

Perish 226

Chapter 226: Druid Emmerich_2

We asked the captives, and they said the supplies were military provisions reserved by their tribe for the upcoming large-scale attack on the Aldeans. Aside from grain and meat, there were also plenty of iron materials and timber... The warehouses are right next to the leader's residence. Tonight, all the supplies you brought from the eastern village can be temporarily stored there."

"Looks like we've helped the Aldeans a great deal this time." Maximus joked lightly, though he let out a long sigh of relief inwardly: the food issue was resolved, as long as the war didn't drag on for too long.

"Exactly, leader! If not for your decisive actions, we wouldn't have dared to fight this battle! And thanks to your wisdom, we have won so effortlessly and achieved such a great victory. This truly is... simply amazing!" Gaius loudly praised, his excitement evidently genuine for the most part.

Maximus smiled faintly without voicing his inner concerns. He looked ahead, where the buildings took on a distinctly different arrangement: three houses formed a "U"-shaped pattern surrounding a courtyard, with wooden fences encircling the area.

Seeing Maximus walking into the courtyard, scanning left and right, Gaius hurried to follow and said, "This is where the nobles of this tribe reside."

"From the structure of this residence, it seems the Segestica nobles have servants attending to them."

"Yes, leader, they have their own Skodisqi slaves. According to the captives, the leader of this tribe also has a small number of Pannonian servant slaves."

"Oh? Such is the case." Maximus rubbed his chin, gazing at the residence in front of him and recalling the stench-filled hut he had seen earlier. He fell into contemplation.

Gaius did not dare to interrupt. The group walked forward a bit more before he quietly said, "Leader, up ahead is the main residence."

What loomed before Maximus was a wooden wall, as tall as the outer wooden walls of this village. Skirting around the wooden wall to reach the main entrance, they found themselves facing a residence twice as large in length and height as ordinary houses, with a flag bearing the image of a stag planted atop its roof.

Seeing Maximus staring at the flag in a trance, Gaius hastily explained, "Leader, you previously ordered us not to damage the buildings of this village, so we—"

"It's fine, let it hang there for now. It won't be long before we replace it with our own." Maximus responded magnanimously. Then, pointing at an object diagonally in front of the main residence entrance, he asked, "What is that?"

A white stone, taller than a person, stood upright in the dirt. There was a strange symbol engraved on it, surrounded by a circle of smaller stones.

"The captives said this is their sacred Spirit of Nature."

Spirit of Nature? Druids?... Maximus recalled conversations he had had with his Gaulish subordinates, discussing the customs of the Gauls, which frequently involved mention of their revered Druidism. He had not expected the Pannonians, as an Illyrian branch, to believe in this too—perhaps they had adopted it from the Skodisqi people.

Maximus turned his attention away from the white stone and noticed that the space enclosed by wooden walls was rather broad. The main road leading from the gate to the residence divided the area into two sections. One side was scattered with eight or nine grass huts, while the other side was an open space with level ground...

"This is the Segestica people's training ground." Gaius explained. "Originally, several wooden racks stood around the edge of the field, adorned with weapons and shields, but we have since taken them."

The leader of this Segestica tribe had actually built an "inner citadel" at the center of the village!... Maximus surveyed the surroundings, marveling at his army's good fortune. If not for the Skodisqi slaves killing this leader and triggering a revolt that plunged the village into chaos, the soldiers—even if they had stormed the village—would have faced a leader who could defend the main residence with remnants of his troops, greatly delaying their occupation of the entire village.

After examining the main residence, Maximus refrained from heading outside. He turned to Gaius and asked, "Where do you plan to place the Segestica prisoners I brought tonight?"

"Behind that row of longhouses, near the river, there are dozens of houses similar to the longhouses. However, they lack walls and are open on all four sides. The interiors are filled with straw bedding. Previously, these were where the Skodisqi slaves slept, referred to by the Segestica people as 'pig houses.' They'll be perfect for arranging the Segestica captives, letting them taste the conditions of their slaves."

There was a hint of vindictive satisfaction in Gaius' words. Having been enslaved for many years himself, he bore a natural resentment toward the Segestica people due to similar past experiences.

"Earlier, you mentioned there were over 3,000 Skodisqi slaves here, yet I brought more than 6,000 Segestica captives, twice their number. How can they all fit?" Maximus asked again.

