

Perish 381

Chapter 381: Crossbow Soldier Shows Power

"Not yet," Valerius responded.

"Rest assured! As soon as the battle begins, I will stand behind this side's troops. Once the enemy charges close, I will immediately have the soldiers charge and block them, ensuring they do not harm your soldiers!" Torrelugo solemnly promised.

"Thank you, Legion Commander!" Valerius pounded his right fist on his left chest, saluting to express his gratitude.

Torrelugo said seriously, "No need for thanks. Although we've trained together on the training ground, being on the battlefield is a different matter. We need to closely cooperate to successfully complete the mission and defeat the enemy."

"You're right." Valerius nodded in agreement once more.

As Torrelugo turned to leave, he couldn't help but glance again at the soldiers drawing the Arm Crossbows. He suppressed the urge to take one and play with it, knowing full well that even as a Legion Commander, the Crossbow Soldiers would not hand over their crossbows to him. Before the war began, the Military Department had issued an order: the Crossbow Soldiers must safeguard each crossbow; even if destroyed, they must not fall into enemy hands!

Watching Torrelugo's departing figure, Valerius breathed a sigh of relief: he had not fought alongside Torrelugo before, only hearing that this man was straightforward and valiant in battle. Unexpectedly, he was also thoughtful and considerate, which augurs well for cooperation between the two teams.

As he was pondering, a commotion arose from the Second Legion's formation behind him, immediately catching his eye: small squads of soldiers emerged sweaty from the gaps between the Centurion formations. They worked together to carry the wooden mounts as tall as a man for the Crossbows, with some carefully holding the bow slots and spring arms...

The leading person was named Fortunius, a Sulla veteran who joined the rebel army with Flanitnus. Having previously served as a Crossbow Gunner in the Roman Army, he was later appointed by Maximus

as the Crossbow Cannon Team Leader. Despite some friction between the Marius veterans and the Sulla veterans within the rebel army, Fortunius showed respect towards Valerius, saluting first and then apologetically saying, "Brother, we are late; please forgive us!"

"Not late at all, the enemy is still forming up, and you arrive just in time," Valerius courteously reassured, "Would you mind checking if the spot I chose is suitable for setting up the crossbows?"

Fortunius inspected the area carefully and returned to say, "Brother, the spot you picked is excellent, with relatively flat ground and not too high, conducive to utilizing the crossbows' power."

"That's good; quickly set up your crossbows." Valerius said earnestly, "I suggest placing your crossbows close behind my troops, with my soldiers providing cover to avoid alerting the enemy. After all, the enemy tasted the power of our crossbows when they besieged our camp last year... When the enemy begins their assault, I'll have my soldiers make way for you. What do you think?"

"Brother, you are thoughtful; let's proceed as you suggest." Fortunius replied before going to command his subordinates to place the crossbows.

Initially, due to long campaigns, many crossbows in the rebel army were damaged, with only five successfully modified. They played a significant role in the temporary camp's defensive battle. Once the tribe was established, and the Iron Workshop began normal operations, the Military Department repaired and modified all crossbows, so this time the Crossbow Cannon Team brought over ten crossbows in total.

After the bases were set and the soldiers started assembling, Fortunius ran back to Valerius: "Brother, have you tested the range of the Arm Crossbow here?"

"I tested it when we were in the middle of the formation but not here, fearing it would be discovered by the enemy," Valerius had pondered this before and did not hesitate to say, "This area is about ten meters lower than the center, so I estimate the range of the Arm Crossbow to be approximately between one hundred to one hundred ten meters."

"One hundred to one hundred ten meters..." Fortunius contemplated aloud, "If that's the case, the accurate range of our crossbows has to be over two hundred..."

"Fortunius." Valerius looked at him gravely and suggested, "I suggest waiting until the enemy is closer before firing to prevent them from being scared off by the power of the crossbows and fleeing to other locations early!"

"Brother, you are right! We hardly have an opportunity to gain merit, so we can't let the enemy escape." Fortunius agreed wholeheartedly and, after some thought, said, "Let's wait until they're at one hundred eighty meters... no, one hundred fifty meters. At such close range, the power of the crossbows can be maximized, making it difficult for them to escape even if they are alarmed..."

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The Pannonia's four major tribes had no unified command for the assault, but it was agreed beforehand: whomever forms up first will launch the attack first.

The Brochi Army was originally marching on the east bank of the Kolana River and did not need to move elsewhere to form up, so they should have been the fastest to form up.

That was indeed the case, but Bricks hesitated to give the attack order, fearing his army would advance alone and face concentrated enemy attacks until a horn sounded from the center route, prompting him to instruct his buglers to sound the horn.

"Woo!!!..." With the deep and resonant horn sound, the Brochi Warriors began advancing. Their pace was not fast because although the two armies were only a mile apart, the terrain was uneven, making it unnecessary to exhaust energy too early.

The enemy stood on a higher ground ahead. The warriors vividly remembered the leaders' words before formation: "...Our original lives were peaceful and harmonious, but after these wicked enemies came, they invaded our territory, burned our homes, killed our brothers and sisters, and incited the slaves to rebel... Some tribes in western Brochi are nearly wiped out, so today we must do everything to defeat them! Slay them! Only then can our families be safe, and our tribe will regain peace!..."

The warriors repressed the surging hatred in their hearts, gripping their shields and long spears tightly, gathering strength as they advanced, though they clearly forgot that this war originated from Pannonia's initial invasion of the Aldeans.

Closer... even closer... so close that the Brochi Warriors could look up and see the faces beneath the enemy's cheek-guard helmets and the gleam of breastplates reflecting off the large shields...

