

Perish 251

Chapter 251: The Magnanimous Maximus?

Gowes could hear the mockery in his words, his face slightly changed, but he still forced himself to explain: "I'm not saying you should thank us, but at least you should give us some reasonable—"

"Medical Officer Emmerich!" Maximus rudely interrupted him and loudly asked, "Do you think what this person is saying is correct?"

"Of course not!" Emmerich answered without hesitation. He looked earnestly at Gowes and the others, gently advising, "You've just arrived here and don't understand the situation. I told you before, the Nix Tribe defeated the Segestica people twice in one day. Wallis, in his battle against the Nix Army, as usual, forced hundreds of our compatriots to charge first. As a result, not only did they fail to disrupt the Nix Army's formation, but they also suffered heavy casualties in a very short time..."

So, before this battle, upon learning that you were among the Segestica forces, I became very concerned and pleaded with Leader Maximus to find a way to rescue you...

You've participated in many wars and should know how difficult it is to rescue you at the frontline of two battling armies, especially since the Nix Army is far less numerous than the Segestica people, and there was no way to contact you beforehand. Any slight mistake could lead to a disaster for you and the entire Nix Army!...

I knew it would be hard to agree to such a request; even if our former tribe still existed, the Great Chief might find it hard to make such a decision... But Leader Maximus agreed and repeatedly discussed it with the Nix Tribe's leaders, ultimately formulating a very detailed plan, mobilizing the entire tribe to work overnight to make those banners and clothes, and having the tribe's warriors practice according to the plan repeatedly until no errors were made...

To save you strangers, the Nix Tribe put in so much effort and took such risks that you can never repay this life-saving grace!

Not to mention, in the Nix Tribe's original battle plan, you were not included. The task of intercepting the Segestica stragglers would have been assigned to some of the Nix Soldiers and some compatriots who joined the tribe earlier. It was I who felt that the Nix Tribe spent so much to rescue you that you should do something for Nix. So I requested Leader Maximus to take on this task.

But now I regret it!"

Emmerich suddenly intensified his tone, speaking painfully, "Because I asked for this task, I really cared about your performance. I heard that you did not follow orders, acted on your own to split forces and pursue the Segestica Great Chief, leading to insufficient interception forces on the east side, allowing many Segestica stragglers to escape. Is that true?!"

Faced with Emmerich's questioning, Goves and the others were already deflated by his words, and someone couldn't help but mutter: "But... but we captured that fortress..."

"How dare you talk about it!" Emmerich said with an exasperated look, reprimanding, "Did you conquer that fortress?! It was the Segestica people who voluntarily abandoned it! Because they suffered a crushing defeat and didn't dare stay there any longer, otherwise they would have been surrounded by Nix soldiers, and none would have been able to escape back!

Don't you know that this fortress was easily captured by the Nix Army before! The ancient tradition of the Skodisqi Tribe 'repay kindness, don't take undeserved credit,' you all seem to have forgotten! Since you have forgotten these precious things, even if you rebuild a tribe, can you still call it the Skodisqi?!"

Goves and a few others bowed their heads, too ashamed to speak.

After a while of silence, Maximus took the initiative to say: "The reason our Nix Tribe is willing to help you is, on one hand, due to Emmerich's earnest plea and, on the other hand, we Nix people were once enslaved. Seeing you as slaves, forcibly sent to battle by the Pannonians, charging to your deaths, we have strong sympathy, so everyone is willing to work hard to rescue you.

If you are willing to stay and build a beautiful home with us, we would be delighted. If you are unwilling, we will not force you. In consideration of Emmerich and the other compatriots of yours willing to stay here, I can allow you to take the weapons we lent you before, and I can let you take some supplies left by the Pannonians in that fortress, as long as you agree to a few conditions I have."

"What are the conditions?!" Goves and the others, initially desperate from Maximus's rejection and Emmerich's scolding, now saw a lifeline and were eager to grasp it.

