

Perish 346

Chapter 346: Making a New Weapon

"The curved plow is quite a bit more difficult than the straight plow," Capito confessed honestly.

"Primarily, it requires a piece of resilient, curved hardwood, and the curvature has to be just right for use as the plow beam. Our carpenters have tried searching the forests, and at least ten or twenty trees need to be inspected before finding one suitable. Some carpenters suggest it's better to bend young trees artificially, so that when they grow up, they'll be ready for making plows.

Another issue is that the iron required for the plowshare is notably more than that of the straight plow, and shaping it to this form takes much more time..."

"I understand," Maximus said thoughtfully. "Making curved plows is significantly harder than straight plows, but they can greatly enhance our tribesmen's ability to cultivate land; as such, it must be promoted throughout the tribe. If anyone in the Public Works Department can come up with a good method to quickly produce more curved plows, they will be rewarded by the tribe!"

"Understood." Capito immediately brightened up.

The other officials had no objections; on the contrary, after hearing Capito and Volenus's explanations, they were eager to use this new plow as soon as possible.

"Leader, the Iron Workshop has already begun weapon production. Yesterday, they forged a batch of short swords and spearheads," Capito continued.

Maximus wasn't particularly delighted by this news since the iron workshop had been fully operational for the past month and a half. They had been intensely refining iron ore, creating pig iron, and crafting iron tools...

However, the Nix Tribe had already signed a ceasefire agreement with Segestica earlier, and with tensions greatly reduced, the tribe needed the Iron Workshop more for everyday essentials like kitchen knives, forks, iron spoons, hoes, hammers, and nails...

The Iron Workshop, while striving to meet the tribesmen's needs, could only repair soldiers' existing damaged weapons and armor as a first step.

Following Capito's suggestion, the Iron Workshop quickly constructed several new vertical furnaces, doubling iron production and creating surplus pig iron for weapon forging.

"Good. Tomorrow, I will visit the Iron Workshop to inspect our tribe's first batch of weapons," Maximus paused and said, "Also, I have an idea for a new weapon. Let's see if the blacksmiths can make it. If they can, our soldiers will gain the ability for long-range attacks."

Before Capito could respond, Fesaros eagerly asked, "Leader, what is this weapon called?"

"I call it the crossbow," Maximus explained. "It's somewhat similar to the crossbow cannons we modified into crossbow bows earlier. However, the structure of this crossbow is simpler—individual soldiers could easily carry it and use it to fire crossbow arrows to attack enemies."

"From your description, Leader, I believe the blacksmiths can make it," Capito confidently said. His confidence stemmed from his knowledge that many blacksmiths from Sarabia had honed exceptional skills while crafting weapons for the Roman Army over the years. With adequate materials, they could even produce crossbow cannons; thus, making the simpler crossbow described by Maximus would be easy.

"That would be ideal." Maximus also felt confident about this. After all, the tribe boasted an Iron Workshop derived from Roman military engineering and experienced machinery craftsmen from the Roman Army Corps. Producing a handheld crossbow should be well within their capabilities.

These past days, Maximus often thought about why Rome—which had advanced mechanical technology of this era to new heights—didn't produce vast quantities of crossbows like the contemporary Qin Han and develop specialized crossbow soldier tactics.

The potential reason was that the Roman Army had mature tactics: javelins for mid-range launching and crossbow cannons for long-range bombardment. This strategy was virtually unparalleled across the Mediterranean, eliminating the need to mass-produce crossbows or train crossbow soldiers.

However, the Nix Tribe had an urgent need. During the defensive battle at their temporary encampment, Maximus realized his troops lacked long-range attack capability. Training archers required too much time; javelin throwers could be trained quickly but fell short on attack range and ammo capacity. The only option was crossbow soldiers—quick to train, affordable in resources, and effective in combat. Especially now, their primary enemies were the Pannonians, whose warriors were mostly under-armored, well-suited for the devastating impact of crossbows.

"Leader, could you bring us along tomorrow when you visit the Iron Workshop?" Flanitus gestured to himself, Quintus, and Lebilus. "We want to see the current capacity of weapon production at the workshop, and we're especially curious about the crossbow you're designing."

Maximus didn't expect the usually reserved Flanitus to offer such flattering words. Smiling faintly, he nodded and said, "Certainly."

Rumor had reached Maximus, although not in depth, that the tools he helped design and improve for the Public Works Department and Agricultural Department had greatly enhanced the tribesmen's efficiency in their labor. Word spread among the tribesmen, igniting a widespread belief that "the Leader is blessed by the Divine." As a result, the military department's chief officers held great anticipation for Maximus's new weapon design.

"Public Works Department, is there anything else to report?" Maximus asked.

Capito had intended to suggest starting road construction between Snowdonia and Westeni. But considering that the tribe's priority was securing the September harvest and mobilizing troops to aid the Aldeans, it was impossible to allocate sufficient manpower for road building under the Public Works Department's supervision. He hesitated for a moment before replying, "Nothing further to report for now."

