenue, seeming as if Torquato's forces were the vanguard while his army followed as the main force.

On the third day, Maximus's army turned around and rapidly headed back to Bologna, then hurried northeast along the Cania Road.

A few days later, Maximus reached the south bank of the Po River, and just as the scouts had reported, there were no Roman garrison forces across the river to intercept, allowing his anxious heart to finally settle.

Soon after, his gaze was captivated by the spectacle before him: a white colossal structure sprawled majestically over the tumultuous river. It wasn't a pontoon bridge, a wooden bridge, or an arch bridge, but a horizontally constructed stone bridge. Although this part of the river was relatively narrow, it was nonetheless several hundred meters across, with swift waters. Yet the Romans, with their superior infrastructure prowess, had built a long stone bridge connecting the two banks, with a deck four to five meters wide, level and solid, featuring a carriageway in the middle, walkways on both sides, guardrails, and drainage holes...almost like transplanting a grand avenue onto the river. And this was in ancient times before the Common Era!

Maximus noticed that the soldiers crossing the river were also awestruck by the long bridge, their morale previously boosted by consecutive victories now causing them to tread carefully. This was the power of civilization!

In his short-lived decades, could he create a civilization comparable to Rome's? ... Maximus harbored both anxiety and anticipation in his heart.

The army crossed the Po River, heading north unimpeded, and in just a few days reached Padua, one of the most prosperous towns in the eastern part of the Northern Italy Province.

Maximus had the army pause again and gave special orders to plunder extensively: grain, livestock, horses, money... all to be taken, but people were to be harmed as little as possible, and killing was forbidden.

When the army set out again, the number of carriages had almost doubled, affecting the marching speed, but as Maximus ordered: "From now on, the army will no longer go out to gather provisions." Therefore, each camp was delayed until after dusk, ensuring the daily marches did not slow significantly.

When Casius learned that the main rebel force had changed direction, crossed the Po River, and reached Padua, he realized he had been completely duped by the rebels.

But by then he was already near Piacenza, with messengers continuously requesting reinforcements, for Torquato led his troops in a path of burning, killing, and pillaging, causing immense panic among the province's populace. Casius decided to temporarily ignore the eastern rebel forces (truthfully, he couldn't deal with them at the moment), and concentrate all his efforts on dealing with this smaller but extremely arrogant rebel force in front of him.

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The news that the "rebel army led by Spartacus defeated the Roman army in consecutive battles" spread along Italy's east coast, and naturally reached the ears of some interested parties across the Adriatic Sea.

"Brother, Leader Maximus and his forces actually beat the Romans! What he said in Sarabia has come true!"

"Yes, when I heard that the Roman Army had surrounded Leader Maximus's troops, I was quite worried for him." Karsipenpas said with much emotion: "But I never expected they not only defeated the armies led by two Roman Governors consecutively but also destroyed the legion in the Northern Italy Province. There's no one left to stop their northward path."

"So that means Leader Maximus will soon arrive with his army!" Onomabatis stressed the point.

"It's time for us to fulfill our promise." Karsipenpas nodded decisively, "We must set off immediately and return to the tribe!"

Without delay, Karsipenpas assigned Onomabatis to remain, while he himself, along with several followers, left the island that day on a small boat, landed on the mainland not far off, and traversed narrow paths through rugged mountains, crossing hills and rivers until finally reaching a relatively flat area with a large stockade enclosed by wooden walls.

The gate guards, far from stopping him, welcomed him into the stockade warmly.

Once inside, he went straight to the central great house, where the tribal leader lived and held councils.

Aco Upapagos, the Great Chief of the Alde Tribe, over fifty years old, with gray hair and an obese stature that required him to pause for breath every few steps, personally came to the door to greet Karsipenpas despite hearing of his arrival.

Seeing him, Karsipenpas moved to pay his respects, only to be pulled into a hearty embrace, with a pat on the back, as the other feigned anger and loudly said: "Karsipenpas, the grain you sent last time solved a great problem for our tribe! But before we could properly thank you, you left in a hurry. Now that you're here, you must stay with me for a few days, or you won't be allowed here in the future!"

"Honorable Great Chief!" Karsipenpas responded earnestly: "In truth, the savior of our tribe is someone else. I merely did some transport labor, and my return to the tribe this time is also because of him."

"Oh?" Aco Upapagos looked at the others behind Karsipenpas, saw them nodding as well, and asked curiously: "Who is this benefactor?"

