

Perish 186

Chapter 186: Buying Land_2

"Listen, Maximus, Maximus, that's not an Illyrian name; it should be a Roman name!" Alistacas loudly questioned.

Karsipengpas hurried to explain, "Maximus is indeed an Illyrian, but he was once sold into slavery, became a gladiator, forced to fight bloodily for the entertainment of Rome's rich men. That name was a nickname given by those Romans. Later, his teammates and his subordinates got used to calling him by that name, so he never reclaimed his original name."

"Alright, even if this Maximus is Illyrian and his subordinates are mostly Illyrian, they are not Aldeans—they are all outsiders! And now, you want to let these outsiders into our territory and live on our land for a long time; Karsipengpas, have you lost your mind? Have you forgotten our tribal rule that if any stranger dares to invade our land, he shouldn't think of leaving alive?"

"Alistacas, do you have a problem with your ears? Leader Maximus isn't trying to invade our land; he wants to purchase land from us, and only the peripheral lands of the tribe, or lands we once owned but have now lost and abandoned!"

Given Alistacas's rude words, Karsipengpas naturally didn't want to be polite to him, "Previously, Leader Maximus gave us so much food, saving our tribesmen from starving to death; he is our savior! The tribal rule also states that one who saves my life, I must repay with my life. Alistacas, is this how you treat a savior!?"

Moreover, Leader Maximus intends to use a significant amount of money to purchase our abandoned lands, and we could use that money to buy livestock, wheat seeds, weapons from those Italian towns and Greek city-states, so that our tribe can quickly recover after the snow disaster and be better prepared to defend against the Pannonians.

So, in any case, Leader Maximus is our tribe's benefactor, Alistacas, you are an important elder of our tribe, and treating our benefactor this way—I wonder what the tribesmen will think when they learn of this!"

"You—" Alistacas was momentarily speechless, roaring angrily, "Anyway, I just disagree!"

Acoupaigos glared disapprovingly at his son and shouted, "Stop arguing! Karsipengpas, why does Leader Maximus want our abandoned lands?"

"Great Chief, I used to be curious and asked him." Karsipengpas answered seriously, "He told me that buying our tribe's abandoned land is first to gain permission for him and his followers to settle on Illyrian soil.

His followers used to come from various Illyrian tribes, became slaves in Italy for many years, and their original tribes may have declined or even perished. Now, they have fought together in Italy for more than a year and do not wish to separate. If they can buy a piece of our less valued land, it would prevent conflicts over land in the future with our tribe and fulfill their wish to return to Illyria, which is a great thing for everyone."

"If this can be so, it truly is a good thing..." Acoupaigos mused to himself.

"The second reason is that Leader Maximus has his own ambitions. Though a young leader, he is very decisive. He was furious when he heard me mention the Pannonians continuously sending troops southward over the years, seizing much of our tribe's land and driving many tribesmen into the mountains where life became difficult!

He told me if he had the chance to face the Pannonians in battle, he would drive them back, making them never dare covet Illyrian land again."

"Oh!" Acoupaigos's eyes lit up.

"How many people does Leader Maximus have under him?" Cleobrotas asked.

"In Sarabia, I heard Leader Maximus say himself that his army has 16,000 soldiers."

"16,000 soldiers!" Acoupaigos and Cleobrotas exchanged a shocked look: though the Alde Tribe had more warriors at its peak, now it barely exceeded ten thousand!

Karsipengpas observed this, then further explained, "Of course, that was when they were still in Sarabia City. Now, after consecutive battles with the Roman Army, their numbers likely aren't as many. Moreover, they also have over 5,000 elders, women, children, and a few craftsmen, altogether more than 20,000—"

"Over 20,000 people is not a small tribe here!" Cleobrotas loudly reminded, "It would require a large piece of land to support so many people!"

"I have asked Leader Maximus the same question before, but he said he wouldn't purchase a huge piece of land from us, and if the land isn't enough in the future, he would lead his army to demand land from the Pannonians."

Acoupaigos and Cleobrotas exchanged another glance.