Maximus solemnly said, "First, your people must not enter the Aldean territory, because you go out from my camp, which could easily cause a misunderstanding between the Alde Tribe and our tribe in the future; second, the land along the Kupa River was promised to our tribe by the Aldeans. I have already taken two fortresses, only temporarily leaving because the Segestica people arrived. You must not settle in that area; third, you must not come to my tribe to harass or entice the Skodisqi people who have joined my tribe to leave... These are my three conditions."

Chapter 252: Generous Maximus?_2

After listening, Gowes and the others whispered among themselves for a while.

Then Gowes asked, "How many supplies can you offer us?"

"A quarter of the supplies from that village, enough for nearly 20,000 troops of the Segestica army for four to five days. How long can a team of over 700 people last on that?"

Gowes and the others exchanged glances and replied in unison, "We agree!"

After both sides made solemn promises, this verbal agreement was considered settled.

As they were leaving, Maximus solemnly said, "If one day you feel tired from wandering outside, I welcome you back here. The doors of the Nix Tribe will always be open for you, this is my promise!"

Gowes seemed not to hear, while the others nodded towards Maximus.

After sending the people off, Emmerich hurried back and repeatedly thanked Maximus.

"I'm not doing this entirely because of you. Any enemy of the Segestica people is someone we will try our best to unite against, rather than holding grudges over small interests," Maximus said modestly, then asked, "This time, the Segestica Great Leader suffered a crushing defeat. Will he come again soon?"

Emmerich pondered for a moment and cautiously said, "I think he'll come again soon. Andres is obstinate and won't stop until he achieves his goals. He treated... the Skodisqi Tribe this way before! Now he surely sees the Nix Tribe as an enemy too. Although Segestica suffered a heavy defeat, the other major tribes of Pannonia were unaffected. He would likely seek reinforcements from the Pannonian Tribe Alliance."

Maximus sighed, "So even though we won a great victory, we still have to prepare for the next battle. If only we knew in advance how many reinforcements the Segestica Tribe is bringing? When will they attack again? Then we could prepare better..."

At this point, Maximus looked at Emmerich and asked in a deep voice, "You've stayed in the Segestica Tribe for so many years; is there any way?"

"Let me think..." Emmerich fell into contemplation again.

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The victory of the rebel army ignited jubilant cheers among those who stayed in the camp, but the Segestica prisoners were like mourners.

Although the rebel army kept secrets from them before, the tense scenes of readying for battle were impossible for them to miss. Knowing well the personality of their Andres Great Leader, each felt secretly delighted, thinking their time of suffering was soon to end. To avoid drawing the rebel army's suspicion at such a critical time and getting killed, they became more compliant.

In the end, they did see their compatriots, but not with victorious smiles to rescue them. Instead, they were escorted into camp, heads hung in defeat...

The invincible Andres Great Leader actually got defeated?!... The original Segestica prisoners felt like a rug was pulled from under them, not only shattering their beautiful hope but also shaking their confidence in the Segestica Tribe.

Budocaribas hurried back to his own tribe, anxiously gathering the tribesmen to prep for defense, when tribesmen who stayed behind to monitor the battle suddenly rushed back, saying "The Segestica people were defeated," which he thought was a lie and rebuked the messenger harshly.

It wasn't until the messenger swore an oath to the gods that "everything he said was true," did Budocaribas, skeptically leading his men to the temporary camp, really believe the "rebel army won" fact upon seeing the numerous Segestica warriors being escorted. Yet, it left him wondering: how did the rebel army turn defeat into victory when he clearly saw their formation collapsing?

Later, he met Maximus, who briefly recounted the battle sequence, clarifying his doubts, yet also filled him with awe for the rebel army. In such a life-and-death battle, these outsiders dared to fake defeat with a squad, and his other units under Segestica's heavy assault didn't collapse. How strong their confidence! How strong their execution! How strong their combat power!