Despite the enemy's excellent equipment, the Brochi Warriors believed their bravery and sheer numbers would be enough to overwhelm and defeat them.

The warriors closest to the riverbank were somewhat puzzled because they saw that the foremost enemy line was unusually not wearing armor or carrying large shields, and they appeared unarmed. What were these enemies planning?

While perplexed, they noticed these enemies began moving left and right, opening gaps, behind which stood wooden-looking devices...

What are these things for?... Most warriors were bewildered.

Only a few who participated in last year's attack on the temporary camp of Nix recalled harrowing memories upon witnessing this scene. Their faces changed dramatically, crying out in succession, "Everyone, beware!... Those things shoot terrifying arrows; avoid them! Avoid them!"

At this moment, the leaders of the Brochi Tribe began shouting, "Revenge!" within the ranks.

Countless warriors echoed the call of "Revenge," filling the entire left flank with roaring fury. Their hatred was ignited, their fighting spirit surging. They gripped their shields in the left hand, high-held spears in the right, and stepped into quick-paced strides forward.

Amid this surging tide, the warnings of the few were like fleeting waves, quickly disappearing.

"Swish! Swish! Swish!..." Arrows shaped like short spears whistled through the air, swiftly piercing through a Brochi warrior's body, seamlessly continuing into the one behind him and then embedding into a third warrior's chest. The powerful thrust toppled several more warriors behind...

The surging tide of warriors was instantly plowed into ten narrow channels, but they were quickly filled again by rushing soldiers from behind.

Seeing this shocking tragedy, the warriors beside them were pale with fear, yet amidst the deafening yells and the pushes from comrades behind, they had no choice but to press forward.

"Crossbows ready!" Fortunius shouted loudly, raising the colorful flag he held.

The Crossbow Gunners forcefully turned the windlass, drawing the bowstrings to the ends of the slots, and placing in the massive arrows...

"Fire!" Fortunius swung down the colorful flag vigorously, and ten crossbows fired again.

The whistling arrows sank into the surging enemy, creating astonishing casualties once more.

But the screams and exclamations were completely drowned out by the tens of thousands of warriors' shouts, which only accelerated their advance.

"Crossbows ready!" Fortunius raised the colorful flag once more, and from the front left came Valerius's voice: "Crossbow Soldiers ready!"

Upon hearing the voice, the crossbow soldiers turned their heads towards the left flank's leader position, where they saw a red flag being raised. The rear row hurriedly passed their drawn and loaded crossbows to the front row comrades and then picked up the other crossbows placed beside them for stringing and loading.

The front row crossbow soldiers took the crossbows, following the countless drills: left hand under the crossbow arm, right hand poised over the trigger, eyes on the sight, targeting forward...

In reality, no precise aiming was needed as enemies were everywhere below the hill, densely populated...

Valerius intentionally waited until after the crossbows fired before waving the flag and shouting, "Flat-trajectory fire, shoot!"

"Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!..." Three hundred crossbow arrows were released simultaneously, sweeping across like a massive scythe, accompanied by endless cries of agony, laying down the foremost Brochi warriors.

This immediately slowed down the advance of the Brochi warriors.

Chapter 382: Establishing the First Merit

"Speed up and charge forward! Charge quickly!" The tribal leader in the rear shouted hoarsely, urging the warriors to advance quickly.

Indeed, the enemy isn't far ahead, rush forward to engage them, and they won't be able to shoot arrows anymore... The warriors began to charge desperately, yet while speeding up, they also tightly shielded their head and chest with their wooden shields.

The sudden changes by the Brochi warriors had no impact on Valerius. After the first round of crossbow arrows was shot, he raised the red flag again: "Crossbowmen, prepare!"

The front row crossbowmen immediately handed their crossbows to their comrades behind them, while receiving another already strung and loaded crossbow.

"Fire arrows!" At Valerius's command, the front row crossbowmen pulled the trigger once again, unleashing a rain of arrows pouring down the hillside.

This was the two-stage attack that the crossbow soldiers had honed over time under Maximus's suggestion: two soldiers worked as a pair, one soldier was responsible for stringing and loading the arrows, while the other, more proficient in shooting, performed the shooting continuously, which shortened the shooting interval of the arm crossbows, leading to a more consistent attack.

Seeing the incoming crossbow arrows, the Brochi warriors at the forefront confidently believed their wooden shields could block them, but they soon screamed in pain because the rudimentary wooden shields were pierced by the powerful triangular iron arrowheads, injuring arms or other parts of their bodies, diminishing some of their combat ability...

The crossbowmen continued firing round after round of crossbow arrows ceaselessly, transitioning from initial nervousness to becoming calm and composed, as the crossbows in their hands were lethal weapons constantly claiming enemy lives.

The Brochi warriors charging toward them paid an extremely heavy price, leaving the path over a hundred meters long stained with blood, wounded warriors lying everywhere, groaning in agony...

When the charge was within thirty meters of the crossbowmen, their formation had already become sparse. In extreme fear, the Brochi warriors hurriedly retreated as the crossbow team prepared to shoot the sixth round of arrows.

The red flag raised in Valerius's hand did not swing forward with force to let the crossbowmen kill the remaining enemies in front but instead, he turned and waved the flag behind him, shouting, "Crossbowmen, retreat!"

Although the enemies in front of the crossbow team had been defeated, the enemies on the flanks had already charged up the hill and were about to engage with the legion soldiers at the rear... To prevent the enemies from the rear from surging over and threatening the safety of the crossbowmen, Valerius made the decisive choice to retreat,

The legion soldiers behind the crossbow team and crossbow cannon team witnessed the newly formed long-range units directly crushing the enemy's frontal assault. While surprised and envious, they also rose with the thought of competing to see which team was superior.

