

Perish 341

Chapter 341: Informing

Under the fierce attack of the rebel army, the Roman Army was forced to retreat step by step.

Seeing this situation from the rear, Okmar immediately followed Spartacus' pre-battle plan and led over 1000 cavalry to attack the Roman Army's left flank.

Crassus, who was in the rear and not participating in the battle, quickly learned of this news and dispatched nearly three thousand cavalry under his command to meet the enemy.

Although the Roman infantry was at a disadvantage, they did not collapse. Instead, they resisted desperately, as the fear of the Eleventh Decimation Law was deeply ingrained in their minds. Dying under the enemy's sword meant merely losing one's life, but facing the punishment of this decree would strip one of their honor as well.

For this reason, the Roman formation, though forced to retreat step by step, did not collapse. On the contrary, Okmar's cavalry, when facing the outnumbering Roman cavalry, fought fiercely but ultimately retreated. He himself fell off his horse and was trampled to death by hooves.

By the afternoon, the Roman Army's left flank, with the least troops and thinnest formation, could no longer hold on and began to break apart.

However, before the warriors on the rebel army's right flank could cheer, the sound of a military horn came from the opposite side. The routing Roman soldiers automatically ran to the sides, and the Roman reserves, which had been conserving their strength in the rear, came forward, blocking the rebel warriors' attempt to pursue and attack.

This reserve force was made up of the three elite legions under Crassus' command. Crassus was no longer the commander with only eight legions as at the beginning; over the year of battling the rebel army, he had recruited many citizens of Great Greece, raising his troop numbers to 80,000, and during the construction of the long wall, subjected them to strict training.

In contrast, the rebel army, after the destruction of Attutmus' forces and the losses in breaking through the long wall, had its numbers reduced to less than 70,000 warriors in the battle, including some family members.

Crassus formed his left wing with a motley crew recruited from Great Greece, greatly wearing down the sharpness and stamina of the rebel warriors, and then deployed his elite troops, not only quickly stabilizing the line but also starting to gain the upper hand.

Soon, the Roman cavalry returned from pursuing the defeated rebel cavalry and began to flank the rear of the rebel army's right wing.

The already weary right-wing warriors of the rebel army finally collapsed under the fierce attack of the enemy.

The victorious Roman left-wing infantry and cavalry took the opportunity to press the fleeing soldiers, launching an assault on the rebel army's center and left wing.

The rebel army's left wing wavered and ultimately collapsed, leaving only the center, thanks to Spartacus' presence, fiercely resisting even after being surrounded.

The battle continued into the evening when Hamilcar, too exhausted to hold his short sword, was slain by the Romans, and a furious and wounded Spartacus roared, trying to save his closest comrade.

The nearby Roman soldiers, intimidated by his bravery, instinctively retreated defensively upon hearing his roar.

Just as Spartacus was about to reach out to pull Hamilcar up, a Roman auxiliary soldier in the rear saw an opening ahead and took the opportunity to hurl his javelin.

Exhausted from a day's fierce fight, Spartacus was too weak to react and watched helplessly as the sharp spearhead pierced through his already tattered armor and embedded in his chest.

At that moment, he felt no pain; what surfaced in his mind was the warm memory of his tribe...

Spartacus fell in battle, and the rebel army suffered a complete defeat, with Crassus finally winning this engagement.

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Crassus finally breathed a sigh of relief. He had been on edge all this time, fearing all his hard work over more than a year would come to naught. While various units were still pursuing the rout, Crassus had already returned to his tent and enjoyed a rare sound sleep.

This sleep lasted until the afternoon of the next day, when he listened to his subordinates report on the subsequent battle situation. One piece of news caught his attention: "A rebel leader wants to see me?"

"This rebel is called Cleonis, one of the main leaders of the rebel army, who once commanded over ten thousand rebel soldiers. He says he wants to tell you an important secret about the rebel army."

"Oh, an important secret of the rebel army?!" Crassus suddenly became interested.

Soon, Cleonis was brought into the tent. This rebel leader, who had fought the Romans multiple times and had once boasted at a Military Commander Conference, "We will stay in Italy until we completely defeat the Romans," now entered the tent timidly like a frightened quail and immediately knelt down: "Sinner Cleonis pays... pays respect to the great General Crassus!"

Crassus didn't even look at him and said coldly, "Speak, what is the supposed important secret of the rebel army you know."

Cleonis swallowed and, without daring to raise his head, ventured, "General... if I tell you this secret... could you lessen my punishment?"

Crassus's face darkened: "How dare you try to bargain with me! Guards, take him away, hang him at the camp gate, and flog him five times every hour until he breathes his last!"

"Spare me, General!" Cleonis pleaded desperately. Once one's knees give in, the spine never straightens again: "I'll say it! I'll say it all!"

Crassus waved his hand to stop the guards who were about to seize Cleonis.

"General, you are brave and skilled in battle. You first annihilated the forces we left in the Regim Region, and then defeated our main forces here... but we still have an army hidden early on, which you haven't noticed!"

Cleonis gritted his teeth, unwilling to let Maximus off easily even in his dangerous predicament, and said with emphasis: "This army has more than 20,000 people, its leader is called Maximus, he's also a gladiator from Capua, a very cunning person. It was him who led the army to capture Pompey and Sarabia. Later we moved north to Rimini, and he refused to follow the decision we made to stay in Italy. Instead, he led his army alone through the Northern Italy Province into Gaul—"

"I thought you were talking about some major secret, but it's this," Crassus laughed haughtily. "You probably don't know yet, but the rebel army you mentioned never made it out of Italy. The Provincial Governor of the Northern Italy Province, Casius, had already annihilated them, and the good news reached the Senate as early as last year."