Typically, Volenus and Capito dominated discussions at tribal meetings, which was unsurprising given their roles overseeing the Agricultural Department and Public Works Department—two key branches that dealt with vital aspects of the tribe's development.

The third most frequent speaker was Sidonius, the Chief Officer of the Legal Department. Unsurprisingly, he chimed in this time as well: "Leader, in recent days, there have been no reported brawls among the Reserve Tribe Members in Snowdonia and Westeni."

"Sidonius, I finally hear good news from you," Maximus remarked half-seriously, half-jokingly.

Sidonius shifted the topic: "However, we have seen disputes arising from tribesmen battling over the collection of animal dung in the wild, with a number of cases escalating to court proceedings."

"Battling over dung?" Maximus blinked in surprise.

Volenus explained with a touch of pride: "Leader, thanks to the Agricultural Department's efforts in promoting composting and organic fertilization methods, tribesmen have observed firsthand how applying fertilizer in fields leads to healthier and more robust crops. Now they regard dung as a precious resource, collecting as much as they can."

Maximus instinctively stroked his chin, curious about how the Legal Department would adjudicate such disputes, but he restrained himself. Discussing dung at length during an important tribal meeting seemed unbecoming. Still, seeing the tribesmen's initiative brought relief, especially since sanitation concerns like public defecation might diminish over time and decrease the need to build public restrooms.

"Physical brawls among Reserve Tribe Members may have decreased, but the number of injuries during their rugby matches hasn't gone down," Horace, Chief Officer of the Medical Department, interjected. "In fact, when hospitalized, they even argue with each other if nurses momentarily neglect them. Leader, could you devise stricter rules for rugby matches to prevent their overly aggressive contests from causing unnecessary injuries?"

Volenus immediately defended the matches: "Horace, you know full well that the Leader devised rugby precisely to ensure that these Reserve Tribe Members from Pannonia and the Skodisqi people vent their mutual hatred in competition, rather than brawling elsewhere and jeopardizing tribal unity.

Judging by Sidonius's earlier report, this brilliant idea from the Leader indeed works! It also aids the Agricultural Department in managing them more effectively. If we forbid them from aggressive play as you suggest, they'll likely clash during routine activities, leading to even more hospitalizations."

For a moment, Horace, who was less adept at debating, found himself at a loss for words.

Maximus sighed lightly. "The animosity between the Pannonians and Skodisqi people runs deep and is challenging to resolve. Yet, our tribe is set to thrive here, and future new members will undoubtedly continue to include them. If this situation remains unchanged and tribal unity remains elusive, how can we defeat powerful enemies in the future..."

Maximus displayed a conflicted expression, hesitating before looking at the group and solemnly declaring, "For days, I've pondered this issue. Perhaps constructing a temple and having them worship the same Divine could help mitigate such hostilities. What do you all think?"

Emmerich, who seldom spoke unless prompted, now stood up with visible excitement: "Leader, that's an excellent solution! While the Pannonians are not officially Celts, they've coexisted with us for over a hundred years and have begun to share our beliefs. They now worship Druids, honor the Holy Stone Sacred Forest, and revere the Creator Goddess Danu, the Plant and Earth Goddess Matres, the Hunting God and King of All Beasts Cornus, and the Thunder God Talanis. They also admire the Female War God Morgan, the Sun God Nuyada, and the Horse God Apona—"

"Emmerich, wait a moment. The gods you mention are all Celtic Divines. Most of our Official Tribe Members don't even know these gods."

"Leader, if we're to construct a temple in the tribe, why not dedicate it to a Divine familiar and agreeable to everyone?"

Chapter 347: The Divine and the Temple

Gaius, unusually excited, loudly said, "Although we come from all over the Mediterranean, everyone has lived in Italy for many years and should respect the deities of Rome. We should build temples for deities such as Jupiter and Juno!"

"Wrong, completely wrong! Roman deities only favor the Romans and have never shown us mercy, so I do not respect them at all. I revere Isis—the Egyptian goddess of life, and Osiris—the god of agriculture..." Acronis spoke just as excitedly.

"As everyone knows, the Romans revere Greek culture, and even their main deities are learned from Greece. Jupiter is Zeus, Juno is Hera... Greek deities are the most familiar to the people of all Mediterranean city-states. If a temple is to be built in the tribe, it is best to be of Greek deities, so that the vast majority of the tribesmen in the tribe can accept it."

Nexia, a Greek, softly said. She is the leader's wife but is also the deputy officer of the Medical Department and naturally able to participate in the tribe's grand meeting.

Although Nexia holds a distinguished position within the tribe, no one is willing to back down when it comes to matters of faith. Pigeris immediately stood up and said, "Leader, I hope you can seriously consider the Sun God Shamash and the Moon God Xin, who are extremely revered by the people of the Two River Valley..."

...

The officials stood up one after another, trying to persuade Maximus to build temples for the deities they revered, and even argued with each other, making the hall gradually noisy. The Cultivation Department officials tried in vain several times to stop them loudly.

Maximus motioned for him not to rush. After a while, when the arguments grew louder, he suddenly stood up and shouted, "Have you had enough of this quarrel!"

