

Perish 286

Chapter 286: Capturing the Outer Camp_2

The last time the Nix people didn't use these two defensive weapons was because the autumn season was dry, and using fire could easily set the wooden walls ablaze. But now they couldn't afford to worry about that because the Panloni people had employed the 'battering ram'.

This was a large tree, big enough for one person to embrace, specially selected by the Pannonians from the mountains. After cutting it down, they smoothed the trunk and sharpened the front end. A dozen warriors lifted it and crossed the filled moat, arriving at the wooden wall and began striking the mud wall below.

Although the mud wall had been packed and reinforced by the Nix soldiers, it was not stone, and under continuous battering, it began to loosen, exposing the wooden wall base embedded deep within.

During the process of the ramming wood thrusting, soldiers on the wall would focus on pouring boiling water and fiery oil on the warriors carrying the ram. As warriors fell with screams, new ones continuously took their place.

Finally, under the relentless pounding of the ramming wood, the wooden wall base gradually loosened and ultimately broke and collapsed.

The Pannonian warriors cheered as they flooded in through the breach in the wooden wall, only to be met by the dense shield formation of the Nix soldiers.

The Pannonian warriors were tightly surrounded in the confined space, unable to wield their long spears and longswords. They fell one after another under the stabbing of Roman Short Swords...

Despite this, the strategy efficiently killed opponents and effectively prevented the Pannonian warriors from breaking through the breach.

However, the wooden wall struck by the ramming wood was not the only one.

Andres organized a dozen such ramming wood attack teams. They were spread under the wooden walls on the east and north sides of the Nix Camp. As more and more walls were knocked down, the Nix had no more troops to form shield formations to block them, and the defense force became stretched. Seeing this from the inner camp tower, Maximus decisively issued the order to retreat.

The sharp sound of the copper horn blew urgently, and the well-prepared Nix soldiers, relying on their repeatedly practiced experience, quickly retreated to the inner camp through several roads in the outer camp...

The Pannonian warriors who breached the outer camp were excitedly pursuing but fell one after another after stepping into traps, scaring the ones following them into halting.

And the few safe passageways were blocked by Nix soldiers forming formations, successfully allowing the vast majority of Nix soldiers fighting in the outer camp to retreat smoothly to the inner camp.

Andres looked from the rear and was overjoyed to see the warriors breaching the enemy camp.

However, it wasn't long before he received the news: there was another camp within the enemy's camp, similarly fortified with wooden walls, towers, moats, and traps. All those mercenaries hid inside...

Andres hurried to the Nix outer camp and, after personally inspecting, had to accept this reality: they had paid a massive price to capture only the periphery of the mercenary camp. To completely destroy this enemy, they still had to breach their inner camp. How much more time would that take? How many more warriors would they have to sacrifice?...

Thinking of this, Andres felt somewhat disheartened because today's assault on the camp resulted in the Pannonian side suffering nearly 3,000 casualties, mostly deaths. The majority of the warriors died after rushing into the breaches in the wooden walls, being surrounded by the enemy, and killed by short sword stabs...

Andres was both heartbroken and frightened: in the two battles attacking the mercenary camp, the army lost nearly 6,000 men, almost a fifth of the whole force. How many more lives would it take to thoroughly destroy this mercenary force?!

Despite feeling heavy-hearted, when the three reinforcement leaders led by Temagis approached him, Andres raised his voice to encourage the equally disheartened trio, reminding them: the Alliance Army had already paid a significant price. If they couldn't wipe out these mercenaries in one go, then many warrior deaths would be in vain. Although the mercenaries unexpectedly dug ditches and built wooden walls inside the camp, their defensive supplies were nearly exhausted. They, however, had gained experience in breaching camps. With a bit more preparation, victory could be achieved within days, thereby preventing this mercenary army from becoming a persistent threat to all Pannonians.

Temagis and his three associates understood well enough that the battle had reached a point where they could not easily retreat.

Their complaints were mainly meant to let Andres know: that assisting Segestica this time had indeed cost them considerable losses.

After the four reached a consensus, they began discussing how to deploy each team to occupy the newly captured perimeter of the mercenary camp.

The Nix people had prepared in advance, scattering all the outer camp tents and using the freed land to bury traps.

The Pannonian Alliance Army hoped to move into the outer camp but had to remove the traps first and then transfer some tents from their camp. Fortunately, it was not yet dusk, giving the Pannonians some time to prepare for encamping.