The collapse of the Panoni Formation's leftmost wing caused a large gap of over 300 meters to appear, west of the Kolana River's north bank. As the crossbowmen and crossbow cannon team retreated, several Centurion sub-units rapidly advanced from the rear.

Of course, to avoid repeating the mistakes of past battles with the Otarat people, in the pre-war military meeting that Maximus convened, he repeatedly emphasized to the Legion Commanders and Great Captains: all teams must strictly adhere to battlefield discipline, and violators must face severe punishment.

Naturally, the focus of Maximus and the Chief of the Ministry of War was on the Third Legion's rightmost unit, designated as the attack's main effort. The military judge was directly stationed at their

rear for supervision, and Legion Commander Torrelugo was present in the rear, ensuring that Centurions continuously reminded their soldiers loudly as they led their units forward: do not break formation to pursue fleeing enemies but remain calm, follow directions, and stick with the main force, prepared to outflank the enemy's side.

As the Third Legion's rightmost array pivoted east and maneuvered on the enemy's flank, it also revealed the Nix Tribe's reserves in the battle— the Third Legion's First Battalion.

The battalion commander was named Eorokus, who was once a laborer from the port of Napolet and had joined the rebel army with Camillus. He participated in all the battles that the Maximus Army experienced, earning several merits and also experiencing defeats (at the Battle of Women River and during the feigned retreat at the Battle of Segestica).

Over two years of war had forged him into a seasoned veteran. Amidst the thunderous battlefield, he maintained his composure, refraining from immediately following the Third Legion's forward units to also encircle the enemy's flank. Instead, he positioned himself at the forefront of the line, leading his ten Centurion formations straight ahead, descending from the hill, and then arraying from north to south. While shielding the flanking Third Legion units and serving as a barrier for the advancing crossbowmen, he also observed the evolving battle situation, ready to lead his unit into combat at any moment.

After leading his team to retreat to the array's rear, Valerius took a slight rest, then followed the Third Legion's First Battalion in advance. As they passed through the field where the previous ranged attack occurred, he dispatched a few crossbowmen to do a simple cleanup and collect reusable crossbow arrows.

Despite the iron workshop craftsmen's hard efforts, producing over 7,000 crossbow arrows in just two months, filling an average of 12 arrows in each Lubin's quiver, and having fired only half of them in previous battles, Valerius believed that after easily repelling the charging enemies, the team under his command could still play a crucial role in today's grand battle, and hence, the more crossbow arrows available, the better.

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Alongside the sounding of the attack horn, of course, the tribal leaders led their warriors to fight the enemy. As the Great Chief, Bricks was stationed at the rear of the Panoni Alliance Army's left-center, paying attention to the entire situation.

At this moment, with the beginning of the battle, the only force Bricks could still command was the 300-man Guard by his side. These guards were all robust, highly skilled warriors, mostly offspring of various tribal nobles. He promised them land and wealth, gaining their loyalty, and equipped them with iron armor, sharp double-edged longswords, and sturdy shields, making this Guard the most formidable force under Bricks and elevating his prestige within the entire tribe.

In fact, he had also learned this tactic from his neighbor, Andres, and further, he learned from the failure of Andres's battle not to use his Guard as the vanguard to assault the enemy formation at the beginning of the battle but kept them by his side to prepare for unforeseen situations.

When the news of the leftmost wing's warriors being routed by the enemy crossbow arrows reached him, Bricks was taken aback. Although he was aware that his tribe's warriors were relatively less battle-hardened due to their more stable environment compared to several other major tribes, even inferior to Mazi (which had quite a few highlanders), he never expected that such a short time after the battle commenced, some of his warriors would be driven to flee.

Filled with anger, he also realized the impending danger. If he couldn't stabilize the left flank quickly and the enemy seized the opportunity to launch a counterattack, it could lead to the collapse of his entire tribal army, and his ambition might become a mere illusion.

Therefore, he immediately dispatched the Guard to rush to the left flank to provide aid. Of course, he wouldn't risk his most valuable asset alone, so he also sent subordinates to rally the retreating clan members and seek assistance from the other three Great Chiefs.

The news of the crossbowmen defeating the immediate enemy quickly reached the Nix Army's command post, instantly dispelling the tense atmosphere.

"Leader, who would have thought the crossbowmen unit you personally established would be so formidable, actually directly repelling the enemy's frontal charge!" Quintus said, both surprised and a bit excited, "I previously thought the first breakthrough to claim the initial victory would be some Centurion unit from the Second Legion or the First Battalion of the Third Legion."

However, Flinitus seriously reminded, "Leader, while the crossbowmen defeating the enemy is certainly a great achievement, you need to carefully consider what kind of commendation they should receive. After all, compared to legion soldiers who courageously engage in hand-to-hand combat with

the enemy and risk being injured at any moment, the crossbowmen are only engaged in long-range shooting, and when the enemy rushes in, they can retreat to the back of the formation without much danger.

If the standards for their rewards are the same as the legion soldiers, won't the legion soldiers find it unfair? Moreover, it might discourage people from seeing serving as legion soldiers as an honor, as more would prefer to join as crossbowmen."

The smile that had just emerged on Maximus's face quickly vanished. He stroked his chin, nodded, and said, "Flanitnus, the matter you've raised is important. The risks they endure should match the rewards received. The commendation standards for crossbowmen should indeed be different from those for legion soldiers!