Thus, when Maximus negotiated with him on how to deal with so many new Segestica warriors as prisoners, he showed a willingness to cooperate.

Additionally, "the rebel army's defeat of the Segestica army" news quickly spread throughout the Alde Tribe, causing a sensation.

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After Maximus led his army away, Spartacus led the main rebel force to turn south.

Meanwhile, the newly appointed Roman Army commander Crassus led the hastily assembled 8 legions (including the remnants of the defeated consuls' forces) eastward through the Flaminia Road from Rome, deliberately avoiding the southbound main rebel force, and arrived at Rimini.

Crassus camped here primarily to prevent the main rebel force from retreating north to the Northern Italy Province because if it escapes Italy, Crassus won't only lose the glory he is after, but his political career might also be utterly destroyed like Publilius and Crodianus before him, so he prudently prepared beforehand.

As for the already far northbound rebel detachment (mainly Maxim's army), he paid little heed, considering his current army consisted mainly of defeated or new soldiers, who were already hard-pressed to deal with the main rebel force, making it infeasible to divide his troops further.

Besides, even if he deployed troops to pursue now it would be too late, not to mention this matter predates his appointment, falling under Crodianus's responsibility.

Still, he dispatched a messenger to inform the Northern Italy Provincial Governor Casius, ordering him to eliminate the rebel army detachment that fled into the province.

Casius, upon receiving the order, felt overwhelmed but didn't dare to object, fully aware of how formidable the richest man in Rome was. Also, having lost two Roman Legions before, even if it wasn't his primary responsibility, it still served as leverage against him.

Luckily, not long after Crassus's order arrived, Casius intercepted Torquato's Gaul rebel forces in Piacenza, delayed by looting along the way.

Torquato launched a fierce attack first, with the rebel soldiers bravely fighting and breaking through the multiple City Guard detachments hurriedly called by Casius. However, due to being outnumbered and exhausted, they were ultimately defeated, with Torquato and most rebel soldiers dying on the spot.

Casius immediately had their heads chopped off and sent word to Crassus to claim victory, stating, "I have routed this rebel faction's main force, with its remnants fleeing east to the mountains. I shall lead troops in pursuit" and so on.

In reality, however, Maximus's army had already left the Northern Italy Province, and after learning this from spies, Casius did not pursue but merely instructed the Alesian army to monitor the rebel's whereabouts.

Soon, the false news concocted by the Alde Tribe and Maximus's army spread, and upon learning this, Casius again reported to Crassus, claiming: In his pursuit, the rebel remnants fled into the mountains in panic, where they got ambushed by barbarians, and were utterly annihilated...

At this time, Crassus was too preoccupied to pay attention to Casius's victory report, as he had encountered a problem.

After fortifying the camp at Rimini, he sent Deputy General Mummius to lead two legions as the vanguard to follow the main rebel force without engaging them in battle.

However, Mummius, being ambitious himself, sought glory and couldn't resist attacking when he saw the straggling rebel units too far from their main force and in disarray, issuing an attack command.

Chapter 253: The Summation of Maximus

Who knew this was precisely Spartacus's stratagem? The rebel army's ambush troops quickly emerged from both sides of the mountains, causing two Roman legions to collapse instantly. They were chased relentlessly by the rebel army and fled back to Rimini in disarray.

The initial defeat made Crassus extremely angry, yet he still kindly consoled Deputy General Mummius, who had disobeyed his command. But after turning away, he cruelly ordered the execution of the "Eleventh Decimation Law" on the five hundred soldiers who first retreated and gathered the entire army to witness the execution process.

When the Roman soldiers saw their comrades beaten to death with sticks by fellow soldiers in a brutal manner, they shivered in fear, feeling that dying in battle under the rebel army's swords was far more honorable than dying at Crassus's hands.

Thus, Crassus achieved his goal of making the soldiers fear him more than the enemy.