As the Pannonian warriors busied themselves in the outer camp, Maximus stood in the inner camp tower, watching everything.

At this time, Flanitnus climbed up: "Leader, based on our careful observation, the Pannonians have deployed about 5,000 people in the East Camp, another 5,000 in the West Camp, about 7,000 in the North Camp, and considering the 2,000 originally stationed across the river in the South Camp; the Pannonians have arranged about 19,000 people around our outer camp. (The Nix's inner and outer camps are not concentric circles. Since the south camp was initially built near the river, later constructing the outer camp resulted in the south only having one wooden wall, and it's not connected.)"

"19,000 people... It seems the Pannonians are determined to trap and destroy us here," Maximus casually quipped with a relaxed demeanor.

Quintus, pondering beside him, remarked: "The Pannonians have lost at least 5,000 men attacking our camp twice, and those wounded should be in their outer camp outside, and the most Pannonian warriors there wouldn't exceed 6,000."

"6,000 is not too many, just enough for us to enjoy a good meal," Maximus said meaningfully, pointing at the busy Pannonians in the outer camp: "Look at their exhausted looks; they're sure to sleep soundly tonight."

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In the dead of night, Andres had a nightmare. He dreamed of turning into a stag galloping across the wilderness, only to lie down on the grass to rest, but a monstrous snake suddenly sprang out from nowhere, baring its sharp teeth and lunging at him.

He fiercely wrestled with it, but the snake was so agile, easily evading his horn thrusts and hoof stomps, instead gnawing his four hooves, leaving many wounds. Ultimately, he collapsed from his overly injured legs, and the monstrous snake bit his neck with one foul bite—

Andres was startled awake from the nightmare, and before he could gather his thoughts, his Guard Captain rushed in, panic-stricken: "Great Chief, not... it's not good! Our camp outside is under attack; it's burning!"

"What?!"

Andres hurriedly arrived at the wooden wall of the outer camp. The passageway was already crowded with warriors, each staring nervously outside.

Countless tents of the Pannonian Allied Camp, a hundred meters beyond the Nix Camp, were ablaze. The raging flames illuminated the dark night sky; from a distance, they looked like a massive red belt encircling the Nix Camp... Amid the firelight, shadows flitted to and fro; blades gleamed, and constant screams echoed like eerie howls in the night, sending chills down the spine.

At that moment, Andres only felt a sharp pain in his head, and a single thought floated in his mind: Terrible! 3,000 warriors stationed at the camp, more than 3,000 wounded, and countless gathered food supplies...

"Andres, the enemy is attacking the camp. We must go to the rescue!" The shout from Temagis snapped the distracted Andres back to reality.

Suppressing the chaos within his heart, he shouted over to Temagis, who was holding a torch not far away: "Take your men and rush to the rescue; you have cavalry; your actions are quicker! I will stay here to watch over the mercenaries inside!"

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"Good!" Temagis replied with only one word, then hurried off to gather his warriors. He was equally anxious because there were many of his tribesmen in the outer camp.

"What are you all doing crowding here! Go back to your tents, put on your armor, grab your weapons, and be ready at any moment for the call to battle!" Andres shouted loudly to the warriors gathered around the wooden walls, "Don't worry, the Great Chief Temagis has already led his team to the rescue, and they will soon drive away the enemy!..."

Andres, accompanied by his guards, shouted over and over again until his voice was hoarse, finally persuading the startled and unsettled warriors to return.

At this moment, standing atop the outer camp tower, Andres finally had the leisure to contemplate the origin of the enemy who attacked the camp while observing the advancing Temagis' troops.

The mercenaries in the camp? Now the mercenaries were completely surrounded. To prevent them from launching a surprise attack from the camp, Andres ordered the warriors to fill the trenches in front of the inner camp with torches and set up dozens of patrols to detect any movement from the mercenaries. But so far, the mercenary camp remained very quiet, even with the chaos caused by the night raid outside, there was no movement from them.

The originally hidden mercenaries outside? If it was the same group that attacked the supply convoy, then what was Pulikas doing who was responsible for chasing them down? But reportedly, that mercenary group was not very large in number and could not have staged such a large-scale offensive as tonight! Could there be other hidden mercenary forces outside? But ever since that setback, every area within ten or twenty miles had been searched, and nothing unusual was found!