"How can that be!" Cleonis was puzzled: "A few months ago, Maximus sent a pirate ship to Regium, telling us he was doing well up north!—"

"Silence! How dare a lowly rebel doubt my noble master's words! Do you want to die?" Kunquus, a trusted aide standing beside Crassus, rebuked loudly.

"But, Maxim really—" Cleonis desperately wanted to argue, but with just one look from Crassus, Kunquus drew his short sword and stabbed it into Cleonis' chest.

Cleonis fell to the ground, dead, with a look of bewilderment on his face.

Guards entered the tent and routinely dragged out the body.

Watching the closed tent flap, Crassus gestured for Kunquus to come forward.

"Later, get some money for these two soldiers outside the tent and have them keep their mouths shut," Crassus said softly, a ruthless look on his face: "Then have someone keep an eye on them. If they dare to spread tales, you—"

"Yes, master, I will arrange it immediately!" Kunquus said knowingly.

Soon, Crassus was alone in his tent. He poured a glass of wine and, gazing at the crimson liquid, revealed a cold smile while murmuring: "Escape to the Gaul Mountains? No, all the rebels have been destroyed. This war is over, and victory belongs to me!..." Saying this, he downed most of the wine in one gulp.

The reason Crassus was willing to lead the army to quell this rebellion was that he wanted to win the glory of a Triumph through victory in war, thus further gaining the highest power in Rome.

For this, he even abandoned his best skills—using money to bribe the enemy and incite internal strife. Although doing so would make victory come easier, the Roman Senate had always been merciless towards rebellious slaves, refusing to engage in any compromise or negotiation. If he did so, not only would he incur many critics from the Elders, but he might also lose command.

Therefore, relying solely on frontal combat undoubtedly increased the difficulty. Fortunately, he finally dealt a complete defeat to the main force of the rebel army through engagement and killed the rebel leader. With victory seemingly within reach, how could he allow any mishaps to prolong a war that should have ended, affecting his subsequent plans?

However, the next day's news outraged Crassus: over 5,000 rebel soldiers fled north, only to encounter Pompey's southward army, resulting in a devastating defeat. Having already achieved victory in the Spanish war, Pompey clearly wanted to add another feat to his record, so he immediately sent a report to the Senate, claiming he had annihilated the entire rebel army.

In the following days, Crassus' personal guards frequently heard cursed outbursts from within the tent: "Pompey is a liar! A thief!..."

To vent his anger and also to demonstrate the authority of the true victor to the world, Crassus erected numerous crosses along the road to Rome, crucifying over 6,000 captured rebel soldiers. Under the exposure of wind and rain, sun, and hunger, they died miserably...

In June, Crassus led his carefully selected elite soldiers, who had performed excellently in the war of suppression, to camp 20 miles south of Rome.

Pompey's camp was not far nearby, but neither of the commanding generals had any intention of interacting, forcing their soldiers to ignore each other's presence.

The application for a Triumph had long been sent to the Senate, and after over ten days of waiting, the Senate finally dispatched an envoy to Crassus' camp.

Chapter 342: Pompey and Caesar

Clatens, a prominent figure in the Sulla Faction, was not only well-connected with Crassus but also the most formidable lawyer in Rome. The Senate sent him, hoping he could persuade the stubborn Crassus.

Crassus was not in a hurry to inquire but instead warmly entertained Clatens. Only after the meal did he ask about the Senate's deliberations.

Unhurriedly wiping the food residue from his mouth and straightening the creases in his clothes, Clatens looked at Crassus with piercing eyes and said in a deep, resonant voice, "Crassus, there's no need for pretenses between us. Though you've been in the camp, your men have been quite active in Rome. I don't believe you're unaware of the Senate's discussions."

Crassus immediately changed his expression, sneering coldly, "Clatens, are you hesitant to speak out of guilt?"

"Crassus, is this how you treat someone truly defending you!" Clatens retorted confidently, "If not for Catullus and my persistence, the Senate wouldn't have debated for so many days! Even though the proposal for a Triumph wasn't passed, you still received a Minor Triumph as compensation; wouldn't you say I had a hand in that?"

"A Minor Triumph..." Crassus scoffed and stopped glaring at Clatens, but the resentment in his words remained unabated: "The Senate swiftly agreed to hold a Triumph for Pompey but stingily gave me only a Minor Triumph. Others ride in carriages, wear laurel crowns, with soldiers following, and sacrifice bulls..."

But I must walk, with no soldiers accompanying me, only civilians, and sacrifice sheep at the temple... Compared to Pompey, I appear a fool in the eyes of the Romans. The Senate treats a hero who risked his life to protect the country so unfairly!"

"I understand your feelings; it is indeed somewhat unfair, considering last year, when the rebellion was at its peak, you alone stood up and stabilized the situation in Italy..."

Clatens, aligning with Crassus' grievances, expressed his sympathy and, seeing the other's demeanor slightly improve, softly said, "But you should also know that many Romans always consider slaves as our dogs. When a dog bites its master and is killed, it's just an ordinary occurrence. They don't see it as an equal war, whereas Pompey fought against the rebels of our Roman Civilian Faction, not only wiping them out but also conquering territories of many barbarian tribes in Spain, which won more favor from the elders..."