Instantly, everyone in the hall stopped quarreling and quietly sat back in their wooden chairs.

Maximus did not just stop there. With a serious expression, he glared at everyone and shouted, "Do you remember the promise you made when establishing the tribe?!"

'From now on, there are no Romans, Celts, Greeks, Egyptians... we are all Nix people! We will unite to defend our homeland!'... Hmph, it's pleasant to say!

But what I heard from your mouths just now was 'the Roman deities I revere'... 'the Greek deities I revere'... and Egyptian deities, deities of the Two Rivers... Today you quarrel over deities; tomorrow you may fight over deities! Our enemies will be very pleased to see this because without them sending troops, we may disintegrate due to internal strife!"

"Leader, it was our fault!" As the leader's wife, Nexia felt that she should play a role at this moment, she said with shame, "We now have a new home, we are Nix people, yet we are arguing over the deities of other tribes, which indeed should not be!"

"Leader, I... I was wrong too. I got anxious earlier and forgot that I am already a Nix person, and as a result..." Acronis followed with a bowed head, admitting her mistake.

Gaius's eyes turned a few times, and he immediately showed a regretful expression: Leader, you are right to criticize, it's all my fault! I shouldn't have mentioned building any Roman temples because here is our new home, and we are a new tribe. We should... we should build a temple for a deity that can truly protect our tribe."

"Well said!" Maximus approvingly looked at Gaius and loudly asked, "We should revere the deities who can protect our Nix tribe!

But which deities can protect our Nix tribe? Is it those foreign deities who have never shone their power on this land? Or is it the local deities who have been revered by the people here for hundreds or thousands of years?

You all should be clear that establishing the tribe here is not just to live peacefully. We need to root here, thrive here, and establish a powerful nation! Only in this way, when the Roman army harms our interests again, will we have enough strength to defeat them!

To achieve this, we must make the people here believe in us, join us, and be willing to become tribesmen of the Nix Tribe and fight with us... So how can we eliminate the locals' resistance to us outsiders? How can we unite the new tribesmen from various tribes?!"

Although Maximus was posing a question, his inclination was very clear, and the hall was silent.

"Leader, I have an idea." The chief officer of the Cultivation Department, Kefisofon, spoke up: "According to my understanding, although each race has its deities, most of their deities are not unique, and some deities were even learned from other races.

For example, the deity Poseidon, revered by the Illyrians, was influenced by us... uh, Greeks, otherwise, how could the Illyrians who initially lived in the mountains worship the Sea God? It was only after they extensively engaged in piracy and began to have awe for the sea that they accepted Poseidon as their deity due to frequent interactions with the Greeks.

And one of the main gods revered by the Greeks, the war god Ares... uh, according to my research, was not initially a deity worshipped by the Greeks; he was a deity of the northern barbarians... uh, northerners at the time. Otherwise, you see Ares is reckless, impulsive, belligerent, cruel, yet simple-minded, often fooled by other deities, quite different from other Greek deities. It might be because the northerners often moved south and frequently waged war with the Greeks, which instilled some fear and led the Greeks to start worshipping Ares...

Also, as Nexia mentioned earlier, several main deities revered by the Romans were indeed transformed from Greek deities. This mainly happened because the early Greek colonists along the coasts of Italy significantly influenced the inland Latin people, and later the Romans greatly admired Greek culture... Such situations are not unusual among other city-states and forces in the Mediterranean..."

Upon hearing this, Maximus's eyes lit up. What Kefisofon said was something he really wasn't aware of, so he eagerly anticipated his next words.

Kefisofon emphasized, "Ladies and gentlemen, since originally, each race could assimilate and integrate other races' deities for their people to revere, why can't our Nix Tribe transform the deities revered by people from various places into deities that our entire tribe can accept and worship?!"

Just when some people were thoughtful and others wanted to refute, Maximus slammed the armrest of his chair and loudly praised, "Well said! Kefisofon, you are indeed the most learned person in our tribe, proposing a method that not only allows our tribesmen to accept but also unifies the tribe! I think we can try this. What do you all say?"

Everyone looked at one another.

After a brief silence, Gaius was the first to shout, "I also think this is a good idea!"

Although people living in the Mediterranean during this time were generally devout towards deities, for these tribal officials in the hall, calling on deities countless times in their plight as slaves or during their hardships, only to find no help forthcoming, greatly weakened their faith in the deities... At this moment, they clearly saw that Maximus was keen to support Kefisofon's suggestion, and with Gaius and others leading, most of the officials eventually expressed agreement.

Maximus smiled and seized the opportunity to say, "Since everyone agrees, then let Emmerich and the nine department heads take the time to jointly discuss which deities our Nix Tribe should worship, which temples should be built, and how to manage these temples... Once they reach a unanimous agreement, I will conduct the final review and confirmation."

.....

Karsipengpas returned to Alde Tribe territory this time, originally just to inform Maximus of the major news that "the main force of the rebel army had been annihilated in Italy," but he heard en route that the Great Chief was seriously ill, so he first detoured to visit the Aldean Main Camp. There, persuaded by Cleobrotas, he had to take on the task of "persuading the Nix Tribe to send troops."

