

Perish 236

Chapter 236: Segestica Army Attacks_2

The women of Segestica also had to work, equally engaged in constructing the camp, though their workload was less than the men's. The task of supervising them was eagerly sought by each unit, as merely watching the scene of women with sweat-soaked thin clothes laboring under the scorching sun was a beautiful sight.

But they could only indulge in this view for now, because Maximus had issued an order, "No one is allowed to violate the female captives, or else face severe punishment!"

The rebel soldiers, accustomed to obeying orders, didn't dare to defy them.

The children of Segestica were supervised by the people from the Female Camp, while the elderly were placed under the jurisdiction of Capito's Supply Camp.

The Skodisqi slaves were easily managed, as Maximus gathered them together and had Emmerich persuade them publicly.

Emmerich held considerable prestige among the slaves, and the rebels' previous efforts to desperately save the wounded Skodisqi hadn't gone unnoticed, instilling a feeling of goodwill among many Skodisqi slaves, who readily expressed their willingness to serve the rebel army.

Thus, the Skodisqi women went to work in the kitchen or Female Camp, the elderly were sent to work in the Supply Camp, while the young and robust were spared from work to undergo urgent military drills led by a group of team officers and soldiers of Illyrian birth, headed by Pequot.

There weren't many women among the Skodisqi slaves, as the Segestica people didn't kindly allow Skodisqi slaves to form families; most of them were female slaves of Segestica nobles;

There weren't many elderly either, most possessing some skill, such as horse breeding, pig feeding, fishing, or blacksmithing...

The young and robust accounted for over 4,000, making up the majority of the slaves. They usually tilled the land, herded, and labored for the Skodisqi, serving as fodder charges during wartime; such a composition of slaves fits well with the Segestica Tribe's pioneering pursuits.

This greatly delighted the rebel army, not only significantly replenishing the desperately needed military force but also increasing the labor availability throughout the ranks.

Yet, when heads of various departments arrived at the gathering place to collect people, Maximus loudly reminded them: these newly joined brothers and sisters, having been oppressed for years, were physically weak, and they needed to have ample rest with minimal work. Moreover, they were to be fed meat at every meal, three times a day, to ensure their quick recovery.

The Skodisqi heard this and felt even more favorable towards the rebel army.

Despite the strict supervision over the Segestica prisoners by the rebels, some prisoners contemplated escape by night, but they couldn't escape the patrol's pursuit.

In this regard, Maximus didn't go soft; with a single order, the fugitives and their families, amounting to a dozen or so people, were beheaded in public, their bodies thrown into the Murenica River, and no more escape attempts occurred the next day.

Unfortunately, this bustling labor scene had to be halted on the third day as the Segestica army appeared along the banks of the Kupa River.

"According to my repeated reconnaissance with the subordinates, the enemy force arriving this time numbers around 15,000 people..." Hagux reported inside the military tent to Maximus and the army's leaders.

As the Cavalry Captain, he was in a bit of a bind. The horses were precious; during the previous lengthy mountain crossings, they lost most of them due to broken legs, cracked hooves, illness, and losing weight... The few surviving horses were given to Maximus and others for use, so in the last battle, his cavalry merely watched as spectators.

Fortunately, after the rebels captured two stockades, they seized a few horses, allowing him to barely perform the reconnaissance duties he initially took on upon joining the rebel army.

"The majority in the enemy's force are light infantry armed with wooden shields and spears, about 1,000 are armored with large shields and longswords as heavy infantry, and there are more than 2,000 Skodisqi male slaves wearing only single-layer inner garments..."

After Hagux finished speaking, Maximus asked: "No cavalry?"

"Just under a hundred cavalry." Hagux seemed a bit dejected.

"Fewer cavalry is a good thing; at least we don't have to worry about sudden flank attacks." Maximus understood why he seemed so disappointed and comforted him: "I inquired among the prisoners, and the reason the Segestica people have few horses isn't that they don't breed them, but because their northern Pannonian tribes were at war with the Boyi.

The Boyi cavalry are formidable, so the Pannonian Tribe Alliance gathered horses from various major tribes and sent them to the northern tribe to form a strong cavalry to counter the Boyi... So don't expect to capture many horses from them for now; let's raise them ourselves after we defeat them."