Cleobrotas asked, "How much money does Leader Maximus plan to use to purchase land from us?"

"He said about 10 to 100 silver talents, depending on the size, fertility, flatness, or mountainousness of the land we provide, and whether there's a river or not..."

talents!... Acoupaigos felt his old heart pounding heavily: with such a large sum of money, he could purchase many supplies from beyond the mountains, improving the life of the northern tribesmen and easing their grievances against the southern tribesmen and himself.

Cleobrotas, however, gravely asked, "Karsipengpas, for the sake of our tribe, please honestly tell me, what do you think of Leader Maximus?"

Karsipengpas's face changed immediately, asking sternly, "Cleobrotas, what do you mean by this? Do you think I would sell out my tribe?"

Acoupaigos quickly intervened, "Karsipengpas, don't be angry, Cleobrotas means no harm. Over 20,000 strangers living long-term around our tribe does mean we must ensure they harbor no malice, for it concerns our tribe's safety. You are a trusted elder of our tribe and have had many interactions with them; naturally, we want to hear your judgment."

Karsipengpas's expression softened slightly. He thought for a moment and then replied, "Hmm... Leader Maximus is probably only 20 years old, very strong, and his followers say that he is brave in battle. Yet, when he talks with me, he doesn't seem rude at all; instead, he comes across as somewhat scholarly, just like a Greek scholar I once captured at sea.

He seems very composed, speaks slowly and methodically, not impulsively at all. Yet, when he gives orders, his subordinates obey earnestly. I have interacted with several of his men, and they respect Maximus not out of fear, but belief. Over the past year, this young leader has made his army live better and more united than the forces of others, like a big family.

To us Illyrian Pirates dealing with him, he is a leader who keeps his promises and values sentiment. Every time we deliver grain and iron ore to Sarabia to sell, they buy at the agreed prices, not suppressing prices because we are pirates, nor cheating on the scales. Conversely, when our ships were damaged by storms, he even had his carpenters repair them for us free of charge..."

Chapter 187: The Final Checkpoint - Aquileia

Karsipengpas gathered his thoughts and continued, "Well... he is a very confident leader. When he was preparing to lead his troops out of Sarabia, I was worried about whether they could escape the pursuit of the Roman Army, but he confidently assured me that they would definitely defeat all the Roman Army and then safely head north. Now, everything he said has come true.

Of course, he is not an arrogant person. He once asked me about the situation of the Pannonians and the surrounding Boyi people, Noric people, Dacians, and other tribes, and even asked me to draw a map of the Pannonian Tribe distribution... He must have considered it repeatedly before he said he would avenge the Illyrians against the Pannonians..."

"It seems, Karsipengpas, your impression of Leader Maximus is quite good." Cleobrotas listened and commented flatly.

Karsipengpas glared, "It's not just me who thinks so; all the Illyrian Pirates who have met Leader Maximus think the same."

"Yes, yes, we think so too, although not as eloquently as the leader," one of the pirates accompanying Karsipengpas quickly expressed their stance.

"Alright, Karsipengpas, buying land is a big deal. I need to discuss it thoroughly with the other elders before I can give you an answer." Acoupaigos lifted the wine glass on the table and smiled, saying, "Let's not discuss this matter for now. It's rare for you to come back; let's have a good drink today."

Karsipengpas did not raise his glass but solemnly reminded, "This matter does indeed need serious consideration, but I hope Great Chief you can make a decision quickly, because Leader Maximus did not just make this request to me; he also proposed buying land to the Otarlat Tribe, the Dalmatian Tribe, the Pulalei Tribe... and even the pirates in the Epirus Region."

Every time Karsipengpas mentioned a tribe name, Acoupaigos's face twitched.

After the banquet, Acoupaigos kept Cleobrotas back alone.

"Cleobrotas, what do you think about this land purchase matter?"

Cleobrotas noticed the expectant expression on Acoupaigos's face and softly asked, "Great Chief, do you want to agree to that Leader Maximus's land purchase request?"