Additionally, through days of observation, he realized the rebel army indeed seemed to have no intention of advancing north. So he decided not to wait any longer and led the entire army south, following the rebel army.

However, he never engaged the rebel army in battle. Instead, he organized his troops while sending out cavalry (Rome's cavalry far outnumbered that of the rebel army) to attack small groups of rebel soldiers who were isolated or gathering supplies.

Crassus adopted Fabian's strategy against Hannibal, based on his circumstances, employing tactics to delay and wear down the enemy.

Spartacus several times deliberately left openings to lure the Roman Army into attacking, but Crassus did not fall for it.

Spartacus led his entire army intending to have a decisive battle with the Roman Army, yet Crassus always fortified his camp early, refusing to come out.

Spartacus was at a loss with this Roman Army, and now he faced a big problem—lack of food.

When moving north, the rebel army plundered along the east coast of Italy. As they turned south, although Maximus left with his army, the total number of the rebel troops hadn't significantly changed, yet the previous route couldn't provide much more resources. Spartacus was forced to alter the route, entering the regions of Lucania Mountain, which hadn't been plundered yet by the rebel army.

Of course, marching here, Spartacus had another goal: to use the treacherous mountain paths and hidden mountains, making it difficult for Rome's heavy infantry to move and deter the Roman Army from following. If the Roman Army continued to pursue, the rebel army could more easily create opportunities for victory.

But he underestimated Crassus.

Crassus, without hesitation, led his army in pursuit into Lucania Mountain, yet he marched and fortified very steadily, giving Spartacus no chance to exploit any flaws, while ironically, the rebel army encountered trouble.

Some units that joined the rebel army in the region of Pisenum grew dissatisfied with Spartacus's constant marching without attacking the Roman Army, so they launched an unauthorized attack on the Roman Camp, resulting in failure.

But the Roman Army did not pursue after their victory, which led to a strategically placed ambush by Spartacus outside the Roman Camp returning empty-handed when he later learned of it.

The rebel army's streak of continuous victories faced a setback.

Spartacus felt the difficulty posed by this commander of the Roman Army. Crassus—this was the name of the Roman commander he learned from captured Roman soldiers, and he was also the person Maximus warned him to be cautious of when he left.

After much consideration, Spartacus decided to lead the army further south, leaving Lucania and heading to Regium. On one hand, the regions they would pass through were from the former Great Greece, relatively wealthy, which could solve the food shortage for the rebel army; on the other hand, he decided to send a few thousand men across the Messina Strait to Sicily.

He had long heard of the numerous oppressed slaves there, who had previously engaged in large-scale resistance against the Roman Army. Now, they were like dry kindling on a stove, just waiting for him to ignite it, enough to set all of Sicily ablaze. In this way, the two rebel armies could support each other across the strait, weakening the Roman Army's strength.

To be honest, the 8 legions led by Crassus, along with the town troops recruited along the way, had reached more than 70,000 men, putting some pressure on Spartacus.

Hamilcar reminded him not to forget Maximus's warning and suggested sending a detachment to Regium, with no need to lead the entire army.

But Spartacus considered: the Roman Army was following closely, and once troops were split, the Roman Army could easily discover it. They could take ships to bypass him and attack the detached troops first, and then the tragedy of Cross would be repeated.

Spartacus rejected Hamilcar's suggestion and decided to personally lead the army to Regium.

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Andres was escorted by cavalry, fleeing east along the south bank of the Kupa River without even entering the camp they had stationed the night before. Even when there were no pursuers in sight behind them, they did not rein in their warhorses and continued past Cabdes's camp, finally reaching Anrotas's tribe, where the cavalry stopped their horses, surrounding Andres into the camp.

The tribal leader Anrotas, seeing Andres's despondent appearance, knew right away that the army had suffered a defeat. Seeing so few return, he couldn't help but feel alarmed, yet knowing Andres's temperament, he dared not inquire and instead assigned a few servants to attend to Andres carefully while he sought out the cavalry to learn more in private.