"It seems this Pannonian Tribe Alliance is quite united, being able to transfer horses in large quantities between tribes; it seems lending soldiers extensively among each other isn't a problem at all." Flannitus expressed some concern.

"Such a possibility does exist. But it seems the Aldean Great Chief was right; while the Pannonians are indeed at war with the Boyi in the north, they have simultaneously invaded the Illyrian in the south, their internally united tribes might have difficulty lending many soldiers to the Segestica tribe while dealing with multiple enemies." Quintus countered.

Maximus coughed lightly: "The matter of whether the Pannonian Tribe Alliance will lend soldiers, we shall discuss later. Let's concentrate on the enemies in front of us first. It seems this Segestica Great Leader has a rather impatient temper, arriving with the army so quickly."

"Perhaps... he's already investigated our situation and doesn't want to wait until our camp is built to attack..." Quintus pondered and looked at Hagux, asking: "Did the enemy bring supplies?"

"Over 50 carriages, escorted by more than 1,000 Pannonian civilians." Hagux mentioned, adding: "These civilians are relatively young."

"Over 50 carriages needing more than 1,000 to escort? Do they take us for fools? These civilians are soldiers as soon as they take up weapons; they're learning from us!" Torrelugo sneered.

"Over 50 carriages of food can supply more than 16,000 people for five or six days at most." Capito reminded, having served as the temporary Supply Camp manager during the rebels' march, with ample experience.

"That means the enemy intends to fight a quick battle this time." Quintus mused.

"That might not necessarily be the case." Flanitnus argued: "Don't forget they still have two stockades along the eastern banks of the Kupa River, and their Seg... Segestica Main Camp isn't far; they can fully camp there and have their Supply Team continuously transport food across."

Quintus shook his head: "I asked several elders of the Alde tribe, and neither they nor the Aldeans have dedicated entities responsible for military logistics; they gather food before combat, and if provisions run out, they must withdraw."

Flanitnus froze for a moment; he indeed hadn't inquired as thoroughly as Quintus did about the enemy, so he said: "Since the Segestica don't plan to engage us in a prolonged battle, as long as we secure our camp's defenses, they will have to withdraw once their supplies are depleted. Hagux, roughly when can the Segestica army arrive?"

Hagux replied: "Though they are cautious, sending many scouts to inspect the mountains along the Kupa River's banks meticulously, their marching speed is quite fast. I estimate they can reach the eastern stockade by tonight, and here by tomorrow morning."

"If I had known, we should have burnt that stockade while retreating, forcing the Segestica to set up camp themselves, lose sleep tonight, and lack the energy to fight us tomorrow." Torrelugo muttered softly.

Chapter 237: Quintus's Ingenious Plan

Maximus glanced at him: "Torrelugo, what are you talking about?"

"Ah... I... I didn't say anything." Torrelugo feigned confusion and shook his head.

Maximus was just trying to scare him and then turned to ask: "It seems this time the Segestica people have learned their lesson. It's probably impossible for us to set an ambush again. Quintus, what are your thoughts?"

"Leader, I think... we can engage the Segestica people in a decisive battle here," Quintus pondered aloud.

This statement caused a stir in the military tent.

Quintus continued to explain: "Segestica has fifteen or sixteen thousand men, and we have thirteen thousand. The difference in numbers is not significant. In terms of combat strength, we are more organized, more disciplined, and more experienced than they are, and our tactics are also superior. We can definitely defeat them!"

"Quintus, where do we even have thirteen thousand soldiers? You aren't counting those newly joined Skodisqi people, are you?" Flanitnus questioned.

"That's right," Quintus nodded.

"Are you crazy?!" Flanitnus loudly questioned: "They have only just picked up their weapons a few days ago, they can't even form ranks properly, let alone master legion tactics! Sending them into such a crucial battle that determines our life and death, they will certainly cry out for their mothers under the enemy's fierce attack!"

"At that moment, the lives of all of us would be in your hands!" Flanitnus shouted angrily.

"No, you don't understand the Skodisqi people. I devised a training plan for them, and I've witnessed their training firsthand. They are extremely diligent, and you can feel the fire in their hearts, it's a hatred towards the Segestica people. Once it erupts in battle, it will be terrifying!"