Acoupaigos sighed, "You've been helping me handle tribe affairs for so many years, so you know the hardships our tribe is facing.

Year after year, the Pannonians from the north invade our territory, forcing us to retreat southward continuously. We've lost the lands along the Kupa River, and they're about to invade here; the eastern hilly area is also invaded by the Pannonians and had to be abandoned. The Otarlat Tribe to the south had a good relationship with us, but the conflict over the salt fields has soured it, leading to frequent clashes over the years.

We used to have plenty of arable land in our tribe, but we've lost more than half of it due to wars with the Pannonians in recent years. The tribesmen in the north and east were forced to move to the mountains, living off pastoralism. Last year's snow disaster cost them many cattle and sheep. If Karsipengpas hadn't brought a lot of grain, many tribesmen would have starved to death...

Like Karsipengpas and others, they cannot sustain their tribes by farming and herding alone, so they turned to piracy, which indeed improved their lives somewhat, but piracy is dangerous! Especially now,

with the Romans controlling the Adriatic Sea and their strong fleets, in recent years, some tribesmen who turned to piracy were captured by the Romans and enslaved, mostly sent to the mines. What a perilous task! It's said very few can come out alive! Watching our tribe weaken year by year, my heart aches!"

Acoupaigos grew more agitated as he spoke, beating his chest in distress, tears welling, and coughing incessantly, "Cough, cough... Several tribes in the entire Illyria have perished over the years... Cough, cough... If this goes on, our Alde Tribe will end up like them, cough, cough..."

"Great Chief, don't be anxious; your health is most important!" Cleobrotas hurriedly stepped forward to support the staggering Acoupaigos, helped him back to his seat, and called a servant to administer medicine and soothe him. When his complexion returned to normal, Cleobrotas guiltily said, "Great Chief, this is all my fault! I did not manage well—"

"What does this have to do with you!" Acoupaigos interrupted him, gritting his teeth, "It's all the damn Romans' fault! It's the damn Pannonians' fault! They turned our tribe into this!"

"But now we have a great opportunity to save the tribe!" Acoupaigos suddenly shifted his tone, his voice becoming vibrant, "Leader Maximus wants to buy our abandoned land, and that's 100 silver talents! It could buy our tribesmen so many fine cattle and sheep! It could equip our warriors with such excellent weapons!... With these resources, at least we won't fear conflict with the Otarat Tribe!"

If Leader Maximus buys our abandoned land and can truly block the Pannonians to the north, then our tribesmen can farm and herd with peace of mind, and the tribe can gradually rejuvenate. Moreover, if they settle next to our tribe, we can become allies, giving us more confidence in dealing with other tribes in the future!... So allowing them to buy our abandoned land brings so many benefits; how can I not be tempted!"

Chapter 188: The Final Barrier—Aquilaia_2

Cleobrotas sat in silence for a moment, then said, "But if that Maximus harbors ill intentions, by doing this we're letting a beast into our home! You know he has 16,000 soldiers under him!"

"Of course, I am well aware of the risks, but if things go that way, our tribe will fall a few days earlier at most! However, if things turn out as I hope, then our tribe will have a chance for revival!" Acoupaigos's murky eyes gleamed: "We must put our trust in Karsipengpas. He has roamed the world for many years, and I've heard he's well-regarded among pirates. The pirate ships he commanded hardly ever

encountered danger, and his men never engaged in disputes. It shows he has a good eye for people and knows how to avoid danger. I believe this time he won't be wrong either!"

"Since the Great Chief has thought it through, I have no further objections," Cleobrotas replied.

Acoupaigos became cheerful: "Now that you agree, the other elders won't oppose it either. Tomorrow, I'll call a tribal meeting. With me, you, and Karsipengpas supporting it, this land purchase proposal will surely get approved. By then, I want you to go meet this Maximus first—"

Acoupaigos gently patted Cleobrotas's arm and said gravely, "Take a good look at him and his men. If you find him trustworthy, you can make an agreement with him there, and then lead them to our Alde; if you sense danger, pretend you need my further consent, hurry back, and we'll block the mountain path, avoiding any contact with him!"