However, this matter should be discussed slowly after the battle concludes. Right now, what we should focus on is how the battle will progress following the good news from the crossbowmen?"

"What we feared most before was how to create a breach in the enemy's left flank, yet the crossbowmen quickly achieved just that," Flanitnus comforted, "We have already laid out a detailed plan beforehand. I trust Torrelugo and Eorokus will follow it step by step and ultimately defeat the enemy's entire left flank! We need not be anxious and can patiently await the next piece of good news."

"Valerius, the Crossbow Soldier Team Captain, is an experienced veteran. I know him; he will not be content with merely achieving the first victory," Quintus continued, "With the crossbow team's astonishing lethality, he is sure to lead the team to seize more opportunities and accomplish further feats."

"If that's the case, we can rest assured and wait for victory to come. Right now, no matter how much we may worry, we can't offer any more help to them," Maximus said with relief, his tone also turning somewhat jesting.

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Apart from this section of the Kolana River's north bank where the Nix Army gained the upper hand, on the rest of the fronts, both sides remained locked in stalemate battles.

Chapter 383: Cavalry Rescue

The Nix Army occupied the high ground, and the Pannonian Alliance Army attacked from below, unable to fully exploit their numerical advantage or consolidate their forces to break the opponent's tight phalanx through a charge.

Once the battle began, in close combat, the Nix Army, with superior protection, better teamwork, and the advantage of short swords in close-quarters fighting, caused most of the screams to come from the Pannonian Soldiers.

The Nix Army strictly adhered to the predetermined plan, adopting a defensive stance, and the Soldiers would never easily break formation to pursue wounded enemies.

Of course, this was also related to Maximus altering the standards for military achievements and promotions, as Soldiers now knew: collecting as many enemy ears as possible was useless; only when the entire army achieved victory could individuals gain merit.

The Nix Soldiers did not press the attack, allowing most wounded Pannonian Soldiers to retreat from the loose formation with the help of their comrades; they had enough warriors to replace them and maintain the offensive stance.

Several Pannonian Chiefs had initially believed that the long, dense formation of the Nix Army on the uneven hills, with the continuation of the battle, would eventually become untenable, or that their assumptions had already been realized before the battle began because the Nix Formation appeared continuous from a distance but was actually interwoven by hundreds of smaller formations. So long as the Soldiers in each Centurion strictly adhered to discipline, they could relatively easily maintain the small phalanx formation during the battle.

The Pannonian Soldiers who charged the hill naturally discovered the secret of the Nix Formation, struggling through the gaps between the two hundred-man formations under the crowding of their comrades to maneuver behind the enemy and launch attacks.

However, this posed no threat to the Nix Soldiers because each Centurion was surrounded by a shield wall like sturdy turtle shells, unlikely to be broken unless the Soldiers inside lost morale. Furthermore, every Nix Soldier was eager to win the battle, and even surrounded, their morale remained high, relentlessly defending and fiercely striking back against the enemy's ferocious charges.

Instead, the Pannonian Army's forces became dispersed by this peculiar formation of the Nix Army. As the battle went on, and with more Soldiers pressing at the rear, the gaps between the Nix Hundred-man Formations became crowded. It was difficult to evade the short swords incessantly thrusting out from between the square shields, leading to high casualties among the Pannonian Soldiers, with injuries and bodies gradually clogging the gaps, intimidating the warriors who followed.

The true threat to the Nix Army came from the right wing of the Pannonian Alliance Army where the warriors from Disone and Perustai, unlike their compatriots from the other two major tribes, charged not with loose formations but formed tightly knit small phalanxes, instructed by their tribal leaders with dozens or hundreds of warriors before marching up the hill.

The warriors held their wooden shields in their left hand in front, which were slightly larger and longer than those of the other two tribes. Their long spears pointed obliquely forward, and with slow steps, they ascend the hill in a more orderly formation.

From the hilltop, the right wing of the Pannonian Alliance Army resembled a tidal wave during its initial surge, layers upon layers moving towards the hill.

If it weren't for the fact that most Pannonian Soldiers downhill were not wearing armor, it would give the illusion that they were a replica of the Nix Formation.

In reality, Disao and Perustai's armies initially shared the same tactics as Mazi and Brochi, but after years of conflict with the Boyi, they were forced to train a more well-organized and dense spear and shield formation to combat the Boyi's superior cavalry, allowing them to hold their ground on the northern bank of the Delaware River and contend with the Boyi without falling behind.

As they approached the Nix's Third Legion, they did not rush forward with high morale but maintained formation, approaching the enemy at a slower pace while cautiously thrusting their long spears from behind their wooden shields.

Faced with the spear and shield formation of the Pannonian right wing, the Nix Centurions initially maintained a defensive stance, only to discover that the Pannonian Soldiers were using the advantage of the spear's length for attacks while the Nix Soldiers found it difficult to reach the enemy.

Just defending and getting hit won't work!

The Nix Centurions gave successive orders for their formations to advance, with Soldiers proactively closing in on the enemy, bashing with their shields, and slashing with short swords in close combat...

The slope of the hills here was steep, putting the Pannonians at a disadvantage, often on the defensive in battle. However, if their formation quickly retreated, the Nix Soldiers, upon their Centurions' reminder, would also cease pursuit, maintaining their formations to brace for the next attack.

Seeing the attack falter, Decikas and Pagiras, the two Chiefs, after deliberation, dispatched some forces to quickly advance eastward, attempting to bypass the Nix formation at its far eastern end, flanking and ascending the hill for a front and back assault...

