

Perish 256

Chapter 256: War-time Farming_2

"Did the Segestica people agree?!" Volenus's eyes lit up.

Maximus shook his head. "We have not yet received their reply. Based on the information we've gathered, the Great Chief of the Segestica tribe is very tough-minded. It's unlikely they will agree.

What we're doing is planting a seed of possibility with the Segestica people. In case their army, for some reason, cannot be deployed, or if they suffer another crushing defeat during a future attack, they'll be more inclined to seriously consider our truce proposal."

"Next time..." Volenus complained disappointedly, "It's already almost October. If we keep dragging this out, we won't be able to plant this year!"

"I knew this was what you were worried about." Maximus stood up, rubbed his hands on his clothes, and smiled slightly. "Volenus, is your mind stuck in a rut? Do we really have to relocate everyone there to start farming?

The land around that village to the east is only about ten miles away from the camp. It will take just one or two hours to get there. Meanwhile, the nearest Segestica tribe is over twenty miles away. I can have the Military Department dispatch a certain number of soldiers to protect you while farming. At the same time, deploy a reconnoitre team to monitor the Segestica people's movements. If anything unusual arises, you can retreat in time... Will that put your mind at ease?"

"Of course!" Volenus lit up with joy but quickly became worried again. "Even if we manage to plant, we won't be able to protect the crops. If the Segestica army comes, won't all the crops we plant be destroyed?"

"How could they be destroyed?" Maximus reassured confidently. "If the Segestica army comes too early, the crops we plant won't have sprouted yet. What's there to destroy?

If they come later, when the crops are fully grown, would they destroy them? No, they wouldn't. If they dare to launch another attack, it means they're confident they can defeat us. If they defeat us, those

lands and crops will belong to them. Why would they ruin them? The only thing you need to keep in mind is to plant the crops away from the roads, to avoid them being trampled when their armies march in the future."

"You're right, Chief. I'll make the arrangements immediately!" Volenus, excited, turned to leave.

"Wait, don't rush," Maximus called out, stopping him. "Before you go, tell me, how do you plan to organize farming over there? Who will you be bringing? What crops will you plant? What steps will you take for farming?"

Volenus wasn't surprised that a leader like Maximus, commanding the entire army, would take such a keen interest in farming affairs. After all, when Volenus first joined the team, Maximus had already discussed agriculture with him. Despite his youth, Maximus was a leader who placed great emphasis on agriculture.

Volenus, calming himself, spoke with excitement: "Chief, I was just about to discuss this matter with you."

"Then let's sit and talk." Maximus smiled. "Akegu, bring two cups of water."

"Yes," came the reply.

After they sat down, Volenus contemplated a moment before speaking. "Chief, here's what I'm thinking. First, all personnel from the Agricultural Department will go to farm there. This will be an excellent opportunity to train them—to help them learn how to supervise and guide others more effectively while also gaining valuable insights about farming this particular region..."

"Good! You're already proving to be an excellent Chief Officer of the Agricultural Department!" Maximus praised generously.

"Next, I will select over 200 people from the Supply Camp. Chief, you know I have records for those who've joined our group. These 200 people all have years of farming experience and extensive knowledge of agriculture.

Additionally, I plan to draw about 1,000 people from the Skodisqi who joined us earlier, mainly those already living in that village. They've been farming that land for over a year and are familiar with it. They're likely more experienced than we are and can save us a lot of time. We could also learn a great deal from them..."

This time, Maximus didn't nod. He asked, "Of the 1,000 Skodisqi people you plan to select, how many are able-bodied young men?"

"At least 700. They are the main workforce; we can't have too few of them," Volenus explained.

"That won't do," Maximus said, shaking his head. "We lost quite a few soldiers in the recent battles. To better handle the coming conflicts, we must train thousands of able-bodied Skodisqi people for combat as quickly as possible, so that they'll be ready when needed.

I'd rather give you more quotas, even if that means pulling some seasoned veterans from our forces. But it's best not to recruit too many able-bodied Skodisqi as farmers."