Cleobrotas suddenly felt immense pressure, hesitating as he intended to refuse.

But Acoupaigos, with a glass of wine in hand, looked earnestly at his friend and said, "Kleo, we've grown up together, supporting each other to where we are now. You're like a brother to me. Whether here or on the battlefield, I've always trusted you the most. This time, I hope you can shoulder this burden and help me make this crucial decision! Even if we make a mistake, it's no big deal. So many tribes have perished, the Alde will just be another!"

Inspired by his words, Cleobrotas took the wine glass and drank it in one gulp.

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Maximus's army marched eastward around the Adriatic Bay. As they approached the bay's top, they saw a towering city before them.

Aquileia was the name of the city. It was built by the Romans after fully occupying the Northern Italy Province as a military fortress. Its initial purpose was to defend against attacks from the east, especially the Boyi people, as this largest Gaul Tribe once on the Po River Plain had been driven into the eastern hills by the Romans. They might return for revenge any day.

But a hundred years had passed without a sign of the Boyi, and Aquileia had become the commerce center of the Northern Italy Province's easternmost part.

Situated at the crossroads of Roman civilization and the barbarians, it boasted a broad, smooth highway. Products like wine, olive oil, and luxurious crafts flowed eastward from here, while iron goods, leather products, slaves, and livestock came westward. Daily caravans painted a vivid picture of its thriving trade.

Nonetheless, Aquileia still carried the burden of military defense. A Roman legion was stationed in the city, but they were ordered south by the Northern Italy Governor Casius to quash rebels and were entirely annihilated. Fortunately, the city still had a 500-strong City Guard and 2000 emergency-recruited soldiers. Aquileia lay at the frontier, constantly threatened by barbarians. The surrounding residents, mostly martial, despite being newly recruited soldiers, were not weak in combat.

Vileius was the camp commander of the legion. With a straightforward nature and often unappreciated by the Legion Commander, the Commander left him to guard the city before heading south, inadvertently saving him from the disaster and making him one of the legion's few survivors.

Upon hearing news of the approaching rebels, Vileius did not panic. He dispatched men to urge neighboring residents to seek refuge in the city and ordered his soldiers to fully arm themselves, taking positions on the city walls for defense. However, he turned away the caravans from markets outside the city.

These caravans had to nervously shelter within the markets, hastily ordering their guards to pick up weapons and prepare to resist the rebels that could snatch at any moment.

It wasn't long before the rebels arrived.

From the city walls, Vileius could see clearly. Off in the distance to the west, a squad of cavalry appeared on the main road. Clad in leather helmets and armor, wielding round shields and long spears, they approached the city quickly, dispersed their formation, scouted around Aquileia, sent some riders back along the road, and then had some continue scouting nearby markets, while others paused to observe from afar...

Vileius found the actions of this rebelling cavalry very familiar and suddenly recalled how the legion's cavalry scouted in advance before deploying. Now the rebels had mastered it—

Unsure of how to express his feelings, Vileius soon saw a long line come into view with a decorated flag waving at its head. Following the flag was a row of soldiers with brass long horns slung over their shoulders, then another flag, featuring a large "1" in a field of red. Four columns of soldiers with neat formation marched closely behind. Each wore a helmet and segmented armor, had a short sword hanging at the waist, and carried a long shield... Each section of the column was accompanied by an officer with a helmet decorated with horizontal plumes, who should be the rebel Centurion. These rebel soldiers were all armored, and their armor seemed well maintained, or else it wouldn't gleam so brilliantly in the morning light.

Narrowing his eyes, Vileius focused on the scenery below the city, his teeth grinding audibly: This wasn't just rebels, it was the spitting image of a Roman legion! How many of these armors came from the bodies of his fellow soldiers?!

The rebels, reaching less than a mile from the city, started to leave the main road, deploying into a massive hollow square on the open field...

Soon after, Vileius saw their supply train appear—carriages following one after another, impossible to count...