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On the far left wing of the Panoni Alliance Army, the Brochi warriors faced encirclement from both front and back. Although aware of their dangerous situation, their hatred only fueled their ferocity in resisting. With large numbers and under pressure from both sides, their formations became thicker, and the attacking Nix's Second Legion Soldiers found it difficult to break through momentarily.

Eorokus did not lead his battalion into battle since he spotted the enemy's reinforcements approaching.

The Crossbow Soldiers led by Valerius had already advanced in front of the Third Legion's First Battalion's formation in two horizontal lines. When the enemy came into range, the first line of Crossbow Soldiers immediately fired crossbow bolts.

A wave of arrows fell, but few enemies fell, failing to match previous successes because this time, the enemies were heavy armor infantry. Despite the strong tension of the crossbows and sharp arrowheads, they could only cause minor injuries even if they pierced the iron armor, failing to incapacitate the enemies completely.

Valerius, somewhat unwilling, ordered another round of shooting.

This wave of crossbow arrows inflicted even fewer injuries as the opposing side strengthened their shield defenses.

Valerius did not order another round, instead decisively commanding his troops to retreat.

Eorokus quickly ordered his entire battalion to advance: four Centurions in the middle charged from the front while three Centurions on each flank maneuvered to enclose the enemy's side.

In reality, Bricks' Guard hadn't even formed their formations properly, lacking a proper flank. They rushed to assist, not expecting an enemy unit to be poised here. First came the crossbow barrage, followed by infantry charges. The Guard Soldiers faced combat without even a moment to catch their breath and reorganize formations. Facing the perilous situation of being outnumbered, their pride did not allow them to retreat. Amid cries tinged with despair, they bravely charged forward, swinging their longswords ferociously at the enemy.

Shield clashed with shield, sword against sword, Nix Soldiers engaged fiercely from the front while the flank units quickly completed the encirclement. With tightly packed shield formations from all directions, the less than three hundred Brochi Heavy Armor Warriors without proper formation found it hard to withstand the overwhelming force, soon clustered into a mass with no space to move, unable even to raise shields or swing swords.

Numerous Nix Soldiers' short swords came down, piercing the unarmored necks and arms mercilessly. Amid their unwilling screams, these Brochi Heavy Armor Warriors fell one by one...

As the Third Legion's First Battalion fought, the Crossbow Soldiers didn't idle either. Valerius led his men to line up with crossbows beyond their allied army to prevent further enemy reinforcements from arriving.

Valerius's caution paid off; as the battle between the two sides neared its end, a sharp-eyed Crossbow Soldier suddenly shouted, "Cavalry! The enemy cavalry is here!"

Valerius's heart tightened as he quickly saw numerous Pannonian Cavalry figures appear in his view.

Bricks sent a messenger to request reinforcements from the other three Chiefs. Mazi's forces were engaged in a fierce battle, like Brochi's, hard to spare. Maitilis had a Guard of two hundred nearby, mostly light infantry with wooden shields and spears, but he unhesitatingly dispatched them all for rescue.

Following the tactics of Disone and Perustai, some forces could have been dispatched to assist the left wing. Still, as the two Chiefs were directing the army to encircle the enemy on the hill from front and rear, they were unwilling to abandon the attack. However, with the left in danger and needing support, it was decided to dispatch the cavalry, which had yet to contribute.

1,100 cavalry charged westward from the right wing. Despite choosing the lower ground between the hills, the path was uneven. They were in a hurry, and warhorse hooves occasionally stumbled along the way. They just managed to arrive at the left wing before Mazi's Guard, only to see Brochi's forces either under siege or surrounded...

The cavalry leaders quickly decided to attack the Third Legion's First Battalion first, partly because these enemies were besieging the precarious Brochi warriors, and partly because these enemies occupied an advantageous position for cavalry reinforcement of beleaguered allies.

The urgency of the situation, coupled with Brick's self-interest, prevented him from fully disclosing to the other three Chiefs that "the enemy's crossbows were formidable!" Thus, the cavalry was oblivious, and from a distance, they only saw the Nix Crossbow Soldiers guarding the attack targets without armor or shields, wielding what appeared to be mere short wooden sticks. Mistaking them for a group of expendable slaves as in their own force's previous battles, they paid no heed.

Chapter 384: Removing the Firewood from Under the Pot

The Pannonian cavalry halted briefly a hundred meters away, waiting for their comrades to arrive while simultaneously spreading out their formation.

Then the leaders shouted "Attack!" The cavalry spurred their warhorses forward, the animals breaking into a trot on the uneven grasslands. Though the saddle jolted, the cavalry gripped their reins with their left hands, their waists and hips secured by four-corner saddles, and their tightly clenched thighs steadied the horses' flanks; they were still fairly stable. Their shiny longswords in their right hands were raised high, ready to swing down with force as they approached the enemy, bolstered by the momentum of their charge and confident they could smash through the thick shield armor of their foes.

But just as this excitement surged, they saw someone in that line of "enemy slaves" ahead waving a red flag. Instantly, countless arrows flew forth, striking the riders and horses with precision. Screams erupted from wounded cavalymen, while the arrows pierced the warhorses eliciting pained shrieks. Chaos ensued as riders and horses collapsed en masse, those in the forefront falling victim almost without exception, some even causing panic among those cavalry following behind, leading to disarray and injuries, including several horses twisting their hooves.

The cavalry, already in motion, could not stop their charge abruptly, so they maneuvered around their injured peers and continued forward.

Thus, wave after wave of arrows rained down at brief intervals upon the Pannonian cavalry.