Chapter 254: Maximus's Summation_2

Although Andres served as a servant boy for the Skodisqi people in his youth and suffered some humiliation, after he came of age, he followed his father in resisting the oppression of the Skodisqi people. While still young, he gained significant fame by killing several enemies in battle.

After he personally led troops into battle, he won victory after victory, becoming a famous warrior among the Pannonians and a nightmare for the Skodisqi people. He played a major role in the eventual destruction of the Skodisqi Tribe in the upper reaches of the Sava River. Thereafter, he took on the role of Great Chief of the Segestica Tribe, boldly waging war against the Alde Tribe, and again, he won battle after battle...

From his first time on the battlefield until now, it has been more than 20 years. Everything has gone smoothly for him, never encountering defeat, not even suffering any significant injuries. But today he was defeated, catastrophically so, in a battle that concerned the rise and fall of his tribe, and he still remains unclear about how he lost...

This blow was so great that he was dazed all the way back to the camp, and once there, he didn't speak to anyone, collapsing into bed and falling asleep.

He slept until deep into the night; he groggily woke up, looked around, and realized this wasn't his bedroom. Only then did he vaguely remember that he had arrived at Anrotas's tribe. Suddenly, the battlefield image of the Segestica Warriors' collapse, like an avalanche, flashed in his mind, causing a sudden headache. He couldn't help but shout, "Someone, come!"

The door swung open immediately, and the tribal leader Pulikas entered, happily saying, "Great Chief, you're awake!"

Anrotas followed closely behind, asking with concern, "Great Chief, you've been sleeping for most of the day, do you want something to eat?"

Being reminded, Andres instinctively reached to touch his stomach, which immediately grumbled in response. Now his head no longer hurt, but his stomach did, and he ordered, "Quick, bring me more food!"

"Great Chief, please wait a moment; everything's been prepared long ago, it just needs reheating." Anrotas said, then turned and left.

"What time is it now?" Andres asked his confidant.

"It's already late at night."

"It's been this long already?! Now, what... what are the enemy's movements?" When Andres mentioned "the enemy," his voice was trembling slightly.

"Great Chief, I... I didn't send out a reconnoitre to spy on the enemy's actions." Pulikas lowered his head in shame, responding softly, "But so far, we haven't seen the enemy appear nearby, and the warriors who escaped back said that as long as they made it past Wallis's camp, the enemy didn't pursue..."

Andres subconsciously glared at him, but then thought about how after being defeated, even he was at a loss, let alone them; but at least Pulikas remained loyally protecting him.

Andres's expression softened slightly and he asked, "How many warriors have returned so far?"

"Uh... about 3,000."

"Only 3,000!" Andres exclaimed in shock because, although he'd never lost a battle before, with years of campaigning experience he knew that after a battle, most of the time the victorious side couldn't kill or capture many enemies, and many routed soldiers could escape back to their tribe and be reorganized to fight after some time. The Segestica Tribe had sent out 16,000 warriors this time, and only 3,000 managed to escape back, not even one-fifth of the total.

"Great Chief, it's been less than a day since the battle ended; perhaps... other warriors got lost, or... have bypassed this camp and are still on their way back to the tribe." Pulikas explained.

"Just follow the river; how could they get lost..." Andres muttered, but said no more, hoping internally that things were as Glicus said.

"Great Chief, the food prepared for you has been reheated!" Anrotas brought in a large wooden tray into the room.

The platter held two grilled lamb legs, a large bowl of wheat porridge, a jug of goat's milk, and a big heap of washed cabbage... the food was quite bountiful.

"Put it here; I'll first go see the warriors who returned." At that moment, Andres had no appetite for food, got up, and headed outside.

"Going to see the warriors this late?!" Anrotas looked at Pulikas in astonishment.

Pulikas said nothing in response and followed Andres out.

After comforting the routed soldiers who had escaped, Andres returned to fill his stomach and then went back to sleep.