Maximus did not make things difficult for his old friend, saying that deploying troops to assist allies in such a significant matter must be decided at a tribal meeting.

But he also comforted him, saying that over the past year or so, the Alde Tribe and he had helped the Nix a lot, and both Maximus and tribesmen were very grateful, so this was a perfect opportunity to repay the favor.

After getting a reassuring answer, Karsipengpas started attending to his private affairs: he hadn't seen his youngest son for more than half a year.

However, he never expected that his son, who was merely sent as a messenger, was arranged by Maximus to study at the Nix School.

Having traveled for years, Karsipengpas was quite knowledgeable and understood the benefit of literacy and learning, thus he was all the more eager to meet his son.

He even refused Maximus's good intention to send someone to call his son over for a meeting and excitedly hurried to the school in Westeni.

The tribal school's courtyard door was ajar and very quiet inside, with a warrior in leather armor and helmet standing at the door.

Originally, no soldiers stood guard at the Nix Tribe School's gate, but intermittently, some children's parents or idlers would intrude into the courtyard and disrupt teaching. Therefore, Kefisofon requested that Maximus station patrol soldiers at the school to ensure order in teaching, and Maximus agreed.

Accompanying Karsipengpas as a guide was Secretary Department member Valles, who took the initiative to inquire about the situation from the soldier on guard. He returned and softly said, "Chief Karsipengpas, Rogemnix is taking an exam right now; you'll have to wait until he finishes before you can see him."

Chapter 348: Encountering Old Friends in a Foreign Place

"Examination?"

Valles explained, "The school regularly tests the knowledge students have learned. Those who perform well can smoothly proceed to the next stage of learning, while students who repeatedly perform poorly may be dismissed. Hence, exams are very important to them, and no one is allowed to disturb during exam periods."

Hearing this, Karsipengpas felt a bit uneasy, "I fear my foolish son might find it difficult to pass such an exam, right?"

"Rochemnix lives with us, and I know him well. Although he was illiterate before coming to school, he is very clever and learns quickly, especially in arithmetic. He easily passed a previous exam, and this time won't be a problem for him, rest assured."

Valles' confident response reassured Karsipengpas. He glanced at the slightly open courtyard gate, then turned around and went to the shade of a large tree nearby.

"The exam will take a while to finish; why don't I show you around the area during the meantime?" Valles suggested.

"No need." Karsipengpas sat down heavily on the ground with a sigh of enjoyment, "Age is catching up, and my stamina isn't what it used to be. I rushed here by carriage from your Snowdonia this morning, and it was quite tiring." He closed his eyes to rest after speaking.

Valles wisely remained silent.

The school courtyard was right by the roadside in town, with few pedestrians who were all busy, so no one bothered the two as they rested. This continued until a middle-aged man, carrying a bundle of wheat straw and limping slightly on his left leg, appeared before Karsipengpas, excitedly shouting, "Chief!"

Karsipengpas suddenly opened his eyes, staring at the man before him in surprise. Then he swiftly stood up and gave the man a powerful hug, "Ekbarnus! You're alive still, I thought you had died long ago!"

Ekbarnus forced a bitter smile, "There were several times I almost died; luckily, the gods protected me, so I survived..."

Karsipengpas released the hug but kept a hand on the man's shoulder, worried he'd escape, as he scrutinized him while complaining, "Where have you been hiding these years?!"

"That time we raided the merchant ship and fought, my leg got injured, so I had to leave the fleet and return to the tribe to recover. The tribe and my family took good care of me, plus you occasionally sent people to deliver supplies, so life was quite good. My injury healed in a few months, but my leg never fully recovered. At that time, I decided not to return to the fleet to avoid dragging you down—"

Karsipengpas angrily interrupted, "How could you think this way! Many crew members got injured; Damara Licus lost a hand and fitted an iron hook, but still continued working on the ship!"

"Chief, he lost a hand, I injured a leg. With the rough seas, I couldn't even stand properly, how could I board a ship and raid!" Ekbarnus first smiled helplessly, then spoke with resentment, "Later those damned Segestica people invaded our territory, my tribe, located the northernmost and adjacent to theirs, was the first to suffer. Most men in the tribe died in battle..."

Since I was injured and didn't go to the battlefield, I survived luckily. But the tribe only had about a hundred people left, mostly the elderly, women, and children. For survival, we temporarily joined another tribe.

But we kept losing, and nearly all tribes along both banks of the Kupa River withdrew south of the Murenica River, but there wasn't enough land southward. We later had to live in the mountains, enduring tough days—"

"At that time, I heard your tribe had perished. I believed you were dead, unexpectedly..." Karsipengpas sighed heavily, then questioned, "Since you're alive, and life's tough, why didn't you come find me these years?!"

Ekbarnus shook his head honestly, "A couple of winters ago, the snow in the mountains was heavy, and our tribe struggled to survive. I heard you worked hard to gather large quantities of food to help us through the hardest times. You've done your best to help us. How could I disturb you further!"