"Let the captives squeeze together. If there's truly no space, they can sleep outside the houses. The weather is hot right now, so sleeping outdoors will be cooler. Keeping them concentrated will also make it easier for us to maintain control." Pequot interjected, not the only former slave among them.

Maximus gave him a glance and said, "Good idea. Let's settle it that way. Gaius, you don't need to accompany me any longer. Go assist Camillus and Oluus in quickly settling the troops. It'll be dark soon."

"Understood!"

"By the way, has dinner been prepared?"

"Acronis and her team are working on it. They've slaughtered ten sheep and dozens of ducks, saying the soldiers deserve a feast to celebrate their victory."

"That's a good arrangement." Maximus nodded approvingly.

After Gaius left, Maximus turned to Akegu and said, "Go bring in that old Skodisqi man we mentioned earlier."

"Understood."

Not long after, the elderly Skodisqi man was brought into the main hall of the residence, where Maximus sat at the head seat, appreciating the unexpected comfort of the chair he was seated on.

The chair was made of oak, heavy and sturdy, polished smoothly. The seat was hollowed out and interwoven with thin ropes made from reed stalks tied to the edges. Animal hide lay over the woven surface. Despite his weight, sitting on the chair's resin-webbed seat didn't cause it to collapse; rather, it provided remarkable softness and comfort. The hide was tanned skillfully, smooth and pliable, demonstrating the Segestica people's craftsmanship in woodwork, weaving, and tanning.

"Respected leader, Skodisqi Druid Emmerich pays his respects to you!" The old man bowed humbly and greeted fluently in Illyrian.

Hearing this, Maximus immediately examined him closely: he was tall and skinny, with pale, long hair and a beard growing untidily around his head, making his skull appear large. His wrinkled face resembled tree bark, save for his still-bright eyes. His tattered clothing made him seem like a withered tree adorned with fluttering cloth strips standing in the hall...

The image was strikingly similar to the characters Maximus had seen in fantasy films or novels in his previous life. He jestingly asked, "You're a Druid; can you perform magic?"

"What is magic?" Emmerich looked puzzled.

Maximus coughed lightly, putting away his playful tone. He asked seriously, "What kind of Druid are you?"

Upon hearing this, Emmerich realized the young leader from outside the mountainous area had some understanding of Druids, and his spirits lifted. He earnestly replied, "In the Skodisqi Tribe, I primarily taught knowledge and treated illnesses."

Chapter 227: The Allegiance of the Skodisqi People

Maximus immediately asked, "What kind of knowledge are you imparting?"

Emmerich replied, "The tribe's history and knowledge of nature."

Maximus didn't comment, instead asking, "Do you know how to heal? What do you use to treat people?"

"Mainly herbal medicine, it's a wealth that nature has bestowed upon humanity."

"How is your medical skill?"

"After our race became the slaves of the Pannonians, many Druids were killed by them. The reason I am alive today is because of my medical skills." Emmerich spoke calmly, not boasting directly, but this was proof enough.

A Druid himself, from the upper echelons of the Skodisqi people, and possessing excellent medical skills, it's understandable he would hold high prestige among the slaves. No wonder he became an organizer of the rebellion... Maximus thought to himself, then asked aloud, "Why were you in such a hurry to see me? What do you need?"

"Honorable leader." Emmerich bowed again in salute and said loudly, "Thank you very much for defeating our enemies and freeing us from their enslavement! I want to know what plans you have for us, the Skodisqi people?"

Although Emmerich felt anxious and was eager to know the fate of himself and his people, he spoke very cautiously, his years as a slave having taught him prudence and restraint. Although he appeared somewhat impatient when he just escaped the cage today, Maximus's two rejections had sobered him. Moreover, in the process of actively helping the rebel army, he had intentionally garnered some information about this force, knowing that this seemingly young leader was no simple person, so he was now very careful.

"Plans?" Maximus tapped the back of the chair lightly, not responding directly but instead asked, "I want to know what you want?"

This question by Maximus was related to the future fate of him and his people, so Emmerich spoke sincerely, "We have suffered too much pain at the hands of the Segestica people, and we are eager to gain freedom. For this, we are willing to do anything for you!"

"Who exactly do you mean by 'we'?" Maximus asked again.