"Alright, Chief, I'll reorganize the personnel," Volenus agreed readily, then continued. "I also plan to bring forty oxen and the iron plows we seized from the Segestica village. Our goal is to plow that land thoroughly and then plant beans and vegetables."

"Beans and vegetables..." Maximus mused thoughtfully.

"I've consulted both the Aldeans and the Skodisqi. They tell me that winters here are not too harsh. The Skodisqi even mentioned that they occasionally plant winter wheat near the Sava River, though the yield isn't very high. So planting winter wheat on the land near the Kupa River should be feasible.

However, despite acquiring a fair amount of grain from the Segestica people, our numbers have grown, and food supplies remain tight. Using some of the wheat as seed on land that isn't yet ours, with no experience in farming this unfamiliar soil, seems quite risky. I think it's better to plant beans and vegetables first. Even if there are losses, it won't feel as wasteful."

Maximus nodded approvingly. "You've thought this through carefully! What kinds of beans and vegetables are you planning to plant?"

"We've gathered about seven or eight hundred pounds from the Segestica village! The most we have are broad beans, followed by chickpeas, then some peas and lentils. I'm planning to plant all of them and divide the plowed land into plots..."

After talking for a while, Volenus suddenly remembered he hadn't mentioned vegetables. He quickly added, "The vegetables include cabbage, lettuce, radishes, and onions. Radishes, being filling, will be planted in greater numbers..."

After hearing this, Maximus asked, "How do you plan to fertilize that land?"

"Chief, I've inspected that land multiple times. It's rich black soil with a fishy smell, suggesting minimal cultivation by either the Aldeans or the Segestica people. As a result, its fertility hasn't been significantly depleted.

However, the black soil is somewhat sticky. The Segestica people cleverly mixed it with lime soil to make it loose and breathable, which didn't affect its ability to grow crops.

They told me that many Celtic tribes have been using such soil improvement methods for years. They even mix sand with clay and marl to enhance sandy soil's fertility... Honestly, I wouldn't have known the Celts were this skilled at farming until I saw it here!" Volenus remarked with admiration.

Chapter 257: Dispatching Spies

"Yes, they are all using the iron plow! Therefore, we must not be too arrogant. We should learn more from them. They have survived and thrived here for hundreds of years, so they naturally have some unique insights, not to mention their thorough understanding of everything here!" Cato said solemnly.

Unlike Volenus, who was once a Roman citizen and viewed the Gauls and Celts as barbarians, in his previous life, he had read about the Gauls and knew that their civilization level was not low, with high standards in agriculture, animal husbandry, iron smelting, and woodworking.

"Leader, you're right!" Volenus nodded in agreement. "Since the soil is already fertile enough, I think we don't need to apply more fertilizer. Besides, we don't have time for composting right now."

"I have a suggestion," Cato said. "I noticed that in the fields around the two villages to the east, there are many piles of wheat straw. I estimate the Segestica people might want to use them as backup for replacing thatch roofs, but that's quite wasteful. Instead, we could burn this straw, collect the ashes, and mix them into the soil to increase its fertility."

"Using straw ash to fertilize the soil?!" Volenus was surprised because he had never heard of such a method and couldn't help but be skeptical.

Cato continued, "Not just wheat straw, other weeds, including ash from burned wood, can also be mixed into the soil to enhance fertility. The darker the ash, the better the fertility it provides. Additionally, the bones left after we eat livestock and poultry can be ground into powder and mixed into the soil to add another type of fertility."

"Another type of fertility?" Volenus was even more puzzled.

So Cato vaguely explained to him, "Generally, for crops to grow well, the soil needs at least three things. Planting legumes can add one, mixing plant ash another, and mixing bone meal the last one... it seems you don't quite believe it."

"I believe it! Leader, I believe everything you've said!" Volenus hurriedly replied.

Cato glanced at him and continued earnestly, "I suggest that your Agricultural Department designate a plot of land as your department's exclusive field to experiment with various new farming methods and implement new tools. If the trial results are good, then you can promote it to other tribesmen."