Quintus said seriously, "Moreover, I have them as a reserve force. It's our First, Second, and Third Legions that will truly face the enemy in a head-to-head formation. While they are fewer in number than the enemy, their combat skills, organization, and discipline can certainly withstand the enemy's assault!"

"It's not just that our troops are fewer than the enemy; they are far fewer!" Flanitnus said seriously, "Our soldiers are indeed excellent, but their numbers are limited. Meanwhile, the Segestica people have far more warriors than we do, so we must be cautious in every battle to avoid excessive casualties. This is how we can ultimately achieve victory in a prolonged war against the entire Pannonian Race.

Therefore, I suggest we hold our camp, use ditches and earthen walls to block the enemy's onslaught, conserve the soldiers' energy, and capitalize on defensive advantages to inflict serious damage on the enemy, ultimately forcing them to retreat."

"Flanitnus, first you have to admit, our forces have never had any experience in defending a city. Furthermore, our camp is too large, and the defensive line is too stretched. To defend the entire camp, the soldiers' strength would be spread too thin.

And the ditch you speak of is nothing but a dirt trench—it isn't deep or wide, doesn't have sharp stakes buried, nor traps set before it, making it easy for the enemy to cross. The earthen walls you mentioned aren't high or thick, and some sections aren't even solidified. I question whether they could withstand an enemy assault; if the enemy breaks into the camp, we can't imagine what might happen, especially with all the Segestica Prisoners inside!"

Quintus raised his voice, unlike Flanitnus, who tended to wave his arms when agitated, he raised his head high: "More importantly, even if we manage to hold the camp and force the Segestica people to retreat, what is the point? The Segestica Tribe's strength will remain largely unscathed, and they could attack us again at any time, with even more caution.

As long as they remain a threat, we can't risk moving to the villages we once seized, nor dare we plant crops there. Although we have seized a good amount of grain this time, it will eventually run out, and then what? Beg the Aldeans for help?"

"Leader, I'd like to point out that if... if we can't sow seeds by November, this year would be a complete loss, and if we still can't till by April next year, there might be no significant harvest next year." Volenus cautiously remarked.

Although this was a military meeting concerning the Segestica people, it was crucial to the survival of the entire rebel army, so Maximus also called the chief officers of the other eight departments. Except for Capito, the others mostly listened without speaking, though Volenus couldn't help but comment.

Flanitnus gave him a harsh glare: "Once a war is tainted by external concerns, it's never a good omen."

But Maximus' next words sent a chill through Flanitnus: "Quintus, you just briefly mentioned engaging the Segestica people in battle, but could you elaborate on how you plan to fight?"

"Sure, Leader." Quintus perked up and detailed his envisioned strategy.

As soon as Quintus finished, Flanitnus immediately voiced his opposition: "This strategy is too reckless; it's playing with our soldiers' lives. I oppose it! I still insist that we should hold our temporary camp, as this would greatly reduce soldier casualties and give us a better chance of repelling the enemy."

"I actually find Quintus' plan quite intriguing; our Second Legion is willing to take on such an adventure." Torrelugo expressed his opinion.

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"I agree that the soldiers of our First Legion prefer face-to-face combat with the enemy. Even if the flanks are threatened, they will never waver easily!" Fesaros said defiantly.

"I can command the Skodisqi people well and lead them to charge the enemy!" Pequot said confidently.

Camillus and Oluus exchanged a glance. Their Third Legion only had a little over 1,000 men; in this battle, they were destined to play a supporting role. Yet Oluus wanted to support his old superior, and Camillus decided to echo his partner: "We think Quintus's proposal is good."

The military leaders all agreed with Quintus's suggestion, which left Flanitus a bit dejected. However, he looked toward Maximus with a glimmer of hope, knowing that the others' approval was meaningless—ultimately, the final decision had to come from this young leader.

Should it be a frontal engagement or camp defense? Maximus was momentarily uncertain. After pondering for a long time, he slowly said, "When we started a rebellion in the Gladiator School, it was a gamble for freedom; when we fought multiple times against the Roman Army, it was a gamble for survival; when we chose to come to this unfamiliar land, it was a gamble for survival; and a few days ago, when we waged war against the Segestica people, it was a gamble for survival..."