Crassus angrily replied, "Fighting the slave rebels was just a lesson to a bunch of dogs?! Have they forgotten how these despised dogs repeatedly defeated our Roman Army, killing and wounding over 100,000 Roman soldiers, with Legal Officer Crabo dying in battle, Valerius defeated, Governor of Northern Italy Casius defeated, Governors Publius Crassus and Crodianus defeated, and the Roman citizens trembling in fear, with no elder daring to lead soldiers into battle..."

Have they forgotten the disgrace they displayed under the threat of these slave rebels last year? Rome has not faced such danger in decades. If this isn't considered a fierce war, then what is!"

In Crassus' roars, Clatens remained calm and sighed, "That's precisely why the Senate doesn't wish to make a big deal of it; it's not only for Rome's dignity but also for the country's stability, keeping the slaves in check."

Besides, you spent enormous human and material resources building walls to trap the rebels, which ended in failure, causing dissatisfaction among many elders. And also—"

Clatens paused, intensifying his tone, "Although you won the battle against the rebels, the remaining rebels were ultimately annihilated by Pompey. You did not secure a complete victory."

"I've already entirely defeated the rebels, my army pursued the remnants everywhere, they couldn't possibly regroup! Pompey just happened to encounter a large group of fleeing soldiers we were chasing and captured them without a fight. Yet he has the gall to claim he ended the war! It's nonsense! He's a shameless thief who stole the honor that should have been mine!"

Out of discontent with the Senate, Crassus ranted a lot, but ultimately he resigned himself to the Senate's decision: Rome would hold a Minor Triumph for him, scheduled on the same day as Pompey's Triumph, with his procession scheduled later.

After Clatens left, the resentment on Crassus' face quickly disappeared, and he became contemplative. Toying with his wine glass, he suddenly said, "Quintus, do you know the main purpose of that guy coming here?"

"Master, wasn't he here to announce the Senate's decision?" Quintus asked quietly.

"He came to deepen my hatred for Pompey so that we would fight each other and put those in the Senate at ease..." Crassus said calmly.

"Master, that Pompey is indeed despicable..." Quintus carefully added.

"Those in the Senate underestimate me!" Crassus snorted disdainfully, his face showing a subtle, enigmatic smile: "As long as there's enough interest, enemies can sometimes become friends... Quintus, go back to Rome and organize people to spread throughout the city how I endured hardships for over a year to quell the rebels for Rome, only to be treated unfairly by the Senate, to gain the people's sympathy!"

"Yes, Master."

Crassus put down his wine glass and walked leisurely out of the tent, gazing eastward at the Capitoline Hill revered by the Romans, appearing and disappearing in the distance...

For the supreme power of Rome, Crassus decided to temporarily endure the humiliation he suffered today.

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On the day of the Triumph, on the road leading to the Jupiter Temple on Capitoline Hill, the ceremonial procession was led from the front. Captives from Spain and Italy were paraded at the forefront, followed by carriages filled with various trophies.

The main protagonist of the Triumph was situated in the center of the procession, his entire body anointed with ointment, his face dyed crimson with ochre, wearing a golden crown inscribed with his achievements, an armband on his arm, holding a staff in his left hand, a laurel branch in his right, atop a quadruple chariot, resembling the majestic Jupiter.

He was flanked by gallant cavalymen, with his veterans who had been through life and death following behind...

As this massive procession crossed the city gates into the Rome City District, the dense crowds lining the streets erupted with thunderous cheers, flowers flew, flags fluttered, and the entire city came alive...

Gneus Pompey reveled in the praises of the citizens, and at that moment, he suddenly thought of Sula.

This was not Rome's first Triumph for him; a decade ago, after divorcing his first wife and marrying Sula's daughter, Sula dispatched him to Sicily and North Africa to eliminate the remnants of Marius. He accomplished the task outstandingly.

Sula demanded he disband his troops and return to Rome, but he requested a Triumph and refused to immediately disband his legion.

Sula had always been fond of his young son-in-law, but this time he hesitated, as Pompey was not yet even an elder, and a Triumph was Rome's highest honor.

Faced with Sula's refusal, the impulsive young Pompey uttered, "More people worship the sunrise than the sunset," and the aged Sula ultimately relented, allowing Pompey to have his way.

During the grand Triumph, Sula called him "Magnus," and even as arrogant as Pompey was, he could discern that the nickname was given more in jest. But this time, after conquering the Spanish rebels who troubled the Senate greatly and annihilating the slave rebels in Italy, such achievements warranted the nickname, didn't they?

Gneus Pompey Magnus, what a grand name! ... Pompey couldn't help but feel excited, his face flushing red with passion.

"Look, Pompey's face is red again!"

"His face is really thin!"

"What a charming hero!"

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The cheers from the Roman citizens along the roadside grew even more fervent. At 36, Pompey steadfastly retained his habit of blushing, bringing delight to everyone. They felt that blushing not only signaled their hero's youthful charm but also proved his genuine and honest nature. They did not envy Pompey soaring to such great heights since this young hero of humble beginnings embodied the deepest dreams within their Roman hearts.

Among the cheering throngs was a young man who did not shout but quietly gazed at Pompey on the quadriga, his expression complex.

He was tall and slender, with delicate features and fair skin, bright, sharp eyes, wearing a long-sleeved short tunic instead of the usual short-sleeved garment, with golden fringes at the cuffs, and a deliberately loose belt around his waist... making him stand out in the crowded throng.