The methods I just mentioned for enhancing soil fertility, you can let your subordinates try it in the Agricultural Department's field first to see if the beans and vegetables that grow are better than those in other fields."

"Leader, this is a great idea! I'll go back and implement your method right away!" Volenus said happily.

Although he was accustomed to following orders, he also had his concerns, such as farming. The fertilization methods Cato mentioned were unfamiliar to him, so he naturally had doubts but had to comply. Now, the problem was solved with the experimental field approach.

He couldn't help but ask again, "Since these methods can enhance soil fertility, do we still need to apply manure as before?"

"Of course, it's needed," Cato replied without hesitation. "Manure can comprehensively improve soil fertility and transform barren soil. Combined with the methods I mentioned earlier, we won't have to worry too much about a significant decline in soil fertility after years of farming. And if we can combine it with the three-field rotation system, that would be even better!"

"What is the three-field rotation system?"

"It's a system where the land is divided into sections, and different crops are grown in rotation according to the season. This ensures a good harvest, maintains soil fertility, and avoids overworking the laborers..."

Cato recalled the information he had studied in his previous life for game illustrations about the civilization's struggles: "Didn't you read the agricultural book written by Cato before? It also mentions crop rotation methods for farmland. The three-field rotation system is more detailed, complete, and better than what he wrote!"

Vorenius immediately became excited and eagerly asked, "Leader, can you explain in detail how to implement this three-field rotation system?!"

"Of course," Cato, who loved to teach, was just about to elaborate when Casius entered the tent to report, "Leader, Emmerich requests an audience and has brought a Segestica prisoner."

Cato changed his tone and said, "Vorenius, first arrange the tasks for plowing across the river. Once you have some free time, I'll explain the three-field rotation system to you in detail."

"...Alright, Leader." Despite feeling somewhat reluctant, Vorenius dutifully left.

Emmerich entered the tent, followed by a young man with a sorrowful expression and restrained movements.

"Leader Cato." Emmerich saluted and said, "As you instructed, I found a warrior willing to return to the Segestica Territory to gather intelligence on the enemy for us."

As soon as he finished speaking, the young man dropped to his knees with a thud and shouted, "Honorable Leader, as long as you... you promise to destroy the Brochi Tribe and reclaim my wife, I am willing to be your servant and do anything for you!"

"Are you trying to bargain with me?" Cato's face slightly darkened. His voice wasn't loud, but it startled the young man, leaving him unsure of how to respond.

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After all, the rebel army had already defeated the Segestica people three times, and the disastrous defeat in that one battle had utterly broken the courage of these Segestica prisoners, naturally filling them with fear towards the leader of the rebel army.

Upon seeing this situation, Emmerich quickly took over the conversation and explained, "Leader Maximus, here's the situation..."

It turns out that this young man was named Jilipus. Although he was a Pannonian, he did not come from the Segestica Tribe but from the Mazi Tribe.

Jilipus was an ordinary tribesman of the Mazi Tribe. He had been childhood sweethearts with his wife, and they married after growing up. His wife was very beautiful and had many suitors, including the second son of the tribe's Great Leader, Maitilis. Unlike others, even after they were married, this son continued to pester his wife. On one occasion, he even attempted to assault her, and if not for his timely arrival, his wife might have been humiliated.

In his anger, Jilipus complained to the Great Leader Maitilis. Since many people witnessed the incident, Maitilis couldn't openly defend his son, and the son also couldn't deny it, so he received a light punishment, which left him resentful. At the beginning of summer, during the tribe's sacrificial ceremony to pray for a good harvest, the carefully prepared live sheep for sacrifice disappeared. Following his son's hint, they found the sheep dead and skinned in the wood shed behind Ligpus' house.

Maitilis was furious and had Jilipus arrested. Without listening to his defense, Jilipus was judged guilty of the grave crime of intentionally sabotaging the sacrifice.

According to tradition, intentional sabotage of a sacrifice was punishable by death. However, when the Pannonian leaders rebelled against the Scodisqi rule, they swore with their tribesmen to focus all efforts against the strong enemies and never to engage in fratricide, staining their compatriots' blood.

