

Perish 386

Chapter 386: Pequot's Idea

The hall echoed with Cleobrotas's joyful laughter, contrasting with the surrounding silence.

After a moment, Budocaribas asked shakily and urgently, "Did Nick's... Nick's army really defeat... the Pannonian army?!"

"Of course it's true! This concerns the life and death of the tribe; how could I joke about such a thing!" Cleobrotas replied sternly, "The scout is right outside the house, you can call him in and ask for details."

No sooner had he finished speaking than several leaders rushed out.

"The Pannonian army consists of tens of thousands; they couldn't have engaged in a full-scale battle with the Nix so quickly. It must have been a minor skirmish between the vanguards, and the Nix gained a small victory, right?" Ambrosius questioned, "Such a victory can't change our current dire situation."

Cleobrotas looked at him coldly, speaking mockingly, "Ambrosius, you're free to doubt and speak ill of the Nix, but truth is truth, and it can't be falsified. When the Nix finally drive the Pannonian army away and we all celebrate regaining the banks of the Kolana River, I'm curious how you'll face the envoy from the Nix then!"

Although Cleobrotas was usually kind, his animosity towards Ambrosius stemmed from the sudden death of Acoupaigos and Alistacas's temporary rise to power, frequent tribal meetings, and the primary discussions about seeking aid from the Nix tribe. Since Maximus hadn't sent reinforcements, Ambrosius and some tribal leaders naturally were dissatisfied.

Publicly and privately, Cleobrotas had to defend the Nix tribe, while Ambrosius accused him: as the father-in-law of the Nix Leader, he was supposed to urge them to send reinforcements, but instead, he sided with outsiders, ignoring the tribe's life and death, making him unworthy of being the chief elder!

Stirred by Ambrosius, some southern leaders also criticized him, and even Alistacas showed distrust towards him.

Cleobrotas had worked for the tribe all his life and was respected; he had never endured such humiliation before. In a fit of anger, he decided not to attend tribal meetings and busied himself arranging for the tribesmen who had retreated from the Kolana River banks, hoping to forget his anger through busyness.

Today, unexpectedly encountering the hurried scout, the news of the Nix's great victory was like sweet dew to him, dispelling his worries, and he quickly came to the hall to share the good news with everyone.

At this moment, Ambrosius was dumbfounded, feeling a strong sense of unease.

Cleobrotas looked at him with a mocking expression, feeling indescribable satisfaction, and wanted to say more to spite him.

At the entrance of the hall, a group of leaders who had been questioning the scout suddenly burst into cheers.

A bright smile quickly appeared on Ambrosius's face, and he shouted loudly, "Great! The Pannonians have been defeated! Thank Ares for protecting our tribe! Everyone, we should immediately send someone to thank the Nix Leader for his full support of the Aldeans! Meanwhile, we should also deploy our forces to quickly reclaim our lost territories!"

"Yes... yes, we should send an envoy to thank Leader Maximus," Alistacas said awkwardly, having just mentioned not deploying forces. He couldn't seamlessly shift his emotions like Ambrosius and had to pinch his face to hide his embarrassment, muttering, "I think Cleo—"

"Alistacas, you're the uncle of Geniandafra and will be the Great Chief of our tribe. Leading the army to meet Leader Maximus, to thank him and congratulate him on his great victory, is undoubtedly the most appropriate!"

"Then, you can lead our warriors, with the support of the Nix army, to reclaim our villages along the Kolana River and thoroughly expel the Pannonians from our territory!"

Initially, Alistacas was annoyed by Ambrosius's unreasonable interruption, but upon hearing his words, his eyes lit up, and he quickly agreed, saying, "I think Ambrosius's proposal is good. It's most appropriate for me to lead the army to meet Leader Maximus!"

"I think Elder Cleobrotas as an envoy is more appropriate," Budocaribas objected, "After all, he's the grandfather of Geniandafra, closer to Leader Maximus and with a higher status. Leader Maximus might be a bit proud after such a victory, but if Elder Cleobrotas goes, Leader Maximus will not only show respect but also be more willing to help us fully."

"Yes, yes, yes, Elder Cleobrotas is indeed the most suitable choice!" Most tribal leaders in the hall agreed, including some southern leaders.

The Nix achieving a glorious victory over the large Pannonian army with fewer numbers instilled awe in the Aldean leaders towards the young Nix Leader, and they naturally didn't want to displease him at this moment.