He was none other than Gaius Julius Caesar, a figure of significant controversy among the Roman citizens in recent years.

On one hand, the citizens admired Caesar's courage, as he defied the threat of death by refusing dictator Sulla's demand for a divorce from Cornelia, Cinna's daughter, leading to years of exile overseas.

On the other hand, his pursuit of fashion and unconventional lifestyle upset conservative Roman citizens. Rumors even spread in Rome about him becoming King Nicomedes IV of Bithynia's paedophile while serving in the Eastern Province, ignoring his being awarded the Warrior Crown for his bravery in battle, contrary to the image of a mere playboy from an illustrious family.

Caesar cared little for the slander from the Roman citizens. At this moment, his heart burned with ambition: he was nearing 30, the traditional starting age for Roman citizens to enter politics. Yet when he looked at the not much older Pompey, who had already achieved so much because of that damned Sulla, the Senate repeatedly broke tradition for his rapid advancement. He had to find a way; otherwise, simply conforming and coasting through Rome's political scene would only make him indistinguishable among the masses...

Not far from Caesar in the crowd, another young man, too, was not cheering, but his gaze towards Pompey was filled with admiration.

Marcus Tullius Cicero was his name, hailing from the small town of Arpinum. He was slim, with a long neck and clumsy movements, his appearance somewhat lacking, but he didn't feel too inferior about it. Since Boyhood, he had been sent to Rome to study, his talents in oratory left many astounded.

Chapter 343: Alde's Request

Marcus Antonius was the model for Cicero. This ancestor, who also came from humble beginnings, relied on his oratory talent to ultimately become a Roman Governor, though he met his end during the period of rebellion initiated by Marius. Because of this, Cicero harbored a deep hatred for the radical reforms of the Civilian Faction and supported the conservative and stable Elder Faction.

Pompey, who had wiped out the Civilian Faction's rebel army in Spain, appeared to him as a second Sulla. Cicero believed that this brilliant Roman hero was destined to become a cornerstone of the Elder Faction.

This was also a source of personal motivation for him. Although he had begun making appearances in court seven or eight years ago and had gained a modest reputation within Rome's legal circles, he felt this was far from enough. To enter the upper echelons of the Roman political arena and work alongside such luminaries, he knew he had to quickly claim the crown of the plaintiff, the pinnacle of legal achievement, to garner widespread admiration. This would become his next goal to strive toward.

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Mid-July, Snowdonia's main residence. The tribal assembly, originally set for the end of the month, was convened early today. Representatives of various departments and their subordinates filled the hall.

"Everyone!" The tribal leader, Maximus, seated at the head, bore a grave expression and spoke in a low tone: "I have just received news. Our comrades who stayed in Italy... Spartacus and the troops he led have been completely defeated by the Romans..."

As Maximus had repeatedly emphasized before, everyone had reached a consensus that the main rebel army's campaign in Italy would eventually fail. Otherwise, they would not have followed Maximus to this place. However, no one had expected the defeat to come so swiftly. That was an army exceeding 100,000 soldiers, led by the courageous and resourceful Spartacus!

"Leader, is this true?!" Acronis voiced the doubts lingering in most people's hearts.

"It is indeed true..." Maximus said, his face shadowed with sorrow. "This news was just brought to me by Elder Karsipempas of the Alde tribe. I had entrusted him to keep us informed about what was happening in Italy.

He told me that two months ago, the main forces of Free Italy were defeated by the Roman Army led by Crassus. Spartacus, Hamilcar... Antonix, and other leaders fell one after another in battle. The warriors either perished on the battlefield or were crucified after being captured...

He said that along the Appian Way leading to Rome, many crosses were erected. The corpses of the warriors nailed upon them... have not been taken down to this day."

The hall fell into a deathly silence, only to be broken by sporadic sobbing. Torrelugo and Fesaros, the two gladiators who initially rose in revolt, not only teared up but also cursed the Romans through gritted teeth.

In contrast, Flanitnus, Quintus, and some tribal officials who had directly sought out Maximus later on, with little previous connection to other rebel forces, appeared more shocked than mournful. Some even seemed awkward.

"Leader, how were Spartacus and the others defeated?" Quintus asked, partly out of curiosity and partly to shift everyone's attention.

Maximus provided a brief account of the main rebel army's mobile campaigns throughout Italy over the past year and their ultimate downfall.

After hearing this, the crowd sighed one after another. They lamented how the rebels had been misled by pirates, leading to unnecessary delays in the Regium region. They also shuddered at how successive Roman armies had converged on Italy to encircle and annihilate the rebels. Many recalled Maximus's previous warnings and felt fortunate to have heeded them.

"Leader, since the Romans have destroyed Spartacus's forces in Italy, does this mean... does this mean they'll come for us next?" Gaius suddenly asked loudly.

These words immediately heightened the tension, and all eyes focused intently on Maximus.

With a calm demeanor, Maximus replied, "Do not worry, everyone. Last month, Rome already held a Triumph for Crassus, who commanded the forces against Spartacus. Quintus, Flanitnus, would you agree that this signifies that the Roman Senate considers this conflict with us to have ended?"

"Indeed, Leader," Flanitnus affirmed confidently. "According to Roman military tradition, the Senate would not have granted Crassus a Triumph if they believed he had not entirely eradicated us. Furthermore, after holding a Triumph, the massive Roman Army assembled for the war would be dissolved, and Crassus would be recalled to Rome, no longer holding command."