Could it be the Aldeans? But when the camp was moved again and the mercenary camp was surrounded, special efforts were made to strengthen the defenses on the western side and trenches were dug to completely cut off contact between the Aldeans and the mercenaries and to prevent their surprise attacks. Could it be that the warriors defending the west relaxed their vigilance tonight and allowed the Aldeans to break into the camp? But these cowardly Aldeans had provided no assistance to the mercenaries during the Alliance Army's two large-scale assaults on the camp, so where would they get the courage to launch a nighttime raid after the army had breached the camp?...

Andres pondered over and over but could not get a clear understanding.

He kept a close watch on the movements of the inner camp mercenaries while closely monitoring the situation of Temagis fighting outside the camp.

However, even when the sounds of shouting and killing outside the camp had ceased and the flames extinguished, there was still no sign of Temagis returning with his team.

Andres felt uneasy, quickly sent people out of the camp to investigate, and finally received the news that the enemy had fled, and Temagis was leading his team to rescue the injured soldiers in the camp.

As soon as a sliver of dawn appeared on the horizon, Temagis returned with his team. Each warrior looked as though they'd been through fire and smoke, and they were all carrying wounded.

Upon seeing Andres, without waiting for him to inquire, Temagis took the initiative to say, "When I led the warriors over there, those enemies were already retreating into the western mountains... I'm unfamiliar with the terrain over there, and since it was night, I was afraid of running into an ambush, so I didn't dare to pursue. Moreover, the camp is full of injured soldiers, and the warriors were eager to rescue them quickly from the burning camp..."

Later, I asked the wounded, and they didn't know where the enemy came from either, most were attacked while they were asleep. These enemies were very cunning, often they wouldn't directly take the lives of the warriors but instead cut off their limbs, and as for the originally wounded, they didn't even touch them, they just set the entire camp on fire..."

Temagis said with hatred, "There are still thousands of injured soldiers outside; we need to send people to bring them all inside."

"Do you know who the nocturnal attackers were?" Andres asked urgently.

"They should be mercenaries. Although I didn't pursue them, in the firelight I saw clearly that many of them were wearing the unique armor of the mercenaries, unmistakably so. And based on my estimate, this group of enemies was at least 2000 strong."

"More than 2000 mercenaries?!" Andres's heart skipped a beat: "Then it's not the same mercenary unit that attacked our supply convoy, it's very likely another team they had previously ambushed in the nearby mountains."

If that's the case, their remaining forces stationed in this camp should not exceed 10,000. And after two battles, their numbers should be even fewer!

We must seize the opportunity to launch a strong attack on this camp, as long as we can eliminate their main forces in this camp, it will be easier to deal with those two wandering units outside..."

As the Segestica Great Leader was passionately discussing, Temagis interrupted him, "Andres, don't forget, our casualties have also been substantial so far! Of the more than 3000 warriors stationed outside, during the enemy's surprise attack last night, they were caught completely unprepared, with more than half dead or wounded. Including casualties from the previous two assaults on the camp, our losses are nearing 9000 men! 9000 men! In the 10-plus years since the rebellion against the Skodisqi people, in which battle have we suffered so many deaths and injuries!

These mercenaries are terribly troublesome! Yesterday, the warriors had just endured a tough battle, finally made it inside the camp, only to find trenches, traps, and wooden walls. Morale had already been greatly affected, and at night they saw the camp they originally lived in turned to ash, do you think they still have the morale to continue attacking in a short period!?

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Moreover, the camp was burned down, and all the supplies inside were destroyed. Although you stored most of the grain in the village to the east, avoiding significant losses, all the long spears and wooden shields stored in the camp were burned. Our tools for preparing long ladder logs, such as axes, hammers, saws, were also incinerated. Additionally, tents, cloth blankets, carriages, and other military supplies were consumed by fire, and not a few warhorses tied outside the camp have gone missing as well... Andres, this battle has cost us dearly—"

"No matter how great the losses are, we must keep fighting until we utterly destroy these mercenaries!" Andres replied firmly. "I will have the tribe quickly prepare and send the lost supplies. In the meantime, the warriors can take this opportunity to rest and regain their morale. Once everything is ready, we will attack immediately—there is no room for delay!"

"Andres, don't forget that more than 2,000 mercenaries attacked us last night. If you also count the mercenaries who attacked the transport convoy earlier, the enemy's numbers outside are now roughly equal to the warriors guarding the village and protecting the grain route. How can we ensure the safety of the transport teams?"