"This..." Alistacas initially believed Cleobrotas was the most suitable envoy, but Ambrosius's reminder made him realize that "going to meet Maximus and reclaiming lost territories with his help" was the best way to boost his prestige and solidify power. Reluctant to lose this opportunity, he could only glare sharply at Budocaribas, who had ruined his plan, without openly opposing it.

"Alistacas, why don't you lead the army to meet Leader Maximus, and if you don't mind my age, I can accompany you," Cleobrotas said gently. Although Alistacas hadn't respected him much in recent days, he always remembered the wish of his old friend Acoupaigos.

"No... no, I don't mind. With you accompanying me, I feel much more at ease. So, it's settled! How does everyone feel?!" Alistacas said joyfully, becoming somewhat incoherent.

The leaders all agreed, including Ambrosius, though a shadow flitted across his eyes.

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At dusk, in the main tent of the Nix Camp on the south bank of the Kupa River, Pequod lifted the tent flap and walked in.

"I've got good news for you!" exclaimed Oluus, the Fourth Legion Commander, sitting in the tent, excitedly, "Hagux's cavalry just came by, and he told me that at noon today, the Leader led the main forces to engage in a great battle with the Pannonian main forces in the hilly area on the east bank of the Kolana River and ultimately achieved a great victory!"

"How did we win?!" Pequod quickly sat beside him, asking with concern.

Oluus quickly recounted what he had heard from the cavalry.

After listening, Pequod admired, "The crossbow soldiers handpicked by the Leader played a significant role in the battle!"

"Indeed, I think the Military Department will equip each legion with a crossbow unit in the future... Oh, and that cavalryman also brought the Leader's orders—our mission here is over. Tonight, we'll discreetly retreat to Westeni, to lure the Pannonian forces across from us out of their camp and across the river to attack our territory. The Leader plans to return with the army tomorrow and defeat them together with us!"

Pequod lightly tapped his leg with his right hand, silently contemplating.

"You crossed the river to scout again today, right? Did you notice anything unusual on the other side?"

Pequod still didn't respond.

Having worked with Pequod for such a long time, Oluus knew he was usually quiet and didn't mind the silence, continuing, "Let's call the team officers in a moment and discuss how to retreat smoothly tonight."

"Oluus, hold on." Pequod finally spoke, "The Leader won a great victory in the south leading three legions, while our Fourth Legion has been play-acting for days, without a single battle before retreating. When the Leader brings the army here to defeat the enemy, our Fourth Legion, as the newest formation, will likely only serve a supporting role and gain little credit. Compared to others claiming

glory and promotion, our legion won't have much to show for, and not just us, the soldiers might have complaints too..."

Oluus's face changed, glaring at him, "Pequod, what do you mean by saying this?"

Pequod boldly held his gaze and said firmly, "I mean, we should not wait for the main forces; our Fourth Legion can fight this battle alone and defeat the enemy here!"

Oluus's expression shifted again, and he exclaimed, "Are you crazy! With only our 4,000 soldiers and most of them being Reserve Tribe members, new recruits, how can they stand against over 10,000 enemies! Don't risk destroying our Fourth Legion for glory!"

"As long as we plan well, 4,000 men can defeat over 10,000 enemies!" Pequod said confidently, "Oluus, whether it succeeds or not, at least listen to my plan."

"Go ahead," Oluus said nonchalantly, but internally he was somewhat hopeful, knowing this former pirate had previously led a few hundred to disrupt the entire Brochi Territory, demonstrating his capable leadership.

Pequod immediately took out a stick, drawing on the ground while explaining his plan.

After listening, Oluus pondered for a moment before asking, "We've been using deceptive tactics these past few days, and their leader is very cautious, as they haven't dared to leave Lin Kou Village with their army.

Also, you've seen, they scout with cavalry on the opposite riverbank every day. You plan to hide half our soldiers in the thickets across the river; how can they not be discovered?"

Chapter 387: Crossing the River

"Oluus, what do you think I've been taking people across the river to patrol every day these past few days for?" Pequod smiled confidently, speaking with assurance, "I've already figured out the terrain of the river sections where we can ford on foot and have grasped the range of the enemy scouts' reconnaissance. More importantly, I've secretly sent people to survey the dense forest and found a good spot for one or two thousand soldiers to camp without easily being detected by the enemy.

This time, I'm bringing a team to ambush, including many soldiers who followed me in the raid on Brochi Territory last time and who have the experience of hiding and living in the mountains and forests. I believe that this time, they can better help the entire team execute a woodland ambush for a day and two nights...