"You all heard that." Maximus scanned the room with a composed expression. "Elder Karsipempas also informed me that during this period, across the Istria Peninsula and the northern Adriatic Gulf, he saw no signs of the Roman Northern Province army preparing to enter the mountains and encircle us. Nor have there been any rumors circulating about our tribe thriving in the mountains.

On the contrary, when he initially sent sailors to spread the false rumor in that region that 'we had been wiped out by barbarians,' those rumors still occasionally surface. I believe that in a year or two, the Italian populace will entirely forget about us. So you may rest easy."

Everyone finally breathed a sigh of relief.

But then Maximus spoke in a deep voice: "Even so, we cannot lower our guard! The influence of the Romans across the Mediterranean is expanding day by day. Sooner or later, their reach will collide with ours. Greedy as they are, they will never overlook this fertile Great River Plain. At that time, war will once again descend upon us.

Thus, we must devote ourselves entirely to strengthening and expanding our tribe. Only then, when war with the Romans comes, will we have the power to defeat them, protect our homeland, and avenge Spartacus and the others. Do you agree?!"

"Yes!!" Torrelugo and others clenched their fists and shouted in unison.

Quintus reminded, "Leader, our tribe now has a large and diverse population. To avoid internal disorder and to prevent some malicious individuals from discovering our secrets and spreading them, I suggest we keep the news of Spartacus's defeat and death confidential. We should not inform the tribespeople or hold public memorials for them."

Quintus's suggestion aligned with Maximus's thoughts, but he still pondered for a moment before replying, "You are right. This is a sensitive time. The Romans are still reveling in their victory over Spartacus, while our tribespeople have just begun to stabilize and are focusing their efforts on building their homes. We must not disrupt this peace!

We will neither memorialize nor publicize the defeat, but we must keep this hatred engraved in our hearts. One day, we will settle this score with the Romans. Do you agree?"

Though Torrelugo, Fesaros, and others felt reluctant, none voiced opposition.

Clearing his throat, Maximus continued, "Elder Karsipempas did not come to our tribe merely to deliver this valuable news from Italy. He also carries a mission entrusted by the Great Chief of the Aldean tribe, Acoupaigos—he hopes we, the Nix Tribe, can send troops to help them defeat the Otarlat people!"

The hall buzzed with murmurs.

Volenus asked hesitantly, "Leader, is this Otarlat tribe the same Illyrian group frequently at odds with the Aldeans over the salt mine?"

"Yes." Maximus nodded. "We have been here for a year now. Most of you should know that our allies, the Aldeans, have two enemies: the Pannonians and the Otarlat people.

The Otarlat is also a major Illyrian tribe, located south of the Aldean territory. Its strength once matched that of the Aldeans, and the two groups had close relations. However, after the discovery of a salt mine along the southern Aldean border, conflict between them became incessant. Later, as casualties mounted on both sides, an agreement was reached to share the mine's profits.

But when the Pannonians went to war against the Aldeans, severely weakening their strength, the Otarlat people seized the opportunity to rekindle the conflict. The Aldeans could not withstand them, and by the year before last, the Otarlat had entirely taken control of the salt mine...

Now, the Great Chief Acoupaigos has asked us to send troops to help them retake the salt mine. What do you all think?"

"I think we should agree to the Aldeans' request!" Pigeris declared boldly. "The Aldeans are our allies, and according to the terms of our alliance, we are obliged to assist when they go to war.

Moreover, we owe our ability to live peacefully here to the Aldeans' generosity. They allowed us into the mountains, provided us land, wheat, and manpower... The Aldeans have helped us tremendously. Now it is time to repay them. We should deploy our forces."

"I disagree with Pigeris's view," Gaius countered. "First of all, the alliance we formed with the Aldeans was a defensive one. When we fought against the Pannonians, the Aldeans did not send their forces to assist us.

Secondly, the Aldeans did not help us selflessly. Conversely, we have helped them considerably. Allowing us to settle, sell us land, and form an alliance with us was merely their strategy to seek aid in resisting the powerful Pannonians. Over the past year, their ability to live peacefully has depended entirely on our hard battles.

Many Aldean tribes struggling with landlessness and poverty have avoided internal disputes and infighting only because we hired many of their impoverished tribespeople through agreements...

Most importantly, the harvest season is just two months away. That is when manpower is most critical. Sending troops to fight at this time will not only disrupt the harvest of our wheat but also displease our tribespeople, who have labored hard for months. Therefore, I believe we should refuse the Aldeans' request."

Chapter 344: The Reason for Deploying Troops for Alde

Over the past six months, as many tribesmen have hired the Aldeans to work for them, the Nix people have developed a subconscious sense of superiority over the Aldeans. Therefore, Gaius's words resonated with some officials. Although they were restrained by protocol and didn't vocally agree, they all nodded in approval.

Maximus noticed this and coughed: "I forgot to mention earlier, the Aldeans have decided to deploy their troops after September. After all, they also need to harvest in autumn. The reason they're informing us this early is obviously to give us enough time to prepare once we agree."

The Nix Tribe Officials, having followed Maximus for so long, understood him to some extent. Seeing him specifically elaborate on this matter, they feared he was inclined to agree with the Aldeans' request, causing the nodding individuals to suddenly stiffen their necks.

Volenus stood up and loudly said, "Leader, I think we should help the Aldeans reclaim the Salt Mine, not just because of the alliance or out of gratitude, but because our tribe needs salt, more salt!