Due to the narrow lowlands between the valley, the cavalry couldn't widen their front. Their tightly packed formation became a prime target within the crossbow soldiers' range. After four rounds of crossbow volleys, the sounds of cries and horses' screeches persisted relentlessly, while fallen horsemen struggled on the dry grasslands amidst the billowing dust stirred by their agony.

The Pannonian cavalry ceased advancing. Within mere moments, hundreds of their comrades had fallen, rapidly dampening their morale.

The Pannonian cavalry began retreating, turning towards the adjacent hills...

At this point, the First Battalion of the Third Legion had already wiped out the enemy, and now confronted hundreds of enemy riders on the southern hills by readjusting their formation.

Valerius seized this opportunity and led the crossbow soldiers to reposition behind the infantry formation.

Eorokus approached Valerius in haste, asking urgently, "Do we still have crossbow arrows?"

"We have enough for at least three more rounds," Valerius answered.

"Then that's sufficient." Eorokus first glanced at the enemy riders lingering hesitantly on the southern hills, before turning to point at the enemies still fiercely battling: "Captain Valerius, I want your crossbow soldiers to fire their remaining arrows at them. Then, I will dispatch five Centurions to launch an attack, while the remaining soldiers will keep an eye on those riders and aim to crush the enemies as swiftly as possible!"

"As you command!" Valerius agreed without hesitation.

Once the crossbow and Crossbow Cannon teams defeated the enemies at hand, ten Centurions from the Second Legion maneuvered to attack the Brochi Army's flanks.

The Brochi Warriors resisted stubbornly. However, neighboring tribal leaders instinctively sensed danger and led their fighters to rush in for reinforcements. As a result, the number of warriors on the far-left flank of the Brochi Army swelled to nearly 2,000, resembling an enormous, bloated mass of flesh. Though Second Legion soldiers managed to encircle them, they momentarily struggled to eliminate this swelling force.

However, this diversion left other sections of the neighboring Brochi Army thinner, and their offensive against the Nix Army on the hills weakened significantly. Meanwhile, the remaining Centurions of the Second Legion adhered to their defensive-first strategy, keeping both sides locked in a stalemate.

But the injection of fresh forces into the Nix Army swiftly broke this temporary balance.

The crossbow soldiers launched rapid three-round volleys at the rear of the Brochi Army, causing significant casualties with nearly every arrow fired, followed by a charge of 500 energetic soldiers from Nix's Third Legion, which terrified the Brochi Warriors.

To worsen matters, Torrelugo, observing these changes unfold from his vantage point, immediately ordered the copper horn to sound the attack signal.

On the hills, the Second Legion soldiers were already brimming with anticipation and unleashed a swift counterattack, which proved to be the final straw for the beleaguered Brochi Warriors.

First besieged by the crossbow soldiers, then flanked and sandwiched by the Second and Third Legion soldiers, the Brochi Warriors fled, their collapse rippling down to their far-left flank. These warriors, also under assault by the Third Legion, crumbled rapidly. Worse, their escape route was blocked by retreating tribesmen, leading most despairing Brochi Warriors to surrender to the ferocious Nix soldiers.

Like a snowball rolling downhill, the Brochi Army's collapse spread rapidly from west to east. The Nix Army's deliberate herding of fleeing fighters to the east significantly contributed to this outcome.

Maximus, seated near the rear center of the Nix Formation, eyes closed in repose, heard the copper horn signals emanating from the west. He opened his eyes immediately, only to hear Flanitnus exclaim excitedly, "The Second Legion has sounded the attack horn. Our right wing must hold a decisive advantage. I trust they'll secure victory shortly!"

"Leader, should we wait until Torrelugo's messenger arrives with details of the battle before making a decision?" Quintus offered a reminder.

"There's no need to wait. Have the First Legion start their attack!" Maximus decisively issued the order, then jested to Quintus, "Didn't you previously assure me that Torrelugo, Eorokus, and that newly appointed crossbow soldier captain Val... Valerius are all highly reliable? What now—losing confidence when it matters most?"

Quintus replied earnestly, "Providing alternative advice for your consideration is part of my duty as your Staff Officer."

Maximus nodded, then suddenly recalled something and said, "According to Hagux, who recently extracted information from the Aldeans, this Pannonian Army stores most of its provisions and supplies at an Alde Tribe village on the east side of the Kolana River. They have left several thousand warriors to defend the village, along with several thousand Scodisqi slaves..."

This village is merely five or six miles away from us. After securing victory here, should we immediately split forces to attack it? This will prevent retreating Pannonian forces from escaping to the village to hold their ground, which could delay the swift conclusion of this battle and hinder our timely reinforcement of Oluus and Pequot."

"Leader, you raise an important point. We should indeed act preemptively," Quintus contemplated before suggesting, "Perhaps we should immediately send word to our right wing, notifying Torrelugo to detach part of his forces to head south along the Kolana River and swiftly capture that village once the Third Legion achieves victory. This way, the Pannonian Army, already defeated and deprived of their supplies, will be completely crushed."

"You're absolutely right. As the Second Legion is closest to the Kolana River, they may finish their battle earliest and are indeed the ideal choice to attack the village. Of course, this would hand them yet another accomplishment, possibly sparking complaints from other legions, so you'll need to smooth things over with the Military Department afterward," Maximus remarked with a hint of jest, showing his agreement with Quintus's proposal.

"There's no avoiding it; luck happens to favor the Second Legion this time—they occupy the most advantageous position," Quintus shrugged.

Maximus glanced around before his gaze settled on a teenage boy, "Akegu, you heard everything we just discussed, didn't you?"

"I did, Leader."