Moreover, after the Priest communicated with the Holy Spirit, he also announced to the people that the Spirit of Nature did not wish for the land to be tainted by Jilipus' impure blood.

In the end, Jilipus was exiled from the tribe, forbidden from stepping into Brochi Tribe's territory for life.

Jilipus wandered through multiple tribes, but no one took him in due to his crime of sabotaging the sacrifice. At that time, Andres became the Segestica Great Leader, seeking to expand power and wage war on the Aldeans, thus indiscriminately accepting roaming Panonians.

Even so, Jilipus was still avoided by other Panonians and was eventually sent to Wallis's new tribe, where he fought against the Aldeans for years.

Once, Jilipus fell gravely ill with a high fever. It was Emmerich who treated him with herbs and saved him. He was very grateful to Emmerich, and through this, they began to interact. Emmerich also learned why Jilipus always seemed out of place with other Panonians, while Jilipus no longer harbored the same hatred toward Scodisqi slaves...

Subsequently, Wallis recklessly led an attack on the rebel army, fell into a trap, and was defeated. Jilipus was captured and sent to the Medical Camp due to a leg injury. The next day, Emmerich, now a Medical Officer of the rebel army, came to work at the Medical Camp and once again encountered the recuperating Jilipus...

Thus, when Maximus asked Emmerich to find someone to gather information on the Segestica people, Emmerich first thought of Jilipus. Upon finding him and explaining, Jilipus readily agreed...

Maximus listened carefully to Emmerich's introduction and asked in astonishment, "Even among the Pannonian tribes, is there such abuse of power to bully the common people?"

"Leader, wherever there are people, there will be conflicts," Emmerich said calmly. "The Panonians, having just recently gained independence, are relatively united, but it doesn't mean that oppression doesn't exist. Otherwise, where did Segestica get so many homeless Panonians to shelter?"

The Panonians continuously waged wars, and the needed food and supplies could not be provided solely by the leaders and nobles and had to be collected from all tribesmen. Once or twice might be manageable, but repeated collection becomes unbearable for some Panonian tribesmen...

I think the biggest problem for the Panonians is—"

Emmerich stressed his words: "Although they learned from us Scodisqi and trained some Druids over the years, whom they call Priests, they only let these Priests handle sacrifices and not arbitrate or punish tribal disputes and crimes, retaining this important power with the leaders and nobles..."

But for us Scodisqi, the Druid's position is above the leaders and nobles, so they can resolve issues fairly and impartially without influence. The Panonian leaders and nobles settle tribal matters based on personal favor, and since the Druids cannot limit this excessive use of power, unjust incidents naturally increase..."

Having finished listening, a thought crossed Maximus's mind: It seems that during leisure, a detailed study of the Pannonian social structure would be quite valuable if what Emmerich said is true.

Thinking of this, Maximus looked at Jilipus, who was kneeling on the ground, with a softer gaze, warmly saying, "Jilipus, your misfortunes greatly move me! But are you truly willing to return to Segestica Territory to gather information for us? Bear in mind that they are your fellow tribesmen, and we are your enemies; the information you provide may lead us to defeat your tribesmen again. Do you not care about this?"

"I do not care!" Jilipus said with clenched teeth and hate in his voice. "After my wife and I married, some people, out of jealousy, kept badmouthing me behind my back and even helped that wolf frame me! When Maitilis sentenced me, no one except my wife spoke up for me! When I was driven out of the tribe, no one but my wife saw me off!"

When I arrived at the Segestica Tribe, they treated me as a stranger due to my false charges, always with disdain in their eyes... They did not see me as a tribesman, so why should I see them as tribesmen and pity them!

Conversely, when I was seriously ill, the Sage treated me with medicine! When I was injured and captured, your doctors and nurses dressed my wounds and took care of me, you are more like my tribesmen than they are!

I heard from the nurses that we Panonians and you Illyrians were originally one people, just split up later. Wouldn't it be better if we could reunite now, without the oppression from those leaders and clan chiefs?!"