"All the Skodisqi people who were rescued by the leader today." Emmerich replied solemnly.

Maximus tapped the arm of the chair again: "Why do you not ask to gain freedom and leave here?"

"Noble leader, our tribe has been destroyed for over a decade. Even if we gain freedom, where could we go?" Emmerich said sadly, "To the east are our enemies, the Pannonians. The Alde Tribe to the west has never had a good relationship with us, the Skodisqi people. Apart from them, there are mountains, dense forests, wild beasts, and venomous creatures. We are weak and have no food. Leaving here, we fear we wouldn't survive more than two or three days..."

"So you want freedom, yet choose to stay..." Maximus asked coldly, "Aren't you worried we might enslave you like the Pannonians did? Because that would be very beneficial to our tribe."

"I'm not worried." Emmerich said with certainty, "I have personally seen your people tend to our wounded tribesmen who were forced to fight against you, they were very earnest in their treatment, not pretending. I've also found out that you come from outside the mountain region, and many among you were once slaves themselves... I think you, honorable leader, will surely treat us well!"

Maximus remained serious: "You are a smart man, but do all the other Skodisqi people understand this reasoning?"

"I will make sure they all understand!" Emmerich said confidently.

Maximus watched him for a while, Emmerich remained calm throughout.

Maximus slowly spoke, "As for the arrangements for you Skodisqi people... Our Nix Tribe will not allow slaves to exist, so from the moment you join our tribe, you are free! —"

Emmerich felt a joy in his heart, but then heard Maximus continue, "However, you should be very clear, any tribe will not easily accept outsiders, especially since all my companions have gone through many hardships and fought in many battles to build this tribe we have today. If you Skodisqi people join in, you'll be sharing the tribe's benefits, which obviously isn't fair, right?"

Emmerich shook his head, speaking softly, "We have no such extravagant desires, as long as we live better than before, without easily losing our lives..."

Emmerich's display of weakness brought a slight smile to Maximus's face: "After joining, you Skodisqi people will become the Reserve Tribe Members of our tribe—"

"Reserve Tribe Members?" Emmerich was momentarily stunned upon hearing this unfamiliar term.

"...As Reserve Tribe Members, their food, clothing, housing, and other needs are provided by the tribe, surely far better than the pig houses and pig feed here. Their lives and property are protected by the tribe, and no one may infringe upon them. Their dignity is also protected by the tribe, no one may discriminate against them... Aside from that, they must obey the tribe's arrangements and diligently farm, build roads, and cut wood..."

As Emmerich listened, he felt something was amiss: although the living conditions of his people improved and their lives were protected, and they wouldn't be discriminated against, they still had to work continuously under supervision. Is this really gaining freedom?

Chapter 228: The Allegiance of the Skodisqi People_2

"Three years!" Maximus saw the other person's expression worsen and suddenly raised his voice: "Just three years of hard work to contribute to our Nix Tribe, proving your sincerity to all the tribesmen, and during these three years, you will become familiar with the tribe's life, understand and consciously abide by the tribe's laws. Then you will become an official tribesman of the Nix Tribe, enjoying the same rights as other tribesmen. For instance, each will be allotted 50 acres of land, can be enlisted by the tribe, and fight for the tribe..."

Note! If they manage to kill an enemy in direct combat, they will be promoted from ordinary tribesmen to second-class tribesmen, and the tribe will allocate him an additional 10 acres of land and he will earn the respect of other tribesmen.

If in the next battle he kills two enemies, he will be promoted from second-class to first-class tribesmen, and the tribe will allocate him an additional 20 acres of land.

If he then kills three more enemies, he will be promoted from first-class tribesmen to Knight, and the tribe will allocate him an additional 20 acres of land..."

Emmerich listened to Maximus's words, initially dissatisfied but then calmed, and gradually, his face lit up with surprise, his mouth widened in astonishment...

As a Druid, Emmerich had not only stayed in various tribes among the Skodisqi people, but had also visited other Celtic Tribes to learn and exchange knowledge with other Druids, such as the Boyi people to the north, Taurisci, and Noric people (all of whom belong to the Celtic)...

Even in his youth, he had learned Latin and had some understanding of the powerful neighbor on the Italian Peninsula to the west—Rome. Yet, he had never heard of any power or race having such a strange system until he couldn't help but interrupt Maximus: "Is this a...decree made by your tribe?"