Maximus fixed his gaze upon the group, his voice becoming clearer and more forceful: "We have nothing. That's why we can only stake our lives! Quintus is right—we can't afford to just wait. We can only rely on risk-taking, defeating the Segestica people quickly to establish ourselves here as soon as possible! I choose—to engage the Segestica Army head-on!"

"Roar!..." Led by Fesaros and Torrelugo, the commanders cheered enthusiastically.

Though Flanitus felt let down, he quickly gathered his spirits. Since the decision was made for engagement, there would undoubtedly be many tasks for him to handle next.

Sure enough, Maximus continued, "This battle determines our life or death. Though a gamble, we need to prepare actively to increase our chances of victory. No more camp construction for the rest of today. Quintus, Flanitus, Fesaros, Torrelugo, Camillus, Oluus—work together actively, leading the soldiers to repeatedly train in this new tactic until it's fully mastered and refined! Especially those new Skodisqi warriors—Pequot, you'll need to put in a lot of effort!"

"Understood." Pequot nodded firmly.

"Pigeris, head to Chief Budocaribas immediately and inform him that we're about to fight against the Segestica people. Ask if he can temporarily guard the Segestica soldiers we've captured."

"Yes, Leader."

"Everyone else, as before prior to battles, manage your men well and do what you need to do! Alright, the meeting is over—go tend to your tasks quickly!"

After everyone had left, Maximus remained seated in the military tent.

A few young attendants approached hesitantly, wanting to speak but withholding their words.

"If you have something to say, spit it out and stop bottling it up." Maximus scolded them lightly. To these attendants, he was both a stern leader and a kind elder brother. His tone of reprimand came from his heart, without much pretense.

Akegu immediately asked, "Leader, can we win tomorrow?"

Maximus adopted a confident demeanor and looked at the young men before him: "Remove the question mark—we can win! Tomorrow, we will win for sure!"

The young men smiled, yet deep inside, Maximus could only manage a bitter smile. As for tomorrow's engagement, he had no certainty. Rather than overthinking and letting the youth see through him, it was better to go inspect the soldiers' training to gain a bit of confidence.

With that thought in mind, Maximus stepped out of the tent casually and was met by Emmerich.

"Leader, we'll be engaging the Segestica people tomorrow. I have a request I hope you can approve!" Emmerich said in a solemn tone.

Maximus furrowed his brow slightly. "We only just made the decision—did Horace tell you?"

"Horace only told me and Nexia, asking us to prepare for rescuing the wounded tomorrow and warning us to keep it secret for now," Emmerich quickly responded with caution.

Maximus felt somewhat relieved. "What's your request?"

"I've heard that among the Segestica forces, there are many of our Skodisqi compatriots. The Segestica people will surely have them charge at our formations first.

I hope tomorrow, when they charge, you'll allow me to lead some Skodisqi tribesmen to stand at the front, to persuade them to join us. This way, we can weaken the Segestica's strength, bolster our own, and increase our chances of defeating them. Isn't that right?!" Emmerich looked at Maximus with hopeful eyes.

Maximus was moved by his words but quickly shook his head after deliberating. "Emmerich, I understand your desire to save your compatriots. But you must realize, the battlefield is not a negotiation table. Your Skodisqi compatriots' charge will collide with our formations in a very short time...

During that short span, they might barely recognize you, then you'll be overwhelmed by the swiftly advancing Segestica Army!

The risk is too great, and the chance of success virtually nonexistent. I can't let the tribe's Medical Officer undertake such a dangerous task. It would be better for you to conserve your energy and focus on treating your wounded compatriots after the battle ends."

"But by then, very few of them will remain alive, as we've seen in past battles," Emmerich said sorrowfully. Suddenly, he dropped to his knees, looking up at Maximus with a resolute expression. "As long as I can rescue them, even if I die at the front, it will be worth it! Leader, I beg you!"

He then bowed deeply, knocking his head hard against the ground before Maximus.

Maximus hurriedly reached out to pull him up, but couldn't manage it, sensing the immense determination in Emmerich's heart.

Helplessly, he said, "Alright then, I'll take you to discuss this with Quintus and Flanitnus to see if your plan is feasible. If it works, I'll agree; if it doesn't, there's nothing I can do. I can't let your impulsiveness affect the entire engagement!"