God, how much wealth of the Northern Italy Province people have these damn rebels plundered!... In Vileius's angry gaze, the carriages, led by several unarmored rebels, slowly moved into the center of the formation... He noted with shock that there were even lots of women among these rebels!

After more than an hour, the rebels began marching around the city in a wide front... Half an hour later, they left Aquileia behind.

By this time, Vileius had rushed to the eastern city head, where his cavalry captain anxiously asked, "Commander, shall we pursue?!"

Long accustomed to dealing with the barbarians, Vileius knew that they fearlessly fought and greedily plundered, but upon returning loaded down, they lost their will to fight, and their ranks became

severely disorganized. If suddenly beset by a fierce attack, they would crumble swiftly... To him, it was the common folly of untaught bands, barbarians and rebels alike.

Additionally, within Aquileia was a 300-strong Gaulish cavalry, a privilege of the Northern Italy Province army near Gaul. They could enlist some Gauls willing to serve Rome. These Gaulish cavalry were auxiliaries of the legion, yet their charge was truly formidable.

Chapter 189: Meeting with the Aldean Envoy

Vileius had long discovered that this rebel army had a large number of supplies. He had already planned in advance to wait for the rebels to bypass Aquileia City (he didn't believe the rebels dared to attack the strong walls of Aquileia) and let down their guard. Then, the Gallian Cavalry would first launch a surprise attack on their rear, as this is often where the enemy's Supply Team would be, thus creating great chaos. The following infantry units would then continue the assault, which should secure a great victory.

However, from the moment he saw the rebels, their performance kept shattering his habitual perception of these unruly mobs: the rebels had excellent equipment, high morale, could skillfully complete formation transformations in front of the enemy, and could maintain their formation during long marches. This was not something an ordinary army could achieve! This indicated that the rebels had undergone rigorous and regular training, with considerable combat experience. Even after leaving Aquileia City, they still protected the Supply Team in the center, with a dense column guarding the rear.

This rebel army was so cautious that Vileius saw no chance for a surprise attack.

"General, quickly give the order. If we wait any longer, these rebels will escape too far! By then, we will have lost the chance to avenge our brothers!" urged the cavalry leader.

Yes, if we miss this opportunity, the rebels will escape Italy and disappear into the mountains. There, it is the barbarians' territory, a forbidden zone for the Roman Army, where they can completely get away! ... Vileius gazed at the outline of the distant mountains, his heart unwilling to let the rebels escape. But seeing the anxious expressions of his subordinates, he suddenly realized that if he just nodded, this guy would rashly lead the Gallian Cavalry to charge the rebels' rear guard. If they couldn't break through in a short time, they would be surrounded by the rebels. Then, relying on their numbers, the rebels would counterattack, crushing the following units deployed behind and threatening Aquileia's safety during the pursuit!

Given the rebels' current performance, this terrifying fantasy was very likely to happen! My task is to protect Aquileia's safety, as Aquileia is related to the safety of the entire Northern Italy Province and even Rome itself! I cannot cause great disaster due to a moment of impulsiveness, just like Governor Casius! ... Vileius shook his head vigorously and said in a deep voice: "We cannot attack; we must hold Aquileia!"

Under the angry gaze of his subordinates, he looked once more at the departing rebels, thinking bitterly in his heart: Don't think you'll be free once you escape Italy! Those fierce barbarians will tear you apart, take you captive, and maybe one day you'll be sold back to Italy as slaves!

The Maximus Army passed Aquileia and continued eastward. The flat terrain soon gave way to a succession of mountains, but Rome's grand road did not end there. It followed the Adriatic Bay's coastline, extending southward into the Istria Peninsula.

Geographically, the Istria Peninsula already belongs to the east coast of the Adriatic Sea. The Istria people living on the island are among the numerous northern Illyrian tribes and should have been designated part of the Illyria Province.

However, from Rome's perspective, Illyria Province was too impoverished, and Rome had little confidence in governing it well. But the Istria Peninsula was different. Most of the island was flat, and at its southern tip was a town with an excellent port—Pula (pula).