Temagis' reminder caused Andres' expression to change. He had been solely focused on annihilating the enemies within the camp, neglecting the safety of the grain route. Thinking about Pulikas' report from a few days ago, their efforts had merely driven that group of enemies into Aldean territory without inflicting any real damage. Now, with an additional 2,000 enemies roaming outside, the situation had indeed become a major headache!

Feeling irritated, Andres tried his best to regain his composure and thought about strategies from past experiences of exterminating remnants of the Skodisqi who escaped into the mountains. He hoped to quickly find a solution to this problem.

At that moment, he saw the two commanders of the Brochi and Mazi reinforcements hurrying toward him.

Another problem... Andres sighed softly in his heart, temporarily shelving the matter of the roaming mercenaries. He readied himself mentally to deal with the coming challenges and to persuade them.

Unexpectedly, Brochi commander Elix, upon seeing him, did not mention last night's raid. Instead, with an exceptionally solemn tone, he said, "Andres Chief, I just met the messenger sent by my tribe's Great Chief. Now, I will ask him to speak with you directly."

After Elix finished speaking, he stepped aside, allowing someone to walk forward from behind.

Andres froze for a moment, recognizing this person—Curius, the eldest son of Bricks and likely the next Great Chief of Brochi. This man in his thirties was dressed as a rider, with a haggard appearance suggesting he had been rushing tirelessly. This brought Andres an uneasy feeling.

"Andres Chief! Temagis Chief!" Curius greeted the two with a bow, and before they could return the courtesy, he immediately continued, "In recent days, enemies have successively attacked several tribes in the western part of my Brochi Territory. Many tribesmen have been killed, a significant amount of supplies looted, and many Skodisqi slaves have joined their ranks... The situation is extremely dire. Therefore, my father sent me here overnight to inform Elder Elix to immediately lead troops back to eliminate the enemies and safeguard the territory!"

Andres felt a sharp pain in his head again. Frustrated, he gritted his teeth and asked, "Does your tribe not have other warriors? Why must you withdraw the troops stationed here?"

"After the last tribal alliance meeting, my father honored his commitment by sending 15,000 reinforcements to Andizeti and another 10,000 reinforcements to you here. Not many warriors remain in the territory."

"Moreover, the initial enemy forces were reported to number several thousand. Now, with those damned Skodisqi slaves joining them, their numbers likely exceed 10,000. If we don't withdraw troops soon, the entire territory might fall into chaos, making the situation even harder to resolve!" Curius explained in a worried tone, deliberately concealing the fact that due to the oversight of their commanders, more than 1,000 reinforcements sent to save the attacked tribes had been ambushed and suffered a disastrous defeat.

What Curius said was reasonable, but Andres was unwilling to let the Brochi reinforcements leave at this critical moment. He couldn't help but ask again, "Why not withdraw the reinforcements stationed in Andizeti? The number of Brochi warriors is greater there, and the route back is flatter and easier to traverse."

Andres' questioning tone visibly annoyed Curius, who dropped his expression and coldly replied, "The safety of Andizeti concerns the survival of our entire Pannonian Race, whereas the troubles here are merely the mess you Segestica stirred up in newly occupied lands. Andres, as the Great Chief, surely you can tell which matters are more consequential."

"You—"

Curius let out a mocking laugh and, having spoken plainly, didn't bother holding back anymore. "Andres, your tribe faced danger, and our Brochi generously allocated 10,000 reinforcements for you. Yet, despite leading a large army here, not only have you failed to annihilate the enemy forces smaller in number than yours, you've suffered significant losses. Just from the Brochi reinforcements alone, over 2,000 have died or been wounded. Upon returning, it will be difficult enough for us to explain this to the families of the casualties."

"And now you want me to disregard our homeland's peril and allow these warriors to continue fighting here? Even if I agreed to such a request, the warriors would undoubtedly revolt, and at that point, you would face an even greater disaster!"

"Curius, Andres does not intend to forcibly retain the Brochi warriors here," Temagis quickly stepped in to appease the situation and shifted the focus. "Where did the enemies within your territory originate?"

"It's unclear for now. It could be the Aldeans, but for the past few years, they've been cowering along the Kolana River. I don't believe they suddenly acquired the courage and strength to offend us Brochi."