"Of course, it's our tribe's decree, and it is the first decree. It's not something I casually made up to fool you." Maximus said solemnly: "This decree is called the Twenty Peerage System. From now on, anyone joining my Nix Tribe will start from the lowest level as a Reserve Tribe Member. This is not specifically targeting you Skodisqi people.

Through this decree, our tribe does not consider the background of new entrants—not their lineage, nor their wealth—but solely their contributions to the tribe! The more contributions one makes, the higher their status in the tribe will be, and the more wealth and power they will gain! As long as they have the talent and are willing to work for the tribe, they can easily stand out! I can say that none of the current tribesmen of the Nix Tribe are Nobles, but in the future, each of them could become Nobles!"

Emmerich instinctively asked, "When everyone becomes Nobles, and there's no ordinary tribesmen, how will the tribe develop?"

Maximus smiled slightly and didn't answer.

Emmerich instantly understood: This decree of the Nix Tribe will undoubtedly give the Skodisqi people, who are about to join the tribe, much hope, yet wealth and power still need to be earned through their efforts, especially through warfare!

Nix tribesmen, driven by the decree, will surely burst forth with immense courage and strength. How many tribes will be destroyed as a result? The batches of captives being escorted back, aren't they the new Reserve Tribe Members? Just like them now!"

Emmerich recalled how the Nix Tribe had, in one stroke today, wiped out two Segestica settlements. This newly emerged tribe evidently possesses a terrifying military power!

Thinking of these, Emmerich couldn't help but tremble slightly and looked up at the young leader sitting at the front. He appeared calm and was smiling, yet Emmerich seemed to see a blazing fire, one that might turn the entire Great River Plain into a sea of flames!

But Emmerich was not afraid, instead, he was incredibly excited, for only thus could he save his compatriots who were suffering!

"Have you thought it over?" Maximus asked softly: "Are you willing to lead your tribesmen to join the Nix Tribe and become the tribe's Reserve Tribe Members?"

"I am willing, and I will persuade the other tribesmen to agree!" Emmerich replied without hesitation.

"Excellent!" Maximus smiled, fiercely patting the arm of his chair and said seriously: "From now on, you and I are one family, and family does not speak two languages. Strictly speaking, you are a scholar and also good at healing. The Skodisqi people respect you, and you are also quite familiar with the Segestica people. Therefore, I decided to appoint you as the Medical Officer of the Nix Tribe's Medical Department, concurrently serving as a consultant to the Political Affairs Hall."

Medical Officer? Political Affairs Hall? Consultant? ... Emmerich felt confused with these unfamiliar terms.

So, Maximus briefly explained the political system of the Nix Tribe to him.

Emmerich listened and was even more astonished: A small tribe wasn't like other tribes whereby the leader and Nobles simply managed the tribesmen. Instead, it set up multiple departments to meticulously handle tribal affairs, revealing the young leader's ambition.

"Thank you for the leader's trust. I am willing to serve as Medical Officer and consultant to the Political Affairs Hall!" Emmerich responded solemnly with a bow.

"As long as you perform well in the next three months as a Medical Officer, I will propose to the Political Affairs Hall to make you an official tribesman! I believe the Chief Officers of various departments will agree, as having a Reserve Tribe Member serving as an officer managing official tribesmen for a long time might cause some complaints." Maximus promised.

Emmerich stubbornly refused this favor, and said: "Since the leader says this Twenty Peerage System is the tribe's first decree, it should be executed according to the decree, with no one being exceptional. Moreover, healing people is also work, which the tribe arranged for me, and it aligns with the tribe's requirements for Reserve Tribe Members. Therefore, I am very grateful to the leader for taking care of me, but I still hope to convert to ordinary tribesmen after three years like other Reserve Tribe Members."

"It seems I have chosen the wrong department for you. With your principle-holding attitude, you should become a Deputy Officer in the Legal Department." Maximus said with a smile, unaffected by the other's refusal, he reminded: "In fact, the Twenty Peerage System has many detailed rules. If a Reserve Tribe Member makes outstanding contributions to the tribe, it is possible to shorten the time to become an official tribesman! But since you insist, then let's do as you say first."