The Roman Senate incorporated the Istria Peninsula into the Northern Italy Province, which they valued most. It could compensate for the lack of excellent ports along the east coast of the Northern Italy Province and allow the province's strength to stabilize and assimilate this barbarian-held peninsula. Thus, the road's end was at Pula.

However, Maximus's army did not go to Pula. Before entering the peninsula, they left the main road, heading south across the peninsula's base.

This is a relatively flat area amidst the mountains. The Romans built a road here leading to the coast of the Illyria Province.

However, the rebel army, accustomed to the grand road, undoubtedly slowed their march upon stepping onto this road. Simultaneously, the rebel army heightened their vigilance because Maximus,

through the Illyrian Soldiers familiar with this area, learned that the Yapode people lived in the high mountains to the east of this road. They were said to be a branch of the Noric people, but unlike the amicable relations between the Noric and Rome, they were restless Gauls who occasionally came down from the mountains to rob travelers.

Scouts sent by Maximus frequently spotted people in long trousers with tattoos hiding in the forests, watching the army. Perhaps because of Maximus's formidable military strength or the caution in marching and camping, no incidents occurred.

A few days later, Maximus's army left the Northern Italy Province, entering the Illyria Province.

They arrived at the southernmost end of the Istria Peninsula's base. Here was a rare lowland, and at the southern end of the lowland was a small seaside town called Talosaphia.

Maximus ordered the army to camp north of this town.

Following the order, everyone immediately began to act. The long march had made the army very familiar with the procedures for setting up camp. Each department and legion knew exactly what to do. Without needing guidance from the leaders, everyone skillfully and cooperatively rolled up their sleeves and set to work.

Chapter 190: Meeting with the Aldean Envoy_2

Maximus sat on a dry, large stone. On the surface, he seemed calm, but in reality, he was somewhat anxious and uneasy. However, the bustling scene of labor before him allowed him to feel some peace of mind.

At this moment, Flanitnus walked over.

"Look, bad news has come again. Go on, how many people have run away today?" Maximus said jokingly, seemingly accustomed to it.

"This time, it's not too bad. Only three, all from the Third Legion," reported the military officer who had just finished counting the troops of each unit.

"Not bad, only three. Fewer by the day." Maximus pulled a handful of grass, rubbed it in his hand, and said gravely, "It seems those who wanted to leave have mostly left. Those who remain are brothers with firm resolve, willing to follow us!"

Flanitus said nothing, but thought: If you allowed the supply camp like the soldiers to leave freely, perhaps it wouldn't be as relaxed as it is now.

Since Maximus' army separated from Torquato's men and changed course to march northeast, soldiers had been deserting each day. Most were those who joined the Maximus Army independently en route north from Spartacus' main forces. They had little attachment to this army and mainly wanted to use its strength to escape back to Gaul. Seeing the route was off course, they had other plans.

Initially, Flanitus demanded that the legions strengthen control and punish deserters, but Maximus stopped this approach. He even had team officers declare among the soldiers that if anyone didn't want to follow the army to a new homeland, they could leave along the way. However, they must not incite others to disrupt the troops and must leave behind their allotted armor and weapons, while the army would also give them some dry rations in return.

Maximus' relaxation of restrictions on deserters was an encouragement to those who only wanted to hitch a ride with the troops, especially when the army was marching around the Adriatic Bay. The number of people leaving each day often reached over a hundred, as at that time they were very close to the Alps.

But for the army's veterans, this had little effect. They were either Illyrians or slaves from elsewhere, with a few steadfast impoverished people wanting to flee Italy and Roman veterans. They had a deep attachment to this army and a great respect for Leader Maximus, always marching in the direction guided by the team officers.

Flanitus was about to continue reporting on other situations within the army when he saw Cavalry Captain Haguks riding over: "Leader, a group of Illyrians requests to see you. The one leading is named Karsipengpas, supposedly coming for the meeting you agreed upon."