"Oh, you, what can I say about you!" Karsipengpas punched him twice firmly, "These years I've gained much at sea, even after contributing to the entire tribe, I still have some savings. If you had come to find me, life would surely be much better than now!"

"Since the Nix tribe moved here, life has improved for me," Ekbarnus smiled, comforting, "My family signed a deal with a Nix person to help farm their land. We get food for our work, and after harvesting in September, I can receive 28% of the yield—"

"Only 28%, that's not much."

"But that Nix person has a hundred acres of land, all planted with wheat. Their Agricultural Department taught new farming techniques. The wheat is growing well; it's bound to be a bumper harvest, and 28% is enough for my family's year-round supply!"

Ekbarnus spoke excitedly, then in a lower voice, "And that Nix person was originally Illyrian. Seeing my large family working hard, they increased my share significantly, as most others helping to farm only get 25%."

Valles quietly listened nearby. Though usually quiet, he was perceptive. When Leader Maximus announced entering the Illyria Mountain, he began learning the Illyrian Language from Illyrian companions. Now, he could understand and speak it fluently, prompting him to softly ask, "May I ask, what's the name of the Nix person who hired you for farming?"

Ekbarnus glanced at him, seeing just a teenager, casually replied, "Fesaros."

Karsipengpas immediately turned to Valles.

Before Valles could be questioned, he said, "Fesaros is our tribe's First Legion Legion Commander, indeed Illyrian by origin, a warm and cheerful person highly regarded by the leader."

Karsipengpas felt reassured, yet Ekbarnus realized the boy was no ordinary child, "May I ask who you are?"

Valles stood straight and solemnly said, "I'm an attendant to Leader Maximus of the Nix tribe, here today to accompany Leader Karsipengpas to visit his child."

"Your child studies in this courtyard too?!" Ekbarnus pointed to the courtyard, surprised.

Karsipengpas explained in a calm tone, "Ah, I have some... business dealings with this Nix tribe leader, so I sent my youngest son here as a messenger, never expected Leader Maxim would send him inside for study."

"That's such a wonderful thing! I hear the children studying inside all learn to write and calculate. Unlike us, who raided merchant ships but couldn't even tally spoils..." Having often passed by, Ekbarnus knew the inside's affairs well, showing envy on his face, "If only my kids could study inside too!"

"If you truly want your child to study here, I could mention it to Leader Maximus—" Karsipengpas was about to promise but was interrupted by Valles, "Actually, enrolling a child to study here is simple. Just join the Nix tribe as a Reserve Tribe Member."

Ekbarnus froze for a moment, shaking his head, "You're young and don't understand; how could I leave my tribe and join a stranger's tribe?"

"But your original tribe no longer exists, haven't you already joined another tribe now!" Valles continued to persuade, "Then why not join the Nix tribe? At least here, you won't go hungry."

And after a couple of years, once you're a formal tribe member, you'll receive at least 50 acres of land, maybe more in the future. You'll live in more comfortable houses, graze many cattle and sheep, and fill your granary with harvested grain. Your children, after studying here, will grow into your best helpers..."

Listening to all this, Ekbarnus couldn't help swallowing hard, trying not to yield to the temptation stirring within. He hurriedly picked up the straw bundle from the ground quickly saying, "Chief, I must rush to the fields to build a scarecrow, I'll be off now. I'll come find you later." With that, he swiftly bounded forward along the road.

Karsipengpas just considered chasing after him when a burst of cheering erupted from the courtyard, the gate swung open, and a group of children poured out.

After a moment's hesitation, Karsipengpas stopped, loudly asking, "Where will I find you later?!"

Chapter 349: Intelligence Department of the Secretariat

Ekbarnus did not respond.

"Don't worry. Now that we know his employer is Fesaros, it will be easy to find him." Valles said confidently.

When Karsipengpas saw his son Rochemnix, he was just stepping out of the courtyard gate, cheerfully talking with other children.

Karsipengpas shouted, and the sharp-eared Rochemnix immediately looked up, then smiled even more happily. He said goodbye to his friends and went straight to Karsipengpas, asking with surprise, "Dad, why are you here?"

"I came to see Leader Maximus for something, and also to check on you." Karsipengpas put on a serious face: "You've been here for more than half a year and haven't kept in touch with the tribe—what have you been doing?!"

"Dad, I haven't been lazy!" Rochemnix loudly protested: "It's just Leader Maximus hasn't given me any tasks, and he asked me to keep studying at their school. I really haven't been playing around!"

"How are you doing in your studies?" Karsipengpas's expression remained serious.

This question hit Rochemnix's sweet spot, and he confidently replied: "I'm doing great! The teachers often praise me. I've memorized the twenty-one letters of the Latin language, remembered over a hundred words, and can write simple sentences. I can do addition and subtraction within a hundred and even some basic multiplication and division... After passing today's exam, I can participate in higher-level learning!"

"Can you pass?"

"Of course I can!"

At this, Karsipengpas finally smiled a bit. He extended his right hand, pressed it on his son's head, and gave it a light pat, "Well done!"