Maximus actually understood: Emmerich was indeed unwilling to make himself a special case among the Skodisqi people, thus distancing his tribesmen from him and making him less close. He might even have deeper thoughts, using himself as an example, to tell others in the tribe that Reserve Tribe Members can not only do farming, road building, these hard jobs but can also hold official positions and serve the tribe."

Maximus had initially made this promise as a probe, and Emmerich's response satisfied him. He was not only unconcerned about Emmerich's intentions but rather supportive because he indeed needed Emmerich to use his prestige to persuade and reassure the Skodisqi people at this time.

As for giving him a consultant role in the Political Affairs Hall, it allowed calling him anytime to consult on matters concerning the Skodisqi people and Segestica people, and if any issues arose with the

Skodisqi Reserve Tribes, he could temporarily send Emmerich to resolve them. This would avoid appointing him in a direct management role over the Skodisqi people.

In this regard, Maximus remained somewhat cautious.

"Honorable leader, I have a small request, which I hope you will agree to." Emmerich lightly requested.

"What request?"

Chapter 229: Skodisqi's Flowers

"Over a decade ago, the Segestica people utterly defeated the Skodisqi Tribe I belonged to, killing the Great Chief and all his immediate family members, leaving behind only his five-year-old daughter. This child, at such a tender age, became a female slave of the Segestica people, growing up under the harsh lashes and merciless blows of their whips and sticks..."

"Later, she was gifted by the Great Chief of the Segestica people to Wallis, the master of this village. Wallis himself was a cruel and ruthless wolf among the Segestica, frequently abusing this child in public to humiliate all the Skodisqi people in the village. He believed that the delicate little girl would be tamed like a dog, but what he didn't know was that she had never forgotten the overwhelming hatred of her tribe's extermination. When your army attacked this village, she seized the opportunity and stabbed Wallis to death—"

Maximus listened quietly, his expression showing surprise: "The Segestica leader was killed by a girl?!"

"Indeed. However, she was seriously injured by Wallis' dying counterattack and fell into a coma..." Emmerich implored earnestly: "I beg the leader to give her the best medical care, and after she recovers, to provide more care for her. She is far too frail and weak to endure heavy labor."

"What is this girl's name?" Maximus asked with interest.

"Florist Luscia," Emmerich replied. "Translated into Illyrian, it means 'flower.'"

"Florist Lusia..." Maximus murmured the name softly, then gazed at Emmerich and asked bluntly: "What does this girl's existence mean to you Skodisqi people?!"

"Our tribe has been annihilated, what more could we dare to hope for?" Emmerich said with a bitter smile, speaking cautiously. "But back then, the Great Chief treated the clansmen well, so the child's existence represents for everyone a nostalgic longing for the goodness of the past, amidst the hardship of slavery..."

Maximus pondered briefly, then nodded and said, "I understand. I assure you that Florist Lusia will be well cared for! Where is she now?"

"At my earnest request earlier, the tribe's doctors should have carried her into a large courtyard and are treating her alongside other injured soldiers. Since they won't let me in, I'm uncertain about her current condition," Emmerich said worriedly.

"You are now the medical officer of our tribe. Not only will no one stop you from going there, they'll likely form a line to welcome you instead," Maximus said, half-jokingly and half-seriously. He stood up, waved his hand, and said, "Let's go; we'll head there now."

The Medical Department's temporary medical camp in this village was established next to the leader's main residence, in the section where the Segestica nobles lived. Helios had repurposed several courtyards into wards for the injured.

When Horace hurried out from the courtyard, his pale gray linen robes stained with fresh blood, Maximus frowned: "Horace, as the Chief Officer of the Medical Department, you should oversee the overall situation, allocating personnel and medical supplies, rather than acting like an ordinary doctor in the field. If your subordinates urgently need you but can't find you, wouldn't the entire medical camp fall into chaos?"

"There's no chaos; everything has been arranged." Horace quickly explained: "It's just that the camp has too many wounded, and we're understaffed, so I had to go in personally to lend a hand."

"How many injured are there?" Maximus asked casually.

"The wounded brought in earlier total over 450, plus the 330 who were already here but couldn't yet be moved to the temporary camp. And since our medical personnel were split into two groups, staffing has been a bit tight."