Early the next morning, Andres woke up again, feeling much more spirited, as if yesterday's catastrophic defeat had been left behind. He didn't immediately lead the army back to the Main Camp but stayed at this camp instead, sending out a reconnoitre to scout for enemy movements while dispatching cavalry to regroup the scattered soldiers.

Upon learning that the enemy hadn't seized the opportunity to capture the two camps to the east, he was surprised: if it were him, he would surely have taken advantage of the great victory to strike directly at the Segestica Main Camp. When he had wiped out the Skodisqi Tribe that occupied the upper reaches of the Kupa River years ago, that was exactly what he did.

But clearly, the enemy leader was a cautious individual, not advancing with the victory, instead retreating to their own camp; this allowed him to breathe a temporary sigh of relief, though he soon felt disheartened because after a busy half-day, the cavalry only managed to bring back over 1,000 routed soldiers and couldn't find any more of their people.

16,000 Segestica warriors, yet less than 5,000 returned; it was an utter and complete defeat that left Andres heartbroken and pained!

Just as he was about to lead his troops away from this place of sorrow, the Cavalry Captain came to report, "Cabdes has returned!"

Andres finally felt that the Spirit of Nature had offered him a little protection; he could imagine how much impact this defeat would have on the tribe, and with Cabdes's assistance, he could resolve many problems, so he quickly had someone bring Cabdes over.

Cabdes's face was clean, his clothes unruffled, except for looking tired, there was no sign of the disarray of an escape after defeat.

"Great Chief, I've returned."

"Cabdes, your safe return is the best news I've heard today!" It was very rare for Andres to speak so emotionally.

However, Cabdes wasn't moved by this; he remained cautious, saying, "Great Chief, I didn't escape back; rather... the enemy released me."

"What did you say?!" Andres's eyes widened, voice suddenly rising.

"The enemy released me to send you a message, they wish to negotiate a truce with us!" Cabdes carefully emphasized the word "truce".

"Truce?" Andres thought he misheard: "The enemy gains victory and actually initiates a ceasefire?!"

"Great Chief, the enemy leader told me..." Cabdes continued cautiously, "They were invited by the Aldeans to reclaim the land along the Kupa River.

Moreover, the Aldeans promised that if they could drive us out, they could settle on a large tract of land along the Kupa River... so they launched an attack on us.

He said that if we voluntarily withdrew from the Kupa River, and you, Great Chief, pledged a ceasefire publicly to the Divine, he would gradually release the captured tens of thousands of our people, allowing them to return to the tribe..."

"What do they mean by 'gradually release'?" Andres pressed down his anger and asked silently.

"I asked the same thing, and the enemy leader told me he worries that if he releases all the captives at once, once we regain our strength, we might... might renege, so he plans to release 1,000 people each month—"

"Damn scoundrel! Who does he think he is, daring to humiliate me like this!" Andres suddenly flew into a rage, "Ceasefire, my ass! Does he think winning a couple of battles can make me, Andres, concede? No, I will lead the army again, destroy their camp, chop off their heads, and toss them to the wild dogs to chew on!..."

Chapter 255: Farming During War

After Cabdes vented with Andres, he softly reminded, "Great Chief, these recent battles with the enemy have cost our tribe most of its warriors. Even if we wish to fight again, we lack the manpower, and the enemy's combat strength remains formidable!"

"You're scared?!" Andres glared.

Cabdes quickly explained, "Great Chief, it's not fear; rather, given our tribe's current situation, we cannot muster enough warriors to fight the enemy in the short term."

"We don't have enough, but other Pannonian tribes do!" Andres resolutely said. "You must return to the tribe with the warriors and first comfort our people. I must head to Mazi to ask the alliance for aid! I'll swiftly bring back enough warriors from other tribes to form a new army, defeat this enemy, and rescue

our captured tribesmen as soon as possible! If we're delayed, many of our captured tribesmen might die from enemy abuse!"