"Then I want you to serve as my messenger immediately. Go find Legion Commander Torrelugo and relay my orders. Can you do it?"

"Leader, I promise to complete the mission!" Akegu saluted excitedly and prepared to run west.

"Wait a moment," Flanitnus interjected. "Leader, it's best if the troops Torrelugo dispatches carry the Pannonian Army's captured flags or a tribal leader among the prisoners, and also include some Scodisqi new recruits."

"Excellent idea!" Maximus immediately grasped the intention: If the warriors defending the village learn their army has failed, their morale will crumble. Coupled with Scodisqi new recruits shouting provocations from outside the village walls, and inciting a rebellion among the thousands of Scodisqi slaves within, this dual pressure would make it easy to seize the village...

Maximus turned to Akegu, "Got all that?"

"Got it!" Akegu quickly repeated with precision, "Tell Legion Commander Torrelugo to detach part of his forces. Among these soldiers must be some Scodisqi new recruits, carrying captured Pannonian banners or a tribal leader prisoner, to march south along the Kolana River and swiftly capture the village storing the Pannonian Army's provisions."

"Very well, go quickly." Maximus waved his hand, and Akegu bolted off, disappearing from sight.

Maximus then turned to his attendant and issued another command: "Notify Hagux to send cavalry familiar with the enemy's condition to guide the Second Legion's attack on the village."

"Understood!"

"Inform Captain Gaius that their Engineering Team must immediately head to the Second Legion and accompany the forces attacking the village, ready to construct siege weapons as needed."

"Understood!"

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Seeing their tribespeople abandon the fight against the enemy, cast aside their weapons, and turn to flee in terror—crying and shouting during their escape while ruthlessly shoving and trampling on their own companions blocking their way—and witnessing the ruthless adversaries chasing them like seasoned herders driving clumsy cattle and sheep along the narrow lowlands of the valley towards the east, leading to an ever-growing tide of fleeing warriors spreading across the valley...

Standing on the opposite hill, Bricks watched the collapse of his army unfold, feeling an intense pain in his chest and utter blankness in his mind.

He had once ridiculed Andres for being an idiot, squandering an absolute manpower advantage only to suffer repeated defeats. Yet now, facing a similar disaster himself, he couldn't muster the will to turn the tide or lead his attendants to block even the smallest troop of chasing enemies to save a few more

tribespeople. When he saw a small group of enemies advancing toward his position, he swiftly fled with his attendants.

Chapter 385: Alistacas's Hesitation

The clever Bricks did not flee in panic to the east like his thousands of tribesmen, but instead fled south, believing it was undoubtedly safer.

Shortly after the attack horn sounded in the center of the Nix Formation, the left wing also sounded the horn, and the Nix Army launched a full counterattack across the line!

Third Legion Commander Carmillus hesitated upon hearing the horn from the center, unsure whether to immediately sound the copper horn to attack because the far right of the Third Legion was under attack from both front and rear. However, the Centurion Formation's defense was tight, the soldiers held the line, preventing the enemy from gaining any advantage, but making it difficult to turn defense into offense as well.

But while he hesitated, the horn on the opposing side sounded first, and the Pannonian Army's various long spear shield formations stopped fighting and began to retreat...

Upon realizing this, Carmillus immediately understood: the enemy was fleeing!

He decisively gave the order to attack, and the Third Legion began its counterattack.

Originally, the Pannonian Cavalry had suffered significant losses due to sniper attacks by the Nix Crossbow Soldier Team and did not dare to rashly attack again. They turned to the hills across to seek opportunities but ended up witnessing the rout of the Brochi Army.

Seeing this, the cavalry dared not linger and fled eastward, returning much faster than they arrived, not caring at all about potential warhorse injuries. Upon returning to the right wing, they informed the Great Chiefs Demikas and Pagiras of the situation.

These two had been reluctant to deploy forces against the Nix and immediately felt the urge to retreat upon learning of the left wing's defeat and their own side's lack of progress in battle so far.

To avoid being affected by the western defeat and causing more losses to the army, they hesitated not a moment in issuing a retreat order.

The retreat of Disone and Perustai's armies, however, was catastrophic for Mazi and Brochi's armies, because along with the attack order, Carmillus instructed the closest Sixth Battalion to assist the First Legion in flanking the middle still engaged enemies after defeating their immediate foe, without pursuing them.

With both wings of the Panoni Alliance Army defeated, the middle could no longer withstand the fight and quickly routed. Only parts of the Second and First Legion Soldiers drove the rout east, while parts of the Third and First Legion Soldiers drove them west, nearly encircling the routs of the two major tribes.

Many Pannonian countless soldiers, like headless flies, ran wildly during the encirclement by the Nix Army, eventually surrendering in despair...

This battle on the hills north of the Kolana River ended with a victory for the Nix Army.

According to post-war statistics, the Nix Army suffered nearly 2,000 casualties, mostly injured; while the Panoni Alliance Army suffered over 5,000 casualties, with more deaths during the rout, and over 7,000 captured. For the Nix, this was indeed a complete victory.

By the time dusk approached, Torrelugo led three battalions of the Second Legion and five Centurions of the Third Legion's First Battalion to the Panoni Alliance Army's temporary supply and baggage camp, only to find no enemy presence, just nearly 4,000 anxious Scodisqi slaves.

Bricks had preemptively fled back to the camp and on the way realized that staying here was not viable, as the Nix would surely capitalize on their victory, and if the news of the Pannonian Army's disastrous defeat reached the Aldeans, they might even come for revenge...