"The more likely culprits are the mercenaries here. I heard your transport convoy was attacked previously, and last night your camp was raided again. Obviously, they could also dispatch a force west to stir up trouble in my Brochi Territory."

Andres seized the opportunity and loudly said, "That's why these mercenaries are our biggest trouble. We should first eliminate the main force of mercenaries in the camp, then divide our troops to hunt down the remaining enemies outside. Only then will our territories truly be secure!"

Curius glanced at him, then said in a deep voice, "I am here merely to deliver the message. I still need to urge the warriors to pack their belongings and assist the wounded. Time is tight, so I'll take my leave now."

With that, he turned around and left, Elix following closely behind.

Andres wanted to call out to them multiple times, but ultimately held back. He stood there, dazed, with only one thought in his mind: What should we do after the Brochi reinforcements leave?

The 10,000-strong Brochi reinforcements, including over 2,000 wounded, made up one-third of the Alliance Army's total forces. Once they depart, and with 3,000 troops already sent to the rear to guard the grain route and thousands of injured soldiers accounted for, Andres would only have about 12,000 to 13,000 combat-ready warriors left. Would this meager force be enough to take the entire camp?

"Andres Chief," Mazi's commander Saromis spoke up. "I regret to say that, like Elix, I too must lead my warriors back home today."

"You—" Andres felt a surge of anger hit him. He turned his glare to Saromis and snarled, "Are you Mazi going to violate the alliance agreement as well?!"

"Andres Chief, what kind of talk is that!" Saromis retorted indignantly, "After the alliance meeting, Great Chief Maitilis immediately ordered me to lead 10,000 reinforcements to assist you in battle here."

The Mazi warriors have been away from home for over a month now. They've fought numerous bitter battles and suffered over 2,000 casualties. In the end, they succeeded in capturing the mercenaries' outer camp, showing those enemies the strength of Pannonians... The Mazi have done more than enough for you Segestica! I believe we've already fulfilled the agreement, and now it's time to return home!"

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"What I said at the tribal alliance meeting was annihilation! Complete annihilation of these mercenaries! You haven't fulfilled the agreement at all!" yelled Andres frantically.

"Don't even mention completely wiping out these mercenaries; just attacking the camp inside—after Brochi's reinforcements left, it's impossible with just our forces! Many of our Mazi warriors have already died or been wounded. We can't afford any more losses!"

Saromis responded resolutely, concerned that after Brochi's army left, his own troops would be used by Andres as the main force to attack the camp.

He then showed compassion and advised, "Andres Chief, this war not only caused many of your Segestica warriors to die or be wounded, but also used up a lot of food and resources! If this continues, the tribal people will protest. I advise you to withdraw temporarily, and let the tribe recuperate. Then look for another opportunity to completely destroy these mercenaries..."

"Later?" Andres suddenly laughed, but the laughter was shrill, his expression uglier than crying.

After a moment, he stopped laughing and looked coldly at Saromis, "If you want to leave, get out quickly. Don't just stand here and be an eyesore!"

Saromis walked away angrily.

Temagis couldn't help but speak, "Andres—"

"What, you want to leave too?!" Andres turned abruptly, looking at Temagis with what seemed like a hint of pleading in his eyes.

Temagis smiled bitterly, "Now that Brochi and Mazi's reinforcements are gone, with just you and me and these four or five thousand men, it's not a question of whether we can take down the mercenaries' camp; we have to constantly be on guard against mercenaries coming out and engaging us in a decisive battle!"

Temagis's reminder left Andres stunned.

After a long while, he seemed deflated, his expression extraordinarily desolate, and he waved his hand murmuring, "Go, just go..."

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In the morning, inside the inner camp of the temporary camp, the clear space beneath the wooden walls was filled with fully armed soldiers, each holding a hard bread, dipping it in steaming lamb soup, and chewing laboriously.

These breads were hurriedly made before the war. Now besieged within the camp, even wood had to be conserved, used only for boiling water and making soup.

Although they had been besieged for several days, the soldiers showed no signs of dismay. Instead, the fire lights outside the camp last night left many restless, and excitement still lingered.

While the soldiers talked eagerly about how last night Third Legion Commander Carmillus and Oluus led the army through tunnels and inflicted massive losses on the enemy, standing in the tower, Maximus felt less at ease than the soldiers.