When Rochemnix was in his own tribe, Karsipengpas would venture out as a pirate, only returning home a few times a year. With no one to discipline him at home, Rochemnix would catch monkeys in the mountains and fish in the river, being quite mischievous. Every time Karsipengpas returned, he would reprimand him, rarely showing a good face. Hearing praise today was so rare that Rochemnix was flushed with excitement, rendered speechless for a moment, just giggling foolishly.

Then Karsipengpas asked with some puzzlement, "When you were in the mountains, you were only about playing. Why have you suddenly become so sensible here?"

Rochemnix protested: "I've always been sensible, but the adults in our village, having nothing to do, just played every day. I was naturally influenced by them. But here, everyone in the Nix Tribe, whether men, women, adults, or elders, are busy every day. Even children a few years younger than me study hard here. I can't bring shame to our tribe by just playing around and doing nothing all day here!"

Hearing this, Karsipengpas fell silent: what his son said was indeed a major problem of their own tribe. Because the land in the mountains was barren and couldn't yield much grain, he had resolutely become a pirate in the past, using the loot to support the tribe. However, once the survival of the tribe was somewhat guaranteed, it led to a portion of the tribe's people doing nothing all day...

"Dad, you're working so hard, and the pirate raids on the sea are very dangerous too!"

His son's warm-hearted words almost broke through Karsipengpas's defenses, but the subsequent words made his face fall: "I think you might as well disband your fleet and take our tribesmen to join the Nix Tribe—"

"Who told you to say this?!" Karsipengpas asked in a harsh whisper, instinctively glancing at Valles, only to see the latter had fallen far behind.

Summoning his courage, Rochemnix continued: "Who else needs to say it! Even though you work so hard outside, life in the mountains is still tough, with not enough to eat, poor sleep, and no medicine when sick..."

In the past two years, you've tried hard to buy food for our other Aldean tribes, but when our tribe faced difficulties, which of those tribes living in the plains ever reached out to help!

Dad, although Nix is a new tribe, they are really great! I believe you've seen the endless fields of wheat along the roads when you came; each Nix tribesman owns a lot of land, and they have no worries about food and clothing!

They can build large bridges and huge water wheels, things we never even dared to imagine, in a very short time. They can even make pottery jars and iron implements... they'll only get richer! Right now they can easily defeat the Pannonians we fear, and their strength will only grow, becoming the strongest tribe in this region!

Since you have such a good relationship with Leader Maximus, you should bring us to join this tribe. The sooner we join, the more benefits we'll gain: enough land, more comfortable houses, and flocks of cattle and sheep...

Everyone's lives will get better, and you wouldn't have to risk going to sea anymore. You could live well with my brother and me. You might even become an official in the Nix Tribe, leading valiant soldiers to teach those Pannonians a lesson!"

Karsipengpas stared blankly at the passionate young man in front of him, so different from the usual image of himself covered in dust and tattered clothes, overwhelmed with emotions.

Until his son urged: "Dad, say something. Is it doable or not?!"

He then heaved a long sigh, reached out a large hand as if to touch his son's head, but stopped halfway, instead placing it heavily on his son's thin shoulder, "Child, you don't understand, many things aren't that simple!"

.....

At dusk, Valles returned to the main house in Svetya, not going directly back to his dormitory but to a wooden house not far behind the tribal hall.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!"

"Come in." Cassius's voice came from inside.

Valles pushed the door open. Cassius, seated behind a wooden table, stood up and with concern said, "I guessed it was you who returned. You've accompanied Leader Karsipengpas all day, you must be hungry. I've already picked up supper for you, so fill your belly before telling me everything in detail."

Valles didn't stand on ceremony, pulled up a chair, sat by the wooden table, grabbed the bread on the table with one hand, and picked up a wooden spoon with the other, ladling oatmeal from the still slightly steaming pottery jar, and started devouring it.

Once he finished the bread, drank the oatmeal, and rubbed his now full belly, he burped and began speaking: "On the way to Westeni with Leader Karsipengpas, he kept looking at the wheat fields alongside the road, occasionally muttering 'The wheat seedlings are growing so well, the ears are so big,' or something like that. Later, he asked me how many acres of land our tribespeople own. When I told him some have over a hundred acres, he was quite surprised, even saying 'So much...'"

Cassius listened intently while recording with an ink pen in a thick book.

"...Later, while we waited outside the school, he ran into an acquaintance named Ekbarnus, who followed Karsipengpas as a pirate. After injuring his left leg, he returned to the tribe, and his left leg still limps now..."

Cassius suddenly interrupted Valles's narration, asking, "Valles, when you suggested to this Aldean named Ekbarnus to 'join our tribe,' he refused. What was his demeanor at that time?"

Recalling the scene, Valles revealed a slight smile: "He seemed a bit flustered... and eager to leave, not daring to speak much with us... I suspect he might be slightly interested."

Cassius circled Ekbarnus's name with the ink pen, thinking: Nowadays, plenty of Aldeans are employed in the tribe. Though the tribe has officially announced 'inviting Aldeans to join Nix,' no Aldean has yet made the request so far. Perhaps Ekbarnus is a breakthrough point...