Everyone should recall the time earlier this year when our tribe faced a grain shortage. We had no choice but to organize people to catch fish in the river and hunt in the mountain. After acquiring a large amount of fish and meat, due to our salt shortage, and the Aldeans having minimal salt reserves, we couldn't use salt to remove the smell from the fish and meat, or use salt to preserve them. Relying solely on smoking and drying to make jerky wasn't sustainable for long, causing considerable waste which was very unfortunate!

The most important thing we must note is our tribe's lack of salt! Currently, our tribe's salt comes through trading with the Aldeans. Now, even their salt reserves are low, and each time the amount of salt we acquire is limited. With our tribe's population increasing, the demand for salt will grow even larger. If we don't help the Aldeans this time and they stop trading salt with us, imagine what the scene would be like when the tribesmen have no salt to eat.

Moreover, now that the tribesmen have sufficient farmland, they can fully raise more livestock in the future, having enough meat to eat. But without enough salt, the excess meat would be hard to preserve, resulting in huge waste... Thus, our tribe needs salt! We need more salt! Therefore, helping the Aldeans reclaim the Salt Mine is necessary!"

Volenus's words from the perspective of the tribe's needs clearly moved the officials in the hall, and more people began to nod.

"Our Military Department also supports deploying troops to help the Aldeans," Flanitnus said after conferring quietly with Quintus and others, standing up to speak: "Although we achieved victory in the recent war against the Pannonians, the Pannonians are still stronger than us. We must do our utmost to deal with them, therefore as our rear, the Aldeans must maintain stability.

According to the information we currently have, the Otarat people's strength surpasses that of the Aldeans. Each year, conflicts due to the Salt Mine have accumulated much hatred between both sides. The Otarat have been the aggressors in recent years. Even if we don't participate, causing the Aldeans to forgo this opportunity to attack, should there come a day when we're fighting the Pannonians and the Otarat suddenly attack the Aldeans, the Aldeans unable to resist might seek our aid. According to the alliance agreement, we would have to send troops to assist them, forcing us to fight on two fronts, which would be disastrous!

It's better to agree to the Aldeans' request now, take the initiative to attack the Otarat, defeat them, and weaken their strength, making them no longer dare to oppose the Aldeans. This way, we ensure stability in the rear and receive an ample supply of salt; it's a win-win situation!"

Flanitnus's speech completely dispelled some officials' hesitations, Maximus saw this and was just about to make a decision when Pigeris stood up.

"I... I agree with Volenus and Flanitnus's views!" he corrected himself: "However, if the tribe agrees to send troops to help the Aldeans, I have a small suggestion. After defeating the Otarlat and reclaiming the Salt Mine, I hope we can reach an agreement with the Aldeans, either that we own a part of the Salt Mine, or we obtain a portion of its output, so we never have to worry about a salt shortage again."

Pigeris's words lit up the eyes of everyone present.

At this point, Maximus spoke: "Does anyone have any objections to sending troops to help the Aldeans reclaim the Salt Mine?"

No one responded.

"Alright then, it's decided," Maximus slapped the arm of his chair and said, "Pigeris, next, you will follow your ideas and negotiate with the Aldeans. We're willing to help our allies, but we must also ensure our interests."

"Yes, Leader!" Pigeris responded excitedly.

"Leader, do we know how many people the Aldeans want us to send?" Quintus asked.

"According to Karpumpas, because of the significance of the Salt Mine, every battle between the two sides is no small matter. Whenever one side leads an army close to the Salt Mine, the other often goes all out in combat, with both sides often engaging with over ten thousand troops. The last time the Otarlat controlled the entire Salt Mine, they dispatched nearly 20,000 soldiers. This time, the Aldeans hope we can send at least 5,000 people."

"5,000 people, that's no small number. How many troops will the Aldeans send themselves?" Quintus continued to ask.

"Karsipengpas told me they will gather 10,000 people to participate."

"So, our two tribes' Alliance Army will exceed 15,000 people. If the Otarat also send 20,000 people like last time, then this will be a major battle!" Quintus remarked with some surprise.

Arms Officer Lebilus suddenly interjected, "Leader, dispatching this many soldiers will consume a significant amount of food per day. Moreover, such a thirty to forty thousand-person battle would likely not be short-lived. Shouldn't the food supply for the soldiers... be provided by the Aldeans who invited us to battle?"

"That..." Maximus coughed several times: "Karsipengpas mentioned we should bring our own food. However, since I hadn't decided on sending troops at the time, I didn't debate the point."

Now that we've decided to send troops, since the Aldeans extended the invitation, ideally, they should supply the food. So, Lebilus, you'll negotiate the military food supply details with Pigeris and the Aldeans."

"Leader, rest assured, I'll handle this matter," Lebilus nodded vigorously.

Seeing that the usually invisible Arms Officer was boldly taking responsibility when it involved his duties, Maximus realized for the first time that Flanitnus's recommendation was correct. He spoke calmly: "Actually, you all need not worry. Although this battle with the Otarat involves tens of thousands, it shouldn't last long."

According to Karsipengpas, our dispatched troops will head south along the banks of the Murenica River. The journey is relatively flat, taking four to five days to reach the Salt Mine. The Aldeans and the Otarat have been fighting over this Salt Mine for years. To minimize unnecessary losses, they've gradually formed an agreement—

As long as one side makes a demand regarding the Salt Mine's holdings, if the other side doesn't want to lose more benefits, they must accept the challenge, with a single battle deciding the victor, determining who controls more of the Salt Mine. Thus, when we send troops, they should return to the tribe in as few as 10 to 15 days."