Maximus saw the fervor in Jilipus's eyes, slapped the arm of his chair vigorously, and exclaimed, "Well said! Since your leg was injured, don't kneel; get up, and let's discuss your matter slowly."

Maximus's concerned words led Jilipus to comply.

Maximus then had Emmerich and Jilipus sit down and asked Akegu to bring them two cups of water.

Holding the wooden cup, Jilipus's anxiety gradually faded, as it was his first time receiving such honor from someone important.

"Currently, we and the Segestica Tribe are mortal enemies, and to gain control of the plains along the Kupa River, there will inevitably be more wars. Since the Pannonian tribes are relatively united, other tribes will surely assist Segestica; thus, they are also enemies of our Nix Tribe, including Brochi. So I can promise to destroy the Mazi Tribe and rescue your wife in the future—"

"Thank you, leader! Thank you, leader!" Jilipus said repeatedly, his voice somewhat choked with emotion. For years, he had this on his mind, knowing that with his own strength, it was mere wishful thinking. Now, there was finally hope.

Chapter 259: Worshipping the Divine

"Of course, you've seen over the past few days that our tribe isn't considered strong yet, while the Mazi Tribe... I've heard it's the center of the Pannonians' territory?" Maximus looked uncertainly at Emmerich.

"Yes, the Mazi Tribe is in the middle of the seven major Pannonian tribes, and their tribal alliance meetings are also held in the Main Camp of the Mazi Tribe. If we attack the Main Camp of the Mazi Tribe, the other major Pannonian tribes would certainly rally together in rescue." Emmerich reminded.

Maximus seized the moment to continue: "So, you see, it will take us in the Nix Tribe a considerable amount of time to fulfill our promise to you, and you need to wait patiently.

But I assure you, once the tribe is capable of confronting the entire body of Pannonians, I will definitely lead an attack on the Mazi Tribe, defeat them, and rescue your wife!"

"I understand, I can wait!" Jilipus resolutely said.

He had been in the camp for several days, aware that the Nix Tribe had only just been founded and was far fewer in number than the Segestica Tribe, yet dared to launch an attack against Segestica and continued to win. Seeing the countless Segestica prisoners in the camp, he knew that the Segestica Tribe probably no longer had the capacity to fight the Nix.

Before arriving, he had even discussed in detail with Emmerich, knowing that the leader of the Nix Tribe harbored extraordinary ambition, and thought to himself: If given a bit more development time, they might dare challenge the entire Pannonians!

Jilipus could only choose to believe this, as it was his only hope.

"By the way, how is your wife doing now?" Maximus asked with concern.

"I... I don't know... Since leaving the Mazi Tribe, I haven't been able to get any news about her..." Jilipus said painfully.

Maximus saw him clutching the armrests so tightly that his nails were white from exertion, further affirming in his mind Jilipus's sincerity in wanting to join the Nix Tribe, and instead said, "Emmerich, how are you planning to send Ligpus back to the Segestica Territory without raising suspicion?"

Emmerich was prepared: "Leader, I was just about to tell you, I'd like to request that you release some Pannonian prisoners, and have Ligpus blend in with them. It would be best if, during their tasks like digging in the camp or herding cattle and sheep, the soldiers deliberately slacken the watch and let them escape... This should avoid arousing suspicion."

"Alright, that seems like a good plan. But how will we make contact with Ligpus after he returns to the Segestica Territory, and then relay the information we obtain?" Maximus asked again.

"Segestica doesn't have much extra land, so after Ligpus returns, he could only help other tribesmen with work. After the great battle, all parts of the Segestica tribe will surely lack a lot of strong labor, so Jilipus will have more choices.

He can choose to work in the tribes closer to the northern plains of the Kupa River and engage in livestock herding, which is hard work that requires strong labor. Ligpus has past experience with herding when he first arrived at the Segestica Tribe, so the tribesmen there shouldn't refuse.

This way, Jilipus will have the freedom to drive herds into the dense woods north of the Kupa River. At the right time, we can arrange for someone to meet him at a predetermined location. It's best to have Skodisqi people arrange for this since they are familiar with the terrain there and can hide without being discovered..."