He was invigorated, "Valles, keep going!"

Valles then talked about the meeting between Karsipengpas and his son, and their conversation. Yes, although he intentionally stayed a bit away, he was eavesdropping with his ears open the entire time.

"So, you're telling me Rochemnix voluntarily urged his father to lead the tribe to join us Nix?!" Cassius was a bit surprised.

"Indeed, I didn't expect him to say such things either. It seems our influence on him is beginning to show."

Valles said with a hint of concern: "It's just... I feel he was too rash speaking these words now, given Karsipengpas's status is quite different from Ekbarnus. Could it lead him to have an opinion of our tribe?"

"This wasn't even your fault. It's the impulsive Rochemnix who suddenly decided to do so, we had no hand in it. Besides, Karsipengpas didn't get angry or upset because of it, right! Perhaps these words might even have a positive effect on him..."

Cassius comforted him: "In any case, I will report this whole incident accurately to the leader, and let the leader consider the matter. We shouldn't worry ourselves pointlessly here. By the way, the leader previously told me to send you over once you returned."

"What for?"

"I don't know either." Cassius shrugged.

Valles walked out the door, turned back to glance at the wooden house, feeling somewhat complicated: Among the batch of children entering the Department of Clerical Affairs, most have now taken up positions—in the Military Affairs Department, Akegu serves as a subordinate; Magus manages the treasury in the Finance Department; Manas serves in the Commerce Department; Gaurus is a subordinate in the Public Works Department; Cassius is responsible for intelligence work in the Clerical Affairs Department... even Naisuya handles edicts and documents in the Clerical Affairs Department. Yet, he remains doing odd jobs in the Clerical Affairs Department.

Chapter 350: The Struggle for the Great Chief

Could it be because I joined the group a few months later than them? ... Valles occasionally had such thoughts.

The large wooden house adjacent to the tribal hall was where Maximus had his office. Similarly, a fellow from the secretarial department stood in front of the door. Upon seeing Valles arrive, he immediately went inside to report.

"Let him in quickly." The familiar voice came from inside.

Valles shook his head, casting away the random thoughts in his mind.

The fellow came out and made a "please enter" gesture. Valles took a quick step inside, and respectfully saluted Maximus, who was seated in the center: "Greetings, Chief!"

"Valles, do you know why I called you over so late?" Maximus asked kindly.

Valles shook his head.

"At today's tribal meeting, I proposed to resolve the conflicts among the reserve tribe members and make the tribe more united, preferably by establishing a unique deity ritual system that belongs to us Nixes and suits the local populace. After discussing, everyone agreed. Next, Emmerich and the nine department heads will draft a plan for me to review..."

This scene seemed a bit strange, a dignified tribal leader discussing important tribal matters with a young boy, and the boy nodded occasionally.

In reality, Maximus often privately discussed some tribal matters with his trusted attendants to expand their knowledge and increase their experience in handling affairs. Thus, Valles could not only understand the political terms that occasionally popped up in Maximus's words but also keenly realized that his long-held expectation might finally be realized today.

Sure enough, Maximus continued, "Next, I will establish a Temple Department, specifically responsible for overseeing all temples and priests in the tribe and their ritual activities. The head of this Temple Department... I consider temporarily appointing Emmerich.

But since he is also handling other affairs, the specific business of the Temple Department will fall onto the deputy head of the Temple Department. I recall that half a year ago, you had an impressive discussion on 'why our tribe didn't establish a temple then', so I've decided to appoint you as the Deputy Officer of this Temple Department. How about it? Do you have the confidence to do well?"

"Yes!" Valles shouted excitedly.

"Very good!" Maximus said sternly, "Now I give you a task: go back and think well about how to manage the Temple Department, supervise the temples and priests in the tribe, so they can both resolve the tribesmen's conflicts, and make the tribe more united, without affecting our management of the tribe... then write down your thoughts and bring them to me to review."

"Yes!" Valles responded loudly, feeling the pressure from Maximus's demand but even more excited.

"Recently, Akegu and the others were sent out for assignments, and only you were kept by my side. Do you feel a bit resentful in your heart?"

Valles was slightly startled. Facing the still smiling Maximus, he quickly denied, "No! Really, no!"

"I want to find the most suitable position for my best student; that's why I kept you until the end!" Maximus watched him with a smile, "It's getting late, go back and rest well."

Valles couldn't help but ask, "Chief, which department does this Temple Department belong to?"

Maximus replied meaningfully, "The Temple Department reports directly to me."

"Oh, understood!" Valles saluted excitedly. As he walked out the door, his heart felt warm all the time.

.....

After attending the Pannonian Tribe Alliance meeting, Cabdes quickly returned to Segestica and immediately prepared to convene a tribal assembly to elect a new Great Chief.

The chiefs of various Segestica tribes arrived from their territories to the Main Camp, gathering in the tribal hall.

The meeting was presided over by the Segestica Priest Hemijias.

Standing beside him was the Alliance Envoy who had accompanied Cabdes here.