"Since the combat duration outside is short, and the Aldeans requested no fewer than 5,000 people...Leader, I suggest we dispatch an entire legion. This would facilitate command in battle and won't consume too much food."

As soon as Quintus finished speaking, Torrelugo immediately stood up: "Leader, please send our Second Legion! We can certainly help the Aldeans and defeat the Otarlat Army!"

"No, the First Legion should go, its combat capability is the strongest!" Fesaros shouted unwilling to be outdone.

"Leader, don't forget our Third Legion. The Third Legion has integrated many new recruits and needs real combat training!" Camillus requested, unwilling to lag behind.

Oluus and Pequot remained silent.

With the continuous addition of Skodisqi slaves, after filling the ranks of the first three legions, the Nix Tribe established the Fourth Legion, and Oluus was finally officially promoted to Fourth Legion Commander.

However, except for main team officers drawn from other units, the rest of the Fourth Legion comprised Reserve Tribe Members, and they haven't yet undergone overall formation drills or signal training. Naturally, Oluus dared not apply to fight independently.

Recently, Pequot was promoted to Deputy Legion Commander of the Fourth Legion for his merits, assisting Oluus in training the Fourth Legion soldiers and familiarizing himself with the entire legion's affairs.

In truth, the main chief officers and legion commanders of the Military Department all understood: based on Maximus's regard for Pequot and the great merits he'd achieved, transitioning from deputy to official was just a matter of more young adults being able to serve.

"I agree with Quintus's suggestion, we can dispatch a legion to assist the Aldeans in battle, but detailed military matters can't be discussed in a tribal council meeting," Maximus said sternly: "After the tribal meeting concludes, I'll hold a separate small military meeting with the three main officers of the Military

Department to discuss which legion will be dispatched and preparations for departure, as well as matters to consider after deployment."

Not discussing military issues at tribal council meetings had been a principle set by Maximus from the beginning, primarily for confidentiality, though it also reflected Maximus's personal desire to prevent other departments from meddling in military affairs.

Chapter 345: Comparison between Autumn Harvest and Seed Harvest

The legion leaders were eager to earn merits and momentarily forgot this principle. They quickly closed their mouths but quietly moved their chairs towards Quintus, intending to persuade them privately first.

The Cultivation Department subordinate standing by the side of the hall noticed and immediately went over to stop them from doing so.

Even though the legion leaders held ranks higher than him, they had to comply obediently because maintaining order at the tribal meeting was the responsibility of the Cultivation Department.

Maximus turned a blind eye to this and, looking around at everyone, loudly asked, "Does anyone else have anything to report?"

Volenus stood up and said, "Leader, this year we've been blessed by the Divine. According to the Aldeans, the rainy season was shorter than in previous years, the river waters didn't surge as they did before, and the climate has been quite good. The wheat we planted in early spring has all sprouted and is starting to mature—it's estimated we can begin harvesting by mid-August.

Moreover, according to our Agricultural Department's observations over the past days, each ear of wheat in the fields has about 20 to 30 grains, and the grains are quite plump. Except for some fields far from the riverbank, near the mountains and forests where fertility is poor, based on our estimates, barring any unexpected events, each acre of land can produce about 75 to 85 jin of wheat. This is indeed a bountiful harvest!"

At this point, Volenus grew excited, looking at Maximus with fiery eyes. Influenced by some rumors in the tribe, he felt the tribe benefited from Maximus's luck, and the Divine who favored this young leader was also blessing the tribe's fields.

An output of around 80 jin per acre is considered a harvest?!... Maximus was somewhat disappointed, even suspecting if the other party had miscalculated.

In his previous life, he knew that in China, the wheat yield per acre was above 800 jin, with many areas exceeding 1000 jin. Even though agricultural technology was backward in this era, a few months ago, he had exerted a lot of effort, leading the Agricultural Department to help the tribal citizens improve farming techniques and boost field fertility... he always felt it should be at least two or three hundred jin to justify his efforts, not expecting it to fall short of even a hundred jin.

"Leader, achieving 80 jin per acre is already quite a good result!" Volenus had worked with Maximus for over two years and was his important assistant. He knew full well that although this leader was young and born from a Gladiator background, he was knowledgeable about agriculture and often came up with astounding ideas and suggestions regarding farming—he indeed had the blessing of the Divine. However, he lacked practical farming experience and wasn't very familiar with the agricultural conditions of the Mediterranean.

Thus, Volenus patiently explained, "Our grain planting and harvest ratio has reached 1 to 8. In many places in Italy, wheat yield per acre is only 50 to 60 jin, with a planting and harvest ratio of just 1 to 5, and in the Samnium Mountain Area, it's even a mere 1 to 2. Only the yield in Campania's Vesuvius Region can reach 120 to 130 jin per acre, with a planting and harvest ratio of 1 to 11, 12, or even 14. It's said that the wheat yield along the Egypt Nile River can also reach this figure, but in the Mediterranean, such cases are few. Overall, our tribe's wheat yield per acre for this year is relatively high!

And considering this is our first time farming along the Kupa Riverbanks, some lands have lain fallow for several years and are no longer familiar fields; there are also some mudflats and small swamps just being cultivated. These new fields yield low per acre, thus dragging down the tribe's average yield per acre.

However, this year we have planted wheat on all available fields; come September, the harvested wheat will be enough to fill every granary, not only solving our grain shortage issue but with plenty to spare..."