Moreover, even if our ambush is discovered by the enemy, I will lead the soldiers to quickly retreat to the west. The enemy won't be able to catch up with us as we are familiar with the terrain. It would merely be a failed ambush without any loss, and everything will just return to the plan originally set by the leader..."

Oluus was somewhat moved, but as the Legion Commander, he was burdened with a heavy responsibility and had to be cautious: "Even if you deceive the enemy's vigilance, considering that the enemy's leader is very cautious, they will certainly be prepared. Even if our raid achieves some results, if we can't completely confuse the entire enemy in the end, once the enemy reacts, we could be in danger."

Pequot laughed: "Oluus, don't forget that we have reinforcements. Since the leader has dispatched messengers to notify us, it means he has already started leading the army back. The hilly area east of the Kolana River is not far from here, and if they move quickly, they can arrive in a little over a day.

And the enemy will discover this empty camp by tomorrow morning. The Lin Kou Village is a bit closer, but the path is quite difficult to walk, taking nearly the same amount of time to reach here. It's possible that by the time we raid the enemy, the leader will have already led his team here."

Oluus finally nodded and said: "I think your plan is worth trying. After all, the enemy is cautious, and they have ample cavalry. If they scout in advance and discover our main force's reinforcements, and escape early, wouldn't that be a pity? Your plan can precisely cut off the enemy's retreat, leaving them nowhere to escape!"

Oluus's point was something Pequot had not considered. At this moment, he seized the opportunity to say: "Precisely because of this hidden danger, which might prevent us from winning the complete victory in this war, we should implement this plan even more firmly!"

"However, the two of us must first send a messenger to inform the leader of this plan!" Oluus reminded in a deep voice: "You also don't want to be deemed by the leader and the Military Department as a leader who likes to take action without orders, do you!"

Pequot was stunned for a moment and said hesitantly: "If we first notify the leader and wait for his permission before acting, I'm afraid it'll be too late!"

"We'll send someone to inform the leader while we implement the plan. The leader is wise and discerning; I believe not only will he not blame us, but he will also coordinate well with us. How could it be too late!"

Among the Roman veterans who joined the rebel army in Lukelia, Oluus was known for loving battle and being action-oriented. After hearing Pequot's plan, he had already fully recognized it. However, having served in the military for decades and understanding some of the taboos within the army, he specifically brought up this point to address the plan's deficiencies and subtly remind Pequot, who was solely eager for merit.

Pequot was pensive.

"It's getting late; we must hurry and call all the team officers to discuss this plan together. After that, we must take action immediately!"

"Yes!"

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The Segestica and Desitia Alliance Army camped at the Lin Kou Village camp for several days. The scouts reported daily that the Nix Army was still besieging the Anrotas Camp.

Later on, Temagis couldn't stay put and believed: The army of Bricks could not possibly have not attacked the Nix Tribe for this long, so could it be false that the Nix Army is still surrounding the camp over here?

On the contrary, Cabdes remained calm and reminded him: Outside the western Brochi Territory is all hilly, with the four great chiefs leading a massive army, requiring sufficient material supplies each day, meaning their march speed won't be fast. Plus, passing through the territory of the Aldeans could meet some resistance, and minor accidents or additional time expenses are normal...

He advised Temagis to wait patiently. Temagis initially listened, but after a day, he couldn't help arguing with Cabdes again.

Just then, the scouts reported: The Nix people besieging the camp were gone, and the entire enemy camp was empty, but the enemy destroyed the pontoon bridge before retreating!

Temagis immediately clamored to advance, and Cabdes did not oppose anymore, but he demanded the scouts penetrate deep into the Nix Territory to investigate the enemy's movements.

The Alliance Army finally broke camp and set out, advancing towards the Kupa River along the forest path. Fearing an ambush, Cabdes dispatched numerous scouts to search the dense forest around the marching column.

Nothing abnormal was discovered, and the army smoothly reached the north bank of the Kupa River. For this, Cabdes was ridiculed by Temagis, who said he was timid like a mouse, lacking the grandeur of a great chief who commands various tribes.

Cabdes felt a deep hatred but had no way to counter it. Now, Segestica was the weakest of the seven major tribes of Pannonia, often needing the help of nearby Brochi and Desitia in many areas.

However, Cabdes firmly opposed the army's immediate crossing of the Kupa River. The reason was: It was already dusk, the pontoon bridge was dismantled by the enemy, and wading through the river would take some time. By the time they crossed, it would be dark. The warriors had walked for most of the day, their feet soaked in river water, cold, and hungry, with some distance still to Anrotas's camp. Marching at night is challenging, and if they suffer a surprise attack midway, the column might collapse, so it's better to camp here and rest, crossing the river tomorrow morning isn't too late.