Dozens of Segestica chiefs were divided into three groups: those favored by Andres or who greatly admired Andres sat on the left side of the hall, led by Pulikas, surrounding Andres's only 10-year-old son Ankasus; those supporting Cabdes surrounded him and sat on the right side of the hall; those undecided sat in the middle, watching the situation unfold.

Once everyone was seated in the hall, Pulikas kept glaring at Cabdes across the room, feeling extremely angry.

The reason was that Cabdes had constantly promised Pulikas, "Ankasus will succeed his father's position as the Great Leader," but after returning from the tribal alliance, he seemed to follow the agreed-upon plan to convene a tribal meeting. However, in the end, Pulikas discovered that this guy actually proposed "to compete for the Great Chief" himself.

Pulikas felt utterly deceived and tried several times to reason with this treacherous fellow, but he avoided him until today when they met in the hall, watching him laughing and chatting with those around him, Pulikas ground his teeth angrily.

At this time, Priest Hemijias loudly proclaimed, "Fellow leaders, since our Great Leader Andres passed away, the position of the tribal Great Chief has been vacant. Today, you are gathered here to select a new Segestica Great Chief to reassure all the tribe members and lead us in reviving our former glory!"

He paused and pointed to the left side, "The candidates for the Great Chief competition are: Andres's son Ankasus!"

Pulikas hastily signaled Ankasus to stand up and was the first to cheer. Those around him followed with applause.

Being just a teenager, Ankasus felt nervous under the crowd's gaze and cheers. He quickly stood up and then quickly sat down again.

"And also our well-known Cabdes!" Hemijias pointed to the right side.

Cabdes stood up with a smile, spread his arms, and slowly turned around, receiving the cheers of the crowd.

This round of cheers was clearly stronger than the previous one.

Pulikas's expression changed abruptly, standing up and exclaimed, "Wait a moment! This method of electing the Great Chief violates our tradition! The Great Chief of Segestica has never been elected but rather has been naturally inherited generation after generation by the Great Chief Family with noble bloodlines, first was the Old Leader Ambra, then the Great Leader Andres, and now it should naturally be Ankasus's turn to assume the position of the Great Chief. This is the tradition of Segestica, even of all the major Pannonian tribes!"

Pulikas's questioning immediately silenced the hall.

Cabdes quickly interjected, "Pulikas, don't forget, I am also the son of Calicus (who was the father of Ambra, the former Segestica Great Chief), and noble blood of the Great Chief Family flows in my veins!"

"But you are not a direct descendant!" Pulikas retorted unceremoniously.

"Not a direct descendant, then what! Aren't I—" Cabdes began to counter but suddenly noticed some people looking at him with strange eyes, and immediately closed his mouth.

It turned out that last year Andres led troops to attack foreign mercenaries, and as a result, suffered a terrible defeat. Numerous Segestica tribal nobles were captured. It was heard that the Aldeans massacred the captives severely. To quickly replenish the army for another battle, Andres appointed a number of nobles to take over the territories and tribesmen of the captured nobles; many of these were non-direct descendants within these captured noble families. Who would have thought that these captured Segestica nobles were later released, resulting in intense conflicts between the two sides that persist unresolved, nearly causing Cabdes's words to expose certain people's scars.

His momentary pause gave Pulikas a chance to press further: "Cabdes, you also realized your mistake, didn't you? Respected Hemijias Priest, you are the Sage most familiar with our Pannonian traditions. We hope you can defend them and acknowledge Andres's only son, Ankasus, the direct descendant of the Great Chief Family, as the new Great Chief!"

Hemijias had not yet responded when the Alliance Envoy suddenly interrupted loudly: "Speaking of our Pannonian traditions, before the Skodisqi people invaded this land, the major tribes selected their Great Leaders just like today. Later, the Skodisqi imposed Great Chiefs on us to better enslave us and passed them successively through generations..."

We have now been independent for more than a decade, and the reason why the major tribes' Great Chiefs are still those appointed by the Skodisqi or their sons who took over, is because they played significant roles in defeating the Skodisqi; their abilities were recognized by the tribesmen, so there's no need for an election anymore! However, today—"

The Alliance Envoy looked at Pulikas, stressed his words, and said loudly: "Not just Segestica but other major tribes are now faced with a major crisis. Therefore, the tribal alliance hopes that Segestica will elect a capable Great Chief who can join forces with other major tribes to overcome this critical juncture!"

The Envoy's words immediately caused a stir within the hall. The tribal chiefs, unlike ordinary tribe members, knew more or less what the "major crisis" mentioned by the envoy was, but were surprised to hear it emphasized so seriously, which stirred up discussions.

Pulikas secretly cried out: Cabdes has indeed obtained the support of the tribal alliance, and Ankasus may now find it hard to succeed!

But still unrelenting, he questioned, "Does the tribal alliance intend to violate the agreement and interfere in Segestica's internal affairs?!"

The Envoy smiled coldly and replied indifferently, "Segestica does not have to heed the suggestions of the tribal alliance, but in the future, seeking help from the tribal alliance might then become somewhat difficult."