Andres said this last sentence because they originally treated captured Skodisqi people in that manner. The reason he decided to head directly to the Pannonian Tribe Alliance instead of returning to the tribe was partly because he felt ashamed to face those left behind, whose complaints about losing husbands and fathers would be unbearable.

"Since the Great Chief has made a decision, I am willing to follow your arrangement." Cabdes respectfully responded.

"Good, let's head out now." Andres said impatiently, "On the way, you must tell me in detail about what you saw in the enemy camp."

"Yes, Great Chief."

The two went out and began gathering the resting warriors in the fort.

Anrotas hurriedly arrived, "Great Chief, I heard you're leaving now?! What will we do once you're gone?!"

"Didn't I say that the enemy has retreated? They didn't even occupy those two empty forts to the east and won't attack you."

Andres said impatiently, "If the enemy really attacks with their army and you can't hold them back, you can first retreat with the tribesmen to the Sava River. It won't take long before I lead an army to recapture your fort and completely eliminate the enemy!"

After speaking, Andres carefully sat into the saddled litter with the assistance of his guards.

Anrotas wanted to say more, but Cabdes gave him a glance, shook his head, and he swallowed his words, blankly watching Andres lead the army away...

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The day Andres was waiting in the fort was a busy day for Maximus.

According to Flanitus's final battle results, the rebel army captured nearly 7,000 Segestica warriors, with over 2,000 Segestica warriors either killed or seriously injured on the battlefield, while the number of enemies who perished in the marsh was left uncoun- ted by Flanitus.

The results were glorious, yet post-battle affairs were even busier.

The treatment of the wounded rebel soldiers, the commemoration and cremation of those fallen, and the arrangement of the captured Segestica warriors — all these matters required Maximus's personal involvement or approval.

Among these, the most crucial task was how to handle so many Segestica warrior captives.

Maximus quickly decided to execute the prisoner agreement made with the Alde Tribe, immediately transferring 6,000 Segestica warrior captives to Budocaribas for distribution to other Alde Tribes. This left the rebel army with only over 4,000 captives, making supervision much easier.

Faced with the formidable Pannonians, despite such a victory, Maximus felt a strong sense of urgency. Therefore, another equally important matter was quickly expanding and upgrading the temporary camp.

The Public Works Department head Capito had led his men in planning the camp's expansion. The next step was assigning people to work.

Over 4,000 Segestica warrior captives, plus 4,000 rebel soldiers, a total of more than 8,000 people were involved in building the camp. Another 4,000 rebel soldiers were responsible for guarding the captives and protecting the camp. Under the diligent supervision and guidance of the Public Works Department, the project of expanding the camp and improving its defenses was expected to be completed in a short time.

During his inspection of the massive worksite, Maximus couldn't resist jumping into the ditch to help the soldiers with sharpening wood sticks and driving pointed stakes with short swords...but soon after, Volenus came calling for him.

"Chief, have you really decided not to move to that fort in the east yet?!" Volenus asked with concern.

"Not yet," Maximus lifted the tent flap, walked into the military tent, patiently explaining, "Even though we've secured a victory, the Segestica people won't easily give up, and their next assault will be more troublesome.

Should we move there hastily, and if the Segestica Army quickly assaults again, we'd have to withdraw back. Instead of making such back-and-forth moves and wasting time, it's better to first strengthen our real encampment here, with support from our Aldean Alliance, to ensure our safety while observing the Segestica people, and then plan accordingly."

"How long will we be here?" Volenus pressed further.

"I can't say for sure; it depends on the Segestica people's actions," Maximus said just as Casius brought him a basin of clean water. Squatting down, washing the dirt off his hands, he added, "Do you think I don't want everyone to move over as soon as possible?! This morning, I released a captured Segestica Chief to deliver a message to their Great Chief, hoping for a ceasefire. If so, we could farm in peace!"