"That's great news!" Maximus smiled. In the past few months, the grain issue had been a heavy burden on him and the high-ranking members of the Nix Tribe, causing them to abandon their cautious approach several times and exchange prisoners for grain with Segestica, leading to the release of 1500 prisoners.

"Leader, you need not worry too much. This time, the tribesmen were somewhat rushed in their farming efforts, insufficiently prepared, with the piled manure not transported effectively, inadequate deep plowing, and the fields not thoroughly cleaned. The wheat seedlings were not cared for sufficiently, and most importantly, the quality of the seeds planted was not the best... so the yield didn't reach our anticipated target.

In fact, in our Agricultural Department's experimental fields that followed your methods meticulously, the wheat growth was much better. According to our estimates, the yield per acre could reach at least 150 jin—"

Volenus's words caused the hall to erupt in amazement.

"Please maintain silence during the meeting!" the Cultivation Department subordinate loudly reminded.

Maximus wore a polite smile, but in truth, he wasn't impressed and felt a bit disheartened: it seemed that despite all efforts, the wheat yield wouldn't go beyond 200 jin now. Without fertilizers or hybrid seeds to improve the wheat varieties, it was difficult to significantly increase the yield.

In terms of hybrids, Maximus only knew concepts and had no practical experience; concerning fertilizers, he had no idea how they were made. Moreover, given the current technological level, producing them was impossible...

Thinking of these, Maximus felt a sense of peace return to his mind.

"After this harvest, our Agricultural Department will vigorously promote these good farming techniques to the tribesmen so they can increase their field yields."

"Very well, that is exactly what your Agricultural Department should do," Maximus nodded.

"However, Leader, this time, with extensive wheat farming, the fertility of the land has been considerably depleted." Volenus turned the conversation solemnly, saying, "Next, I hope to implement crop rotation on the fields to maintain land fertility. In Campania, some large estates divide fields into two parts, with one used for farming and the other left fallow, rotating them annually. This not only reduces soil fertility depletion but also enhances land usage..."

However, I believe the three-field rotation method you previously told us about is even better! Dividing the fields into three parts—a part for spring sowing, a part for autumn sowing, and a part left fallow, rotating the cultivation among the three parts.

Adding manure and grass fertilizer to the land left fallow to enhance soil fertility, while also growing legumes, as you mentioned, can increase another type of soil fertility and enrich the tribesmen's food varieties.

Simultaneously, we should also have the tribesmen designate some idle lands to grow alfalfa—livestock like horses, cattle, and sheep love to eat it, helping them grow fat and strong. Increasing livestock means enhancing our food reserves and responding to your previous call for tribesmen to raise more cattle and horses to increase livestock power...

Thus, our Agricultural Department plans to promote three-field rotation across the tribe. We've already experimented in test fields, though still brief, we've accumulated some experience, and we hope you'll approve!"

Volenus spoke eloquently, Maximus listened intently, and the other officials were also drawn in.

After hearing Volenus speak, Maximus's confidence was reinvigorated. He earnestly said, "Farming requires physical labor, even more so technical skill. Only by continually cultivating good wheat seed, improving farming methods, and enhancing farming tools can the yield of our wheat and other crops be consistently elevated! The Agricultural Department is pivotal to realizing this goal in our tribe—Volenus, you should proceed without hesitation; the three-field rotation can be implemented in the next step!"

"Yes, Leader!" Volenus, encouraged, was even more enthusiastic: "We in the Agricultural Department also plan to persuade the tribesmen to allocate a piece of land specifically for growing flax, for the Weaving Workshop to purchase, thus giving them extra income..."

"Certainly."

"Now, as the wheat is about to mature, the next month is when we need to be most vigilant because there are many birds in the mountains, flocking to peck at the grains. We must come up with all sorts of methods to drive them away.

Additionally, creatures like field mice will attempt to raid the fields. To prevent our efforts over the past six months from going to waste, we hope to get help from other departments."

"That won't be a problem," Maximus promptly promised.

He scanned the other people in the hall, speaking firmly, "Right now, grain is the most pressing issue for our tribe. To ensure a good harvest, you all must give your full cooperation to the Agricultural Department!"

"Yes!!" the officials responded in unison.

Maximus added, "If the wheat harvest is bountiful and the grain problem is resolved, the Agricultural Department's significant efforts should be acknowledged with a reward, and the tribe will grant it."

The Agricultural Department's subordinates became immediately excited because the tribe's reward usually meant a promotion in tribal citizen level.

Under the envious gazes of officials from other departments, Volenus sat down with satisfaction.

Capito promptly stood up: "Leader, the Curved Plow you instructed our Public Works Department to prototype—the artisans have succeeded after several attempts, and it has been field-tested by the Agricultural Department for some time. They all say this new plow is much better than the original straight plow!"

"Indeed, Leader, our Agricultural Department has used this new plow, and it's much easier to use than the old one." Volenus interjected: "Firstly, the plow's weight is significantly reduced, making it easier for tribesmen to till the fields and less laborious for the draught horses or oxen;

secondly, it's more convenient to operate, easily maneuverable during turns. For strong tribesmen, it can even be handled single-handedly;

additionally, its iron plowshare is a triangular cone shape that not only penetrates deeply into the soil but also automatically pushes turned soil to the sides, reducing the plow's forward resistance... I hope the Public Works Department can produce more of these plows so that every tribal household can use one."

Maximus looked at Capito, "Is the Curved Plow easy to manufacture?"