Horace, fearing Maximus might misunderstand, clarified further: "Actually, most of our own soldiers' injuries aren't serious, and we have relatively few casualties. The majority of the severely injured are Segestica and Skodisqi soldiers. The Segestica injuries are mainly stab wounds, which we're experienced in treating. However, among the Skodisqi, some injuries are from repeated trampling and are extremely severe. Even Minujus has been at a loss to handle some of them."

Maximus cast a glance at Emmerich nearby. Though Emmerich's face showed deep concern, he surprisingly managed to hold his tongue.

"Who's in charge of the temporary camp?" Maximus asked.

"It's Ikechiu. The injuries of those sent to the temporary camp are relatively minor, so treatment there should be manageable."

Ikechiu, a Roman Army slave who joined the Medical Camp alongside Horace, was known for his diligence and shared a close bond with Horace. He was likely Horace's favored candidate for another deputy medical officer position.

"Having many wounded is not a problem. If treatment is administered according to my previous instructions, it shouldn't be this hectic." Maximus reminded.

Maximus' prior instructions were clear: treat his own troops as thoroughly as possible, ensuring even the gravely wounded were cared for; make a concerted effort for Skodisqi soldiers; and for severe Segestica injuries, they could be left unattended.

Horace, of course, hadn't forgotten Maximus' directives, but with his strong sense of responsibility, it was apparent he couldn't entirely neglect the critically injured Segestica soldiers. He instead pivoted, saying, "Leader, I think you've allocated too few personnel to our Medical Department. Look at how this one battle has left our entire medical camp overwhelmed and scrambling. We should increase the number of positions in our Medical Department so we can better handle future wars."

Chapter 230: Skodisqi's Fresh Flowers_2

"Horace." Maximus looked at the plain-faced Roman veteran and reminded him in a deep voice, "I've assigned you five subordinates, not to have them follow you around to rescue the wounded, but to assist you in managing the entire tribe's medical affairs, overseeing all the doctors and nurses within the tribe.

If war breaks out, they will help you temporarily summon all the doctors and nurses from the tribe to rescue the wounded. You and your subordinates only need to supervise them and allocate personnel efficiently.

If multiple battles occur simultaneously, you can also personally appoint a doctor to serve as the temporary head of a medical camp for the aftermath of a specific battle... This is the role your Medical Department should play. Do you understand?"

"Oh..." Horace suddenly realized, but his face immediately clouded with concern. "But if that's the case, won't some people slack off and neglect to treat the patients?"

Maximus confidently replied, "They will do their best because the Twenty Peerage System will make them take their work seriously. Perform well, and they'll rise in rank; perform poorly, and they'll be demoted. Their performance will be recorded by you and your subordinates—that's also one of the tasks of the Medical Department."

Horace's eyes widened in surprise. "The Twenty Peerage System has demotions as well?"

Maximus asked with equal surprise, "Have I not mentioned this before?"

"You haven't." Horace answered with certainty.

"That was my oversight!" Maximus smacked his forehead and explained, "Perform well, and you'll be promoted. Perform poorly, or worse, break the decrees, and you'll certainly be demoted. There's no such thing as promotion without demotion in this world, right, Horace?"

"Right." Horace, who always acted diligently, agreed with this principle.

"I'll make a note to include this demotion aspect when we discuss the Twenty Peerage System in the Political Affairs Hall." Maximus spoke with full sincerity. In truth, he hadn't forgotten to mention it before—he had intentionally avoided it at the time, as he needed to rally everyone's support for his restructuring of the rebel army and found it more effective to share the favorable aspects first.

"By the way, didn't you say you were short-staffed? I've brought you a new subordinate—another Medical Officer I've just appointed."

Maximus pretended not to notice Horace's briefly stiff expression and pointed to Emmerich, who stood nearby, introducing him. "This is Emmerich, a learned scholar among the Skodisqi people. He is well-versed in herbal medicine and has saved countless lives, earning the deep respect of the Skodisqi people. I've also appointed him as a consultant to the Political Affairs Hall. He'll help us better understand the surrounding forces and establish a stronger foothold here!"

After hearing this, Horace understood he had no chance of dissuading Maximus from this appointment, but he still felt a thorn in his heart and didn't immediately greet his new subordinate.

Instead, Emmerich bent low in a bow and spoke in awkward Latin, "Hello, I'm very pleased to work with you!"

Maximus felt impressed. Are all Druids so erudite? Or is this old man a linguistic prodigy?