Last night, he had Carmillus lead 2500 soldiers through tunnels to sneak out of the camp, launching a surprise attack and burning the Pannonians' outer camp. From the look of things, the action seemed to go well, but now only about 7000 soldiers remained in the inner camp. The enraged Pannonians might launch a strong attack on the inner camp, and he must be on high alert at any moment.

But fortunately, although the soldiers defending the camp had decreased by a few thousand, moving back into the inner camp drastically reduced the defensive area required. The 7000 soldiers were more than enough, and in times of crisis, personnel could be drawn from the Supply Camp to supplement.

Maximus now hoped the Pannonians would launch an assault immediately, allowing them to use the inner camp's defensive facilities to massively damage the enemy again, and when the Pannonians' morale was sufficiently depleted, Carmillus and Oluus would lead troops from behind in a surprise attack, while the soldiers of the inner camp would kill their way out, pincering the enemy from both sides, and in the final battle thoroughly defeating the enemy...

This was the counterattack plan developed by Maximus after consultation with the Military Department, hoping to secure victory and end this month-long war.

But what was happening in the outer camp astonished Maximus: first, a large number of Pannonian soldiers from the northern outer camp withdrew outside, followed by soldiers from the western outer camp, with the eastern outer camp next...

"Are the Pannonians preparing for a full retreat?" Maximus said somewhat incredulously, "Last night's raid didn't inflict immense damage on them, so how could they lose the will to continue fighting?"

"The Pannonians have repeatedly suffered defeats at our hands. Yesterday, they barely captured the outer camp only to find another inner camp to breach, and then suffered an attack at night, resulting in many casualties, with all supplies in the camp being burned... If it were me, I wouldn't want to keep fighting either..." said Flanitnus from the side.

"Could it be..." Quintus pondered and said, "the Pannonians are merely feigning retreat, to lure us out to pursue, then they turn back to counterattack us, thereby avoiding the hardship of storming the camp..."

"Hmm..." Maximus stroked his chin, deep in thought.

At this moment, Akegu came to the foot of the tower and shouted, "Report to the leader, the enemy across the river is retreating from the camp!"

"Leader, the enemy is about to fully pull out of the outer camp. If we don't launch an assault now, we'll miss the opportunity." Flanitnus anxiously reminded.

Quintus said nothing.

Maximus watched the Pannonian warriors leaving the gates of the outer camp one by one and, after weighing the situation repeatedly in his mind, finally spoke, "We've secured the victory already; there's no need to take risks. Remember, even a cornered rabbit will bite."

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Quintus was right in his guess; Andres indeed had that intention when he was forced to retreat. He deliberately let his team fall behind and created some confusion to lure the enemies from the inner camp to strike, so he could justifiably demand that the other teams that had just left return for support.

To achieve this goal, he was willing to accept losses for his team. It was his last effort for this war; however, the mercenaries stayed in the inner camp, allowing them to leave.

Reluctantly, Andres led his team to evacuate from the mercenary outer camp, which had been seized with countless sacrifices. He passed through a camp almost burnt to ashes, and traversed the battlefield, which was a cause of immense grief and defeat for him. Finally, he arrived on the west bank of the Kolana River, and reined in his warhorse, turning his head back with a look of unwillingness.

Under the sunlight, the swamp was steaming with mist, making the mercenary camp in the far distance appear illusory and vague...

Suddenly Andres felt: This war was his last chance to eliminate this mercenary army. If he gave up, it would be endless trouble in the future...

Thinking of this, his hands clenched tightly, and hatred surged in his heart: It's all that damned Brochi and the Maziyi people's fault, short-sighted, only caring for themselves, ignoring the interests of Segestica...

The hatred in Andres' heart continued to grow, and the mane he held in his hand was pulled tighter and tighter.

The warhorse neighed and suddenly lunged forward.

Caught off guard, Andres fell into the river with a splash.

He struggled to get up, but a hoof stamped heavily on his chest, and the blow was so painful he could hardly breathe. Instinctively, he opened his mouth to call for help, but the cold river water poured in as soon as he did...

"Great Chief! Great Chief!!..." Before Andres lost consciousness, he saw the guards rushing towards him in panic from all sides...

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In the courtyard of the Alde Tribe's main house, Acoupaigos was sitting on a wooden chair, resting with his eyes closed.

He had bustled and fought in his youth, but as he aged, illness plagued him. Especially in autumn and winter, his body felt suffocated and pained in his limbs, making sleep difficult. Only basking in the sun brought some relief.