So he persuaded the 3,000 stationed Pannonian warriors, without alerting the Scodisqi slaves in the camp to avoid chaos that might interfere with their escape, to carry only a small portion of dry rations and quickly led the team to flee east, recalling that some supplies remained at several temporary camps set up along the route west, which might barely support their return to Brochi Territory.

The Scodisiqi New Soldiers quickly put these fellow tribesmen in the camp at ease, and Torrelugo easily occupied this camp, critical to the Panoni Alliance Army, dealing yet another blow to the countless Pannonian soldiers fleeing into the wilderness.

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In the hall of the Aldean Main Camp, acting Great Chief Alistacas and leaders from various tribes were in urgent discussion on how to respond to the Panoni Alliance Army, which had already occupied the banks of the Kolana River and begun advancing north.

Most southern leaders, led by Ambrosius, believed: the Panoni Alliance Army must be targeting the Nix Tribe this time. Aldeans had already suffered significant losses, and the most pressing need is to mobilize all warriors to firstly safeguard the riverbank tribes of the Murenica River; then once the outcome of the Pannoni and Nix conflict is clear, decide on subsequent actions.

Leaders of the western region, led by Bodocaribas, argued: the Pannonian Army's strength is too great, and while the Nix people are resilient in battle, they are unlikely to withstand this time. Alde should dispatch forces to assist the Nix in defeating the Pannonian Army. Otherwise, once the Nix are defeated, the Pannonians can fully focus on attacking us. Moreover, as allies, the Alde have an obligation to send aid to the Nix...

Ambrosius sneered at this, sarcastically commenting, "Yes, we are allied with the Nix, even the Nix's leader is our Great Chief's granddaughter's husband, but when the Pannonian Army invaded the Kolana River, despite our repeated calls for aid, they never sent any reinforcements, leading to our loss of land along the river and so many tribesmen. And now they want us to send troops to rescue them, do you all think this is fair?!"

"Of course, it's not fair!!!" a group of southern leaders echoed in unison.

Bodocaribas argued, "Ladies and gentlemen, you have already known the reason why the Nix did not send reinforcements immediately! The Segestica people also attacked them from the north, and the Nix leader was leading his army to intercept. Later he promised to swiftly lead his army to our side..."

This afternoon, when our spies returned with the news that the Nix Army had already appeared on the northern bank of the Kolana River, indicating they might have engaged with the Pannonians already... this precisely suggests that the Nix keep their promises!

Now is the critical moment concerning our tribe's life and death, we should immediately dispatch forces to assist the Nix in repelling the Pannonian Army to ensure Alde's safety!"

These last words were loudly proclaimed by Bodocaribas as he directly faced Alistacas on the main seat.

Alistacas felt moved; he had always aspired to lead troops against the Pannonians to demonstrate his valor to his tribesmen. He slapped the back of his chair forcefully: "Bodocaribas Elder is correct—"

"Everyone!" Seeing the situation unfolding poorly, Ambrosius immediately interrupted, "The Nix leader said that the Segestica Army invaded their northern territory, hence they couldn't send troops to assist us in time..."

This is his narrative. In fact, we don't even know if the Segestica are truly attacking the Nix. We only know that after suffering a series of defeats last year, they have not sent troops onto the banks of the Kupa River again!

The Nix Army has now reached the east bank of the Kolana River, but is it genuinely to fulfill our alliance for rescue? It's likely more due to the imminent invasion of their territory by the Pannonians!"

Ambrosius surveyed the crowd and finally looked at Bodocaribas, righteously stating: "The Pannonian Army advances north along the east bank of the Kolana River; they can invade Nix territory or pass through the shallow river section north of the Kolana again to attack us!

We've already suffered significant losses before; our remaining strength may struggle to even hold off the Pannonians at Bodocaribas's camp, let alone keep them beyond the Murenica River.

If we forcibly dispatch troops to face the Pannonians head-on and fail, we may no longer have enough warriors to defend our homeland! Bodocaribas, your tribe might be the first to be destroyed by the Pannonians at that time; you'd better think carefully about that!"

Bodocaribas's face shifted between expressions; at this moment, he hesitated.

Seizing the opportunity, Ambrosius stepped next to Alistacas and whispered: "Great Chief, have you forgotten what I mentioned last time! The Pannonian raid along the Kolana River incurred great loss to us. At the time, your father was alive, so he bore the responsibility! But if you lead warriors to battle the Pannonians and fail, putting the tribe in danger, this responsibility will fall upon you!

In this way, although there had initially been little controversy regarding your succession as Great Chief, some leaders might now have reason to oppose, and the tribesmen may also be greatly disappointed in you..."

Hearing this, Alistacas felt anxious: Yes, due to the Pannonian massive invasion, his father's sudden passing, the tribal assembly to elect a Great Chief had not yet convened, leaving him acting in the capacity...

Resentment and concern alternately flashed across his face, and Alistacas abruptly stood, loudly declaring, "Ambrosius is correct; given our tribe's current state, we indeed should not send troops on this risky venture!—"

As soon as Alistacas finished speaking, someone outside the hall suddenly shouted, "Good news! Good news!"

Accompanied by these joyful cries, Cleobrotas swiftly entered the hall, excitement plainly visible on his face: "The Nix Army has engaged in a fierce battle with the Pannonians in the hilly area on the north bank of the Kolana River, and the result—"

Cleobrotas gazed excitedly at the audience, loudly proclaiming, "The Nix Army defeated the Pannonians despite being outnumbered, and our spies reported that Nix Soldiers are now pursuing the Pannonian routs!

According to the spies, those damned Pannonians are crying and wailing, desperately fleeing as if they've lost their parents! Hahaha..."