Horace solemnly replied, "You're skilled in treating illnesses with herbal remedies. We lack familiarity with the local flora here, so we indeed need to learn from you to improve our methods. Therefore, I welcome you to join us.

However, I cannot allow you to enter the Medical Camp right now, as you have not cleansed yourself. Your hair and clothes are covered in dust and may harbor lice or fleas, which could potentially harm the healing process of our injured."

"Oh, that's my fault. I forgot to remind you of the Medical Camp's hygiene rules before coming," Maximus quickly interjected for fear of Emmerich harboring discontent and briefly reiterated the explanation he had once shared with Horace about tiny insects infecting wounds.

Finally, he emphasized, "Since adopting these practices, we've seen a significant reduction in infections and fevers among the wounded."

Emmerich listened thoughtfully and then seriously remarked, "Nature's divine mysteries... Just as there are trees as mighty as mountains, there are also insects smaller than a strand of hair. Just because we cannot see them does not mean they don't exist."

Like maggots thrive in rotting flesh, these tiny creatures view the human body as a paradise. Their joy, however, comes at the cost of our suffering... Respected leader, thank you for enlightening me—I've learned something new!"

Emmerich bowed deeply once again and then suddenly realized, "Ah, no wonder you all favor short hair and clean-shaven faces—it must be to minimize the presence of these insects. I will go cleanse myself immediately and then return."

With that, he turned and headed toward the river.

Maximus and Horace exchanged glances.

Horace couldn't help but ask, "Leader, did he truly understand?"

His skepticism was understandable; after all, even now, he struggled to fully accept Maximus's insect-caused disease theory. Nevertheless, he adhered to the sanitation measures because they indeed proved effective.

"Not only did he understand, but he grasped it quite deeply." Maximus stroked the faint stubble on his chin. In truth, their preference for short hair and clean-shaven faces was simply a habit influenced by the Italians, but Emmerich's interpretation was not wrong either.

Emmerich really is a remarkable Druid; we can't afford to lose him!... Snapping back to reality, Maximus instructed, "Akegu, go keep an eye on him. Don't let him wander recklessly around the village and risk getting injured by our soldiers."

"Yes." Akegu understood and hurried after him.

"Horace," Maximus then said earnestly, "You don't have to worry about Ikechiu. I've always taken note of his contributions. I have other plans for him—ones no less significant than a Medical Officer's role."

Horace finally felt reassured and gratefully said, "Thank you, Leader!"

Maximus smiled faintly and surveyed his surroundings. "Where are our wounded warriors staying?"

"Over there." Horace pointed to two larger houses nearby and personally led the way.

As he had done many times before, Maximus visited each wounded soldier of the rebel army one by one. He inquired about their injuries, praised their bravery, and thanked them for their contributions... Whenever he accurately called out their names and discussed details from their past, it always moved them deeply.

Of course, it was impossible for him to remember every single one of the thousands of soldiers under his command. His young attendants, who had been following him for over a year, meticulously gathered information about each injured soldier beforehand and quietly relayed it to him.

Although this approach was exhausting, Maximus had persevered and grown accustomed to it because he understood that while prestige could be earned on the battlefield, devotion was often built in the ordinary moments. His power ultimately depended on these ordinary soldiers.

After finishing his visits to his own soldiers, he decided to check on the wounded from Segestica. This, however, was not to show care but to put on a performance.

To this end, he avoided going to the residences of the critically injured Segestica warriors, as they were either unlikely to survive or unconscious—wasting his efforts on them was unnecessary.

Each room housing lightly injured Segestica warriors had guards stationed at the door to prevent doctors or nurses from being harmed during treatment. So far, a few attacks had been thwarted just in time, but most of the wounded soldiers had behaved relatively peacefully.

When Maximus entered, he found these Segestica soldiers mostly filled with confusion.

On the one hand, they had been defeated and conquered by the rebel army, so they should harbor hatred. On the other hand, they had been injured and left for dead on the battlefield, expecting to become food for the beasts, as that's how they themselves had treated enemies in the past. Yet they were instead brought back to the village by the rebel army and given treatment. The care, especially from the women—gentle and attentive though their words were incomprehensible—radiated a kindness that the wounded could not ignore. This left their emotions in a conflicted turmoil.