Cleobrotas hurriedly approached him and excitedly whispered: "Great Chief, Maximus has won again! They have repelled the Pannonian army!"

Acoupaigos opened his eyes, raised his head, and saw his confidant's joyful face. He said with some surprise: "Yesterday, didn't Budocaribas send someone to say that the Pannonians had broken through the temporary camp and trapped Maximus and his men inside, in a very dangerous situation, asking if we should send reinforcements to rescue them? How come today the Pannonians are defeated?"

"Great Chief, this news was also brought by a messenger from Budocaribas, whom I happened to encounter at the gate, so I relayed the message to you. After the Pannonians occupied the outer camp of the Nix Tribe, they got negligent. Maximus had arranged a team hidden in the mountains in advance who launched a surprise attack at night, burning the entire Pannonian camp, forcing them to retreat the next day."

"So that's how it is." Acoupaigos said with slight disappointment: "The Pannonians were forced to retreat just because their camp was destroyed, and it wasn't a crushing defeat like last time."

"Great Chief, this time, the army led by Andres exceeded 30,000 people. The Nix soldiers led by Maximus were just over 10,000. Being able to fend off Andres's army was already beyond our expectations.

Additionally, the scouts sent by Budocaribas observed many wounded in the Pannonian camp, indicating their casualties were not minor either..."

Cleobrotas sincerely praised: "Judging from these recent battles, the team led by Maximus is indeed excellent at fighting. With them holding the eastern front, we don't have to worry about further attacks from the Pannonians!"

"...Yes, they are indeed very adept at fighting. They've almost brought Segestica to its knees in just over a month..." Acoupaigos sighed meaningfully and asked: "You mentioned Nix several times just now; what is this Nix?"

"Oh, Maximus established his own tribe and named it Nix. Recently, when people from our tribe went to meet him, he always referred to himself as a Nix person."

"Nix... Nix Tribe... It seems that Maximus is determined to take root here!..." Acoupaigos softly murmured the name "Nix," his expression becoming somewhat complicated. He was about to say more but then saw his eldest son Aristakas approaching in a hurry.

"Father, those outsiders have defeated the Pannonians once again!"

"I'm already aware of this."

Aristakas eagerly said: "Father, the Segestica people have suffered repeated defeats, severely diminishing their strength. We should seize this opportunity to gather warriors from each tribe, form an army, and reclaim our land by the Kupa River! If we delay, I'm afraid those outsiders will occupy all of it, and then it will be difficult for us to regain the land!"

Acoupaigos glared at him and questioned: "Who put you up to saying these things to me?!"

Aristakas did not dare meet his father's eyes, lowering his gaze but stubbornly replied: "No... no one put me up to it. I just believe we should do this! At the time... when we signed the alliance treaty with those outsiders, we shouldn't have agreed to that clause, about everything they take from the Pannonians belonging to them! Nonsense! Now it turns out that if we want to reclaim our own land, it's like we're thieves!"

"Shut up!" Acoupaigos roared in anger, then coughed repeatedly: "If... if it weren't for me signing that treaty with Maximus, allowing them to secure the eastern front for us against the pressing Segestica people, I'm afraid the Pannonian army would have already reached our village today!"

...Cough... We've been at war with the Segestica people for several years, and don't you yet understand what kind of person that leader of the Segestica is? He's someone who never rests until he achieves his goal!

The Segestica may now be weakened, and if we send troops to attack, perhaps we could indeed reclaim the land, but so what! The Pannonians still have six or seven big tribes, and they have a tribal alliance. Andres could easily borrow reinforcements, and if he leads the army back, can you withstand it?!"

"I—" Aristakas was at a loss for words.

"Then not only will you sacrifice our remaining warriors, but you'll also offend those outsiders. If they become displeased and no longer willingly defend us against the Pannonians, or even secretly sabotage us... wouldn't that create another powerful enemy for ourselves?"

Acoupaigos' stern admonishment left Aristakas dumbfounded. He paused for a moment, then stammered: "The land by the Kupa River... we could temporarily give it up, and we previously abandoned the land east of the Kolana River, which still lies vast and deserted, unclaimed by anyone. Yet in the mountain ranges north of the Murenica River, many of our tribes live crowded together. Why don't we let them cross to the east bank and reclaim the original land."