Emmerich responded gratefully, "Thank you, Leader! I'm willing to go with you to meet Quintus and the others!"

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Andres led his forces into Wallis's village. Much like Cabdes's village, it was devoid of anything except houses.

Andres was no longer enraged. He entered the tribe's main building alone, silently staring at the principal seat in the hall, as if seeing his friend Wallis sitting there once again, laughing and waving at him...

After a moment, he walked slowly towards it, taking a seat. His longsword rested across his knees, and he gently stroked the cold blade. In his mind echoed the intelligence brought back by his scouts: the force that killed Wallis was indeed summoned by the Aldeans. They had built a camp in front of the Aldeans' village, where they hoarded stolen supplies and held numerous tribesmen captive. Perhaps anticipating his swift advance, the enemy had spent the past two days frantically repairing their camp. But he would not let them succeed; he would arrive with all speed and crush their camp.

"My dear brother," Andres murmured, "tomorrow, I will retrieve your body, and I will place the head of their leader at your grave."

With a sharp sound, the longsword sank directly into the wooden floor beside the principal seat.

Chapter 239: Army 2 Confrontation

On the second morning, after the warriors had breakfasted, Andres led the army to set out.

Strangely enough, while the weather was quite hot the previous days, today was crisp and cool, making the march light and brisk. This reminded Andres of the divination performed by Priest Hemijias before departing from the Segestica Main Camp.

Hemijias used Horse Divination, gathering the few warhorses of the tribe together and observing their movements without disturbing them. The horse that Andres often rode neighed first, and the other horses followed in joyful cries. Hemijias immediately concluded: this was a great omen, and the Great Chief's expedition this time would certainly be a great victory.

Considering today's favorable weather, the omen seems to be gradually coming true... Andres became pleased.

At this moment, the reconnoitre rushed back from the front: "Report to the Great Chief, the enemy is assembling in front of their camp!"

What? They are not holding their camp?!... This situation was somewhat unexpected for Andres; he had already thoroughly investigated and found that this enemy force numbers around ten thousand.

"Keep closely observing the enemy's movements and report to me at any time!"

"Yes, Great Chief." The reconnoitre rode off to the front again.

If the enemy does not hold the camp, it is indeed a good thing. Although some measures have been prepared in advance, attacking a camp always causes more casualties than field battles, and victory is harder to seize... But the enemy's numbers are far fewer than mine, yet they dare come out to meet me in battle; are they overconfident? Or do they have other plans?... Andres looked at the hills ahead and the plain by the river, where Wallis was defeated before, and a sudden alertness struck him: Could the enemy be aiming to ambush me on the west bank of the Kolana River?!

"Have Pulikas lead the warriors to speed up and cross the Kolana River as soon as possible!" Andres urgently ordered.

By now, at the end of September, the river's water level had further decreased, especially this section of the Kolana River, where the deepest part barely reached the knees.

Andres had already received another report from the reconnoitre, stating that the enemy was marching in a formation in this direction. However, upon arriving at the river crossing, he did not see any traces of the enemy on the opposite bank, and his tension eased significantly.

Just after the main force crossed the river, the reconnoitre rushed back again: "Great Chief, the enemy is beginning to form a line a mile ahead!"

Riding on his horse, Andres stretched his neck to look forward, his gaze sweeping over the heads of the warriors, spotting only a distant rising dust cloud...

It seems the enemy wants to engage me in battle here! Thinking of this, Andres felt a bit anxious. He did not want the enemy to complete their formation and charge while his side was still in disarray, so he issued the order: "Pass the word down, quickly form ranks here!"

After speaking, he personally began to direct his main force to form a formation.

This main force consisted of more than 6,000 warriors from the Segestica Western Village and the riverbank plains tribes where the West Village was located. These tribes occupied the fertile lands along the Sava River, rich in resources and relatively populous. Since Anderes took office, he had annually gathered tribesmen from surrounding tribes during the abundant and leisurely post-harvest September for military training, gradually making them his most reliable force.

Originally, this main force numbered nearly 20,000. A few years ago, Andres split off more than half of them to expand westward. Although there were some losses, as long as the Kupa River's riverside lands were captured and attract refugees from other Pannonian tribes, his strength would greatly increase within five or six years. But who would have expected, this enemy appeared suddenly and within a day swallowed his finest 7,000 warriors, making him how can he not hate!