"Quickly! Bring them over!" Maximus said with great joy, repeatedly exclaiming.

Haguks turned his horse and galloped away.

Maximus jumped up, punched Flanitnus in the chest playfully, then danced around, shouting: "Great! They've indeed come as promised. There's hope for our new homeland!"

Flanitnus, for the first time, saw this usually composed young leader show a rare childlike side. Of course, he also understood why Maximus was so excited. He, too, breathed a sigh of relief, a smile appearing on his face.

"Akegu, go find Acronis to bring some wine and food. Casius, you call Pigeris and Alakosia under his command, also call Quintus and Volenus, and..." Maximus turned around, "Call Fesaros and Pequot too, they're both Illyrians."

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

Once those Maximus called for had arrived, the Aldean Envoy also appeared not far away.

Maximus strode forward to greet them, first walking towards him was Karsipengpas.

Maximus, with a smile, opened his arms and gave the other a strong embrace.

"Karsipengpas, I really didn't expect you'd come so soon!" Maximus said gratefully.

"I promised you I'd do my best to fulfill my commitments." Karsipengpas patted his chest and said with some emotion, "But I truly didn't expect you'd actually defeat the Roman Army and arrive here smoothly!"

The two looked at each other and laughed heartily.

"May I ask who these people are?" Maximus looked towards the people behind Karsipengpas.

"Let me introduce you. This is Cleobrotas, the elder of my Alde Tribe," Karsipengpas emphasized, reminding them, "He's also the main person appointed by our Great Chief to negotiate the land deal with you!"

"Elder Karsipengpas, it's a pleasure to meet you! My brothers and I welcome your arrival and hope our discussions will proceed smoothly!" Maximus, while examining the thin old man in front of him, extended his right hand in a friendly gesture.

Cleobrotas was also observing Maximus, just as Karsipengpas said, "Young, strong, yet calm and courteous," he grasped the other's hand, saying, "Leader Maximus, if we hadn't appeared here, what would you have done next?"

Maximus was momentarily stunned, then said, "I considered such a situation in advance because buying and selling land is a big deal, not every tribe has the courage to make such a bold decision. If you hadn't appeared, I would lead the army over those mountains—"

Maximus pointed to the undulating mountain range not far away, saying solemnly, "I heard that beyond the mountains is the land of the Pannonians. I would drive them away and establish our own homeland."

"Young man, the Panoni people aren't easy to deal with. We're afraid you might not drive them away and instead get destroyed by them," a middle-aged man said with a gloomy tone.

"And who is this?"

"He is also an elder of our Alde Tribe, Budocaribas." Karsipengpas stepped forward and whispered, "The land he had to abandon due to the Panoni people is what we want to specifically recommend to you this time."

"Got it..." Maximus replied earnestly, "I know the Panoni people aren't easy to deal with, but if they keep invading south, how much fertile land would they take from our Illyrian tribes? Someone must

stand up to dampen their arrogance! Moreover, if I don't take their land, do I take land from our Illyrian compatriots—?"

His words caused a change in expression for some within the envoy.

Maximus sincerely said, "Since the Romans took the coastal land from us Illyrians, each tribe was forced back into the mountains, greatly weakening their strength. If we continue with internal strife, facing another foreign invasion would only lead to extinction!

Therefore, I will not do such a thing. Instead, I will ask the Panoni people for land! Even if I ultimately fail, at least I can bite a piece off the Pannonians so they won't dare easily encroach on our Illyrian lands again!"

"Well said!" exclaimed a robust man in his thirties, "Our Illyrian tribes should unite to confront external threats together, instead of stabbing allies for short-term gain!"

"This is also our tribe's elder Ciciliotes. His village is close to the Budocaribas' tribe," Karsipengpas explained quietly to Maximus.

All the visitors are elders of the tribes! It seems the Alde Tribe takes the land sale matter very seriously!... Maximus took a deep breath, feeling even more excited inside.

"Leader Maximus, if you purchase land in our tribe, settle down with your followers, will you still avenge us Illyrians against the Panoni people?"