"You've thought this through very well. I'll call Capito, Volenus, Quintus, and Flanitnus together, draft a detailed plan based on your method, and then implement it accordingly." After saying this, Maximus looked at Jilipus again and said with seriousness, "I agreed to your request, but our Nix Tribe does not accept servants. You can choose to join the Nix Tribe, become our Reserve Tribe Member..."

Going back to Segestica involves great risk, but you will be doing Nix Tribe a service by gathering information, and it will count as an achievement. The more crucial information you gather, the greater your achievements, which will in turn raise your status in the Nix Tribe. It will also lead to more rewards, and you might even become one of our Nobles, owning vast lands!

By the day you bring your wife back, you can let her enjoy an unprecedentedly wealthy life and make her proud of you... Would you like to join the Nix Tribe?"

Maximus's words set Jilipus's imagination alight, and he answered without hesitation, "Of course, I would!"

After Jilipus left, Emmerich spoke up, "Leader, I have a suggestion, but I'm not sure if I should say it."

Maximus looked at him and said with a serious tone, "You are the Medical Officer and also a consultant in the Political Affairs Hall. Making suggestions is part of your duty. Don't be so cautious, just say whatever needs to be said."

Emmerich felt relieved from the reprimand and said, "Leader, you handed over the newly captured 6,000 Segestica people to the Alde Tribe and even allowed them to kill the tribal leaders and Nobles among them. I think it's a pity.

Rather than that, it's better to keep them alive for now. Segestica deployed a large army this time, and we captured so many tribal leaders and Nobles. The Segestica Great Leader Andres will likely believe these people would die at our hands. To prevent disorder and maintain order, he will certainly appoint new tribal leaders and Nobles as soon as possible.

Chapter 260: Worship of the Divine_2

After a period of time, we'll release these captives back, and by then, the Segestica Tribe will certainly fall into chaos..."

"Good idea!" Maximus applauded. "Conflicts are bound to arise between the Old Leader and the New Leader, the Old Nobles and the New Nobles—it's a clash of interests, inevitable! Just one thing... Are the tribal leaders and nobles under Segestica appointed by the Great Chief?"

"Usually, it's inherited through generations and then submitted to the Great Chief for confirmation. But Andres is assertive and eager to open hostilities with us; he'll likely directly assign heirs from the families of these captives to stabilize the tribe quickly and save time..." Emmerich explained.

"I see..." Maximus pondered for a moment, then said, "Akegu, go find Flanitnus immediately and tell him to halt the transfer of captives to Alde. Separate the Segestica tribal leaders and nobles among the captives for me and replace their count with ordinary captives... Later, I'll explain the situation personally to Budocaribas. Off you go!"

"Understood!"

Emmerich, emboldened by seeing his suggestion accepted, added, "Leader, I have one more suggestion."

"Whatever suggestions you have, say them all at once—don't drop them out piecemeal." Maximus joked.

"After the Skodisqi people became slaves, the Pannonians prohibited them from worshipping their Divine. Now that they've gained freedom, they've asked me to ask you, Leader, if they might be allowed to resume their worship?"

Maximus's smile slightly froze but quickly returned to normal. His demeanor relaxed as he said, "Worshipping the Divine is a significant matter and cannot be handled carelessly. Right now, we're all squeezed into this temporary camp with limited space. Since they haven't worshipped in so many years, it doesn't need to happen in this urgent moment. Once we've resolved the Segestica issue and moved eastward to the new camp, where everyone will have their own homes, they may worship then.

Moreover, our Political Affairs Hall will need time to deliberate on how tribesmen might worship their respective Divine and whether to build a temple for such purposes—you must be present for those discussions! For now, explain things to them well and ask for their patience."

Emmerich, having only tried to probe this young leader's attitude toward local Divine, remained composed and replied, "Understood, I will persuade them properly."

Maximus watched him exit the tent, then paced back and forth within it. Suddenly, he stopped and posed a question: "Why do you think I refuse to agree to let the Skodisqi people worship their Divine after joining the tribe?"