Andres personally led the main force from the central command, while his other trusted subordinate, Glicus, commanded over 5,000 warriors from the Segestica East Camp and the riverbank plains tribes of the East Village, serving as his left-wing. These tribes' warriors also lived on flat, fertile lands, many of whom were blood relatives of the Great Chief's clan. But precisely because of this, their lives had been relatively peaceful in recent years, with less warfare, and their combat effectiveness was somewhat weaker.

Andres also dispatched his uncle, Cabdes, to command his right-wing of 5,000 men. These right-wing warriors hailed from the upstream Sava River tribes. While not as prosperous as other tribes, the environment they resided in was not very safe (with the Yabod people and Noric), thus their combat

effectiveness was not weak. Since they only sent about 3,500 men, Andres further deployed 1,500 from his main force to join the right-wing.

Counting the 2,200 Skodisqi male slaves driven to the front by Segestica warriors, the army led by Andres numbered approximately 18,500, exceeding the previous estimate made by Hagux by over 3,500 men.

This was partly owing to reconnaissance errors and partly because Andres indeed incorporated more than 1,000 civilians responsible for transporting supplies into the ranks. The 600 warriors, dispatched urgently by Anrotas chief to defend the nearby settlements and guard the supplies, were now stationed.

Andres intended to concentrate all his strength on this battle.

However, while he appointed two subordinates to lead the left and right wings, it was actually more of a coordination role.

As each of these Segestica warriors was commanded by their respective tribal chief or the chief's appointed agent, and these chiefs further divided command rights among their Nobles, each noble commanded differing numbers of warriors. Thus, one could witness them shouting, berating, and exerting all their efforts to ensure the warriors formed a proper line.

Chapter 240: Army 2 vs. Army 2

At the same time, conflicts arose among the nobles and even tribal leaders over positioning within the battle lines, necessitating Cabdes and Pulikas to step forward to mediate. Their prestige within the tribe was enough to make the tribal leaders temporarily comply.

The Segestica people's initial formation was extremely chaotic, with the deafening noise of tens of thousands enveloping the entire area... Andres was accustomed to this, but he did not know that a group of people several miles away on the opposing hill was watching them.

"Leader, the Segestica people have been forming their lines for quite some time now, yet their arrangement is still loose and chaotic. This shows their poor organizational skills. Although they have many people, breaking through our dense square formations will be nearly impossible," Quintus pointed ahead and spoke with confidence.

They were standing atop a large boulder on the hill, looking down with a wide view. The weather was excellent today, and the scenery several miles ahead was clear to their gaze. Although the Segestica warriors along the riverside appeared tiny like ants, their overall situation was still discernible.

Maximus's gaze was fixed on the forefront of the Segestica formation, both excited and slightly concerned, as he said, "They've sent out a lot of Skodisqi slaves again this time. I hope our plan works."

"Don't worry, Leader. Judging by their troop composition and formation, even though they recently faced defeat, they haven't altered their tactics. Our strategy should work just fine."

Quintus reassured him confidently, "Moreover, did you notice the gleaming figures at the forefront of the Segestica formation? Those should be their heavily armored longsword infantry, sent out in significant numbers this time. However, their slow advancement will give us more time to deal with the Skodisqi slaves."

"But with so many heavy infantry sent by the enemy this time, the soldiers will find it harder to withstand their prolonged assaults," Maximus still displayed a hint of concern.

"Rest assured, Leader. These heavy infantry of the Segestica people are strong in personal defense, but their longswords, while intimidating, cannot break through the soldiers' square shield defenses. Furthermore, due to the longsword's excessive weight and length, wielding it single-handedly will exhaust their strength quickly and expose vulnerabilities, far inferior to the threat posed by our short sword thrusts.

In fact, if they were to wield their swords with both hands, their strikes would be more threatening. However, their defensive capability would then decrease... More importantly, they carry large shields, yet have not learned to work collectively for defense..."

Although this was Maximus's second time participating in a pitched battle, this confrontation was a fight to the death. He could not entirely avoid feeling a trace of nervousness as the moment approached, especially recalling the final stage of the Womans River battle when the Third Legion was defeated—his heart had almost stopped. Nevertheless, Quintus's patient and detailed explanation brought him some relief.