Chapter 185: Buying Land

"Great Chief, could you please offer me a glass of wine first? Then we can talk slowly," Karsipengpas said directly.

Acoupaigos laughed heartily, "Don't worry, you won't be short of wine. I'll make sure you get drunk."

The group entered the council hall and each took a seat as the attendant brought in the wine.

The Alde Tribe did not cultivate grapes; this wine was obtained by the tribesmen through piracy, plundering merchant ships.

Karsipengpas, having traveled for a long time, was indeed a bit thirsty. He took several gulps in succession before wiping the wine foam from his lips and began talking, "Great Chief, did you hear that something major is happening across the sea in Italy?"

"You're talking about the slaves and commoners uprising in Italy and fighting against the Romans, right?"

"Yes, this army of slaves and commoners has already consecutively defeated two Roman Governors and the Roman Army of the Northern Italy Province, totaling over 100,000 troops—"

"Really?!" Acoupaigos was taken aback, as he hadn't heard this news before.

"It's true. Now the entire east coast of Italy is in chaos, and even the Roman Fleet has no time to chase us—"

"Good, good, well done! This is heaven's punishment for the Romans!" Acoupaigos laughed with joy, having not heard any bad news for the Romans for a long time.

Acoupaigos hated the Romans. More accurately, the Aldeans all hated the Romans.

This hatred dates back to a hundred years ago when the Illyrian Kingdom allied with the Macedonia Kingdom against Rome, only to be defeated by Rome. Rome supported a puppet to control the Illyrian Kingdom, but the Illyrians refused to submit and continued to resist, but they were still defeated by Rome. Rome destroyed the Illyrian Kingdom and, to ensure the safety of the east coast of Italy and combat piracy, brought the Illyrian coastal region under its own control, making it the Roman Province

of Illyria, while the inland region of Illyria was referred to as Dalmatia, though in reality, Dalmatia was merely one of the strongest tribes amongst the various Illyrian tribes.

The Illyrians lost their land and even their name, the frustration in their hearts is imaginable.

The Alde are the northernmost tribe of Illyria. They once had multiple port towns along the Adriatic Sea, mainly living off maritime trade and piracy. Later, they were forced to retreat to the mountainous inland when the Romans took their coastal lands, relying primarily on farming. However, their territories were mostly mountainous, with infertile soil and scarce yields, leading to slow population growth and difficult living conditions.

Thus, Acoupaigos always believed that the Romans caused the current hardship of the Alde Tribe. Hearing about the troubles faced by the Romans made him happy, and the last time he felt this joyous was during the outbreak of the Roman Alliance War in Italy.

"Great Chief, after defeating the Romans, this army is marching north. They plan to leave Italy and head to Gaul to find true freedom!" Karsipengpas emphasized, "They have a leader named Maximus. He is an Illyrian, and many of his followers are also Illyrians. Although this leader is young, he is brave and good at fighting. He once independently led an army to capture Sarabia and opened the port to us pirates, offering us much assistance. The grains you mentioned were generously given by Leader Maximus."

"I see..." Acoupaigos stroked his sparse beard and said with emotion, "It seems this Leader Maximus hasn't forgotten his roots!"

"Yes, Great Chief," Karsipengpas observed Acoupaigos's expression carefully and then spoke in a deep voice, "Not only has he not forgotten, but he doesn't plan to follow others to Gaul. Instead, he wants to bring his followers back to his long-desired homeland, so he asked me to inquire if the Great Chief would allow him to buy some land, so he and his Illyrian soldiers could live on Illyrian soil!"

"Are you saying this Leader Maximus wants to live on Alde's land?!" Acoupaigos became serious.

"He wishes to purchase land from you and is willing to pay a significant amount!" Karsipengpas quickly explained further, "Moreover, he doesn't want the core lands of our tribe, just those at the edges, bordering other forces."

"I see..." Acoupaigos fell into contemplation.

After a while, he said to his attendant, "Go bring Cleobrotas and Alistacas."

Cleobrotas was an elder of the Alde Tribe and also Acoupaigos's confidant.

Alistacas was Acoupaigos's eldest son.

The two soon arrived at the council hall. Upon seeing Karsipengpas, Cleobrotas greeted him warmly, while Alistacas, who was of the same age as Karsipengpas, merely nodded perfunctorily before walking straight over to sit beside Acoupaigos.

Acoupaigos briefly recounted what Karsipengpas requested and asked for their opinions.

Alistacas was the first to express opposition, "I disagree! Even if Karsipengpas says that the one called... um... called—"

"Maximus," Karsipengpas reminded.