Aside from himself, only a few young attendants were present in the tent; the question was evidently directed at them.

Maximus kept these youths by his side, not only to assign them clerical tasks or errands but also to let them observe how he handled affairs intimately. Occasionally, he posed questions that required thinking, truly nurturing them as potential future aides.

Typically, Maximus kept four attendants in his service. While Akegu and Casius were constant fixtures—mainly because he was most familiar and comfortable with them—the other two rotated every five days.

Currently, aside from Akegu, who had gone out on an errand, three attendants remained. After hearing Maximus's query, Manas eagerly responded, "Our group has so many people, and everyone has their own Divine they worship. The majority worship Ares and Poseidon (since Illyrians primarily revere these Divine, and Maximus's group has the most Illyrians). But they've never worshipped recklessly. If we permit these newly joined Skodisqi people to worship freely, the elders might feel dissatisfied, which could trigger conflict."

Manas finished enthusiastically and stared expectantly at Maximus.

This boy was outgoing and loved the spotlight... Maximus merely nodded slightly, offering neither affirmation nor criticism.

"The Skodisqi people have just joined us. If we allow them to worship their Divine now, it may deepen their ties to their original tribe and make it easier for them to form cliques. This would hinder their integration into our group, delaying their process of becoming one of us..." Casius offered carefully.

It was a reasonable answer, but Maximus wasn't particularly impressed. Casius was meticulous, stable, and thoughtful; Maximus routinely entrusted him with more complex tasks, which he consistently completed well.

"Uh... um..." Finally, the last youth deliberated for a long while before saying, "I heard the Skodisqi people practice Druidism. If they are allowed to worship their Divine, might they then resume electing their own Druids?... I heard that, in the Skodisqi Tribe, Druids held very high status and wielded significant power..."

The final youth stole a glance at Maximus and softly added, "But we have a leader and subordinate groups among the Nine Divisions to manage everyone. We wouldn't permit the newly joined Skodisqi people to follow Druids' commands instead of our orders..."

Maximus was startled and recognized the boy—none other than Quintus's grandson, Valles.

When Valles first joined the group, Maximus kept an eye on him for a while. The boy loved learning and excelled in school, though he was introverted and not fond of speaking. After he became an attendant recently, he buried himself in tasks and hadn't taken the initiative to speak with Maximus. Had it not been for today's question, which piqued Maximus's curiosity, it might've taken even longer to discover this unpolished talent.

Nonetheless, Maximus revealed no reaction outwardly, instead praising all three attendants equally: "Your thoughts are all well-considered! Remember! Anyone joining our tribe should prioritize the tribe's interests. They must never eat our bread yet act against the tribe!

We must also find ways to help these newly joined people quickly integrate into the tribe. Only when everyone contributes to the tribe can we grow stronger and develop faster. Do you agree with me?!"

"Yes!!"

.....

As the group moved through dense forests and reached the plains along the Sava River, Andres instructed Cabdes on a few matters before riding eastward with a group of guards.

The Sava River, a major tributary of the Danube, flows east year after year, carving out fertile plains.

After traveling east along the Sava River's west bank for a day, Andres approached Gonami Lake in southern Segestica. He dismounted and boarded a ship, drifting south along the river. Within a day, he entered the territory of another Pannonian Tribe—the Brochi.

Andres continued eastward, passing various Brochi subordinate tribal patrols. After passing through the Brochi's main camp, he turned northeast, leaving the plains behind and venturing into a hill region, officially entering the territory of the Mazi Tribe.

The Mazi Tribe lies at the center of the Pannoni Territory. Unlike the other six large tribes, half of its territory consists of mountain ranges. Hills and mountains surround a sizable basin where the Mazi's main camp resides.

Upon entering the main camp, Andres, still dusty from travel, went straight to the Great Chief's main house, only to be informed that the Great Chief of the Mazi was in the Tribal Alliance Hall—and several other Great Chiefs were also present.

Why were these individuals gathered here now?... Andres, puzzled, made his way to the Tribal Alliance Meeting Hall.