"Leader, the Segestica people's formation is about to be complete. I think it's time to move our troops forward," Quintus reminded.

Maximus nodded and turned his head to shout, "Akegu!"

Akegu immediately raised a flag and began waving it back and forth. The red banner fluttered strikingly in the wind.

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On another hill not far from Maximus and his group stood several men—Budocaribas, Ciciliotes, and other elders of the Alde Tribe.

Yesterday, due to the promise made by Great Chief Acoupaigos, Budocaribas had agreed to the rebel army's request to take several thousand captured Segestica soldiers back to the village for detention. At the same time, he learned of the "Segestica Army's coming attack." Whether out of curiosity about the rebel army's combat strength or worry about the outcome of this war, he and neighboring village elders felt compelled to witness the battle results personally.

But when they arrived on the mountain, they were taken aback.

"Budocaribas, the Segestica people have come with so many! This doesn't look like a small force compared to the battle we fought against them a few years ago. Could Andres have brought all his warriors here? In comparison, these outsiders have far fewer people. Can they even win?" One elder voiced his concern.

"Aren't these outsiders too overconfident?! Being weaker than the Segestica people, they should have stayed in their camp and defended properly! Instead, they've come out to face them head-on. If they lose, all our efforts for them recently will have been in vain!" Another elder grumbled.

"The fight hasn't even started yet—don't jump to conclusions. Let's watch and see first," Budocaribas advised, though he himself was uneasy: Why would the Segestica people deploy such a massive army? Was their sole purpose to eliminate these outsiders? Could they later move on to attack my village?

A few days ago, he had been pleased that the rebel army could act as a buffer for his tribe. In this moment, however, regret began to cloud his thoughts.

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"Woo!... Woo!... Woo!..." The sound of copper horns echoed.

"Brothers, forward!..." The shouts of the team officers were quickly drowned in the cacophony of soldiers' footsteps, the collisions of weapons, and the friction of armor.

The rebel army's 9,000 fully armed soldiers moved as units, forming nine dense square formations arranged in a staggered layout—five in the front and four behind—spanning a total length of over a mile. They marched slowly forward toward the Kolana River...

"Great Chief, the enemy is advancing toward us!"

Upon hearing the scout's report, Andres furrowed his brows slightly: "Hurry and inform Cabdes and Pulikas to quickly align the troops!"

After giving the order, Andres focused his gaze into the distance. During autumn, when the weather is dry, even slight movement stirs up dust from the ground. At this moment, the faraway sky was shrouded in a vast cloud of smoke and dust, drifting slowly toward them, obscuring everything on the ground.

Andres watched the movement speed of the dust cloud, calculating the distance between the enemy and himself, yet he refrained from hastily issuing any further commands. Standing steadfast at the frontlines, he steadied the restless warriors behind him, calming them gradually.

As the cloud of dust approached within about a mile of the Segestica army, it ceased its movement.

Andres waited for a while but noticed the cloud didn't advance further. Instead, with its prolonged presence, the dust began dispersing, gradually revealing the enemy forces...

Unified rows of red long shields, helmets, and armor, an impressively tight formation... It indeed resembled what Cabdes had described earlier. But why was their formation divided into blocks, irregularly shaped at that?...

Andres had never engaged directly with the Roman Army, so he didn't understand their tactics. Narrowing his eyes and riding his horse back and forth in front of his ranks, he observed carefully, unable to immediately discern how this arrangement might affect his army.

Yet, he noticed both flanks of the enemy formation were bordered by swampland. Clearly, the opposing side intended to leverage the narrowing terrain caused by the swamp extending outward to compensate for their numerical disadvantage, setting their formation there to block his army's advance.

But could they really hold? Andres chuckled inwardly. He raised the large sword in his hand, swung it a few times, then pointed forward: "Warriors, advance with me!"

With that, he spurred his horse to move forward slowly.

The troops behind followed his lead, while the Skodisqi male slaves at the front, driven by Segestica warriors' shouts and curses, also began to move forward, mobilizing the entire central army. The movement spread to the flanks... When the Segestica army's over 18,000 warriors had all begun marching forward, it took nearly 10 minutes.