Though Temagis ridiculed Cabdes for being overly cautious, he also acknowledged there was some truth in his words, so the Alliance Army camped and rested on the north bank of the Kupa River.

Fearing a night-time attack on the camp, Cabdes personally deployed multiple patrols and sentries.

The night passed uneventfully.

On the following morning, a light drizzle began, and a thin mist covered the surface of the Kupa River.

The Alliance Army reached the original crossing point, where the pontoon bridge had indeed been dismantled. Clearly, the Nix people intended to cut off the Segestica Army's route into their territory, but it was ineffective. After the Alliance Army walked a short distance downstream, the river suddenly widened, and the riverbed was clearly visible, composed of hard gravel—an ideal fording point. At the end of autumn, the river's water level had decreased, and the deepest part was no more than knee-high.

Feeling constricted after staying at the Lin Kou Village camp for too long, Temagis impatiently requested to lead the way crossing the river, and Cabdes readily agreed, hoping the other side would lead and scout the path.

First went the cavalry, followed by the infantry... Despite the shallow water, the currents were swift. Many rocks on the riverbed were covered with algae, making it hard for the warriors to maintain balance as they held wooden shields, long spears, and Longswords. Once some slipped and fell, they barely had time to rise before being swept away downstream by the current...

Occasionally, both cavalry and infantry fell into the river, prompting those crossing afterwards to be more cautious, slowing the crossing process.

During this, scouts previously sent deep into the Nix Territory returned with news: No traces of Nix Army were found, but the nearest enemy camp (referring to Westeni) had its gates tightly shut, with the enemy on guard on the wooden walls.

Upon hearing this, Cabdes relaxed his vigilance considerably, though a sense of urgency grew. He knew the "enemy camp" described by the scouts was the territory he had once lost. Even though he now possessed the Main Camp, having lost land from one's own tribe to the enemy was a disgrace for a Great Chief, detrimental to his prestige; it had to be reclaimed as soon as possible!

Once all Desitia warriors had crossed the river with difficulty, he began urging the Segestica Warriors to cross.

The Segestica Warriors began rolling up their pants, securing their long spears at their waist behind them, holding tightly onto the wooden shield with their left hand and clutching the wooden shield edge of the person in front with their right, forming long lines as they crossed the river together... This was a river-crossing method devised by the Desitia Warriors, significantly reducing slips in the river.

By this time, it was mid-morning. The rain had stopped, the mist was dissipating, and the sun had come out, with the gentle sunshine warming the drenched warriors, driving away the chill within them...

Cabdes looked ahead: On the other side of the river, Temagis was gathering the warriors, assembling the forces, not immediately abandoning him, who had yet to cross, to rush to the enemy's abandoned empty camp.

This reassured Cabdes, and just as he was about to urge his tribesmen to hasten their crossing, he suddenly heard terrified shouts from behind: "Enemies! The enemies are coming! ..."

Startled, he turned around and saw two scouts with frantic expressions bursting out of the dense woods not far from the riverbank, running for their lives, and behind them, innumerable soldiers wielding shields and short swords, fierce and aggressive, were charging madly towards his direction...

It's the Nix people! They were hiding right behind us! Why didn't the scouts discover this! ... Cabdes was both shocked and furious, but there wasn't time to think. The sudden enemy attack immediately threw the Segestica Army into chaos. Some warriors instinctively scrambled to jump into the river to evade the enemy's attack, which immediately disrupted order, causing comrades crossing the river to fall in chain-like successions amidst cries for help filling the air...

"Stop crossing! Stop crossing now!" Cabdes shouted anxiously: "Form up quickly, prepare for battle! ..."

Chapter 388: Cabdes Drowns

The tribal leaders also realized the danger and loudly shouted to stop their tribesmen from crossing the river, forcing them to turn and face the enemy...

This chaotic scene unfolded before Pequot's eyes. Late the previous night, he led 2,000 soldiers, each carrying four large loaves of bread, crossed the floating bridge, dismantled it, and then headed to the pre-selected campsite.

This campsite was in a dense forest, far from the forest road and outside the Pannonian scouts' reconnaissance range.

Throughout the next day, he stayed put but sent soldiers most skilled in forest maneuvering to secretly observe the enemy's movements without being detected by enemy scouts.

When he learned that the enemy intended to camp on the north bank of the Kupa River at dusk, he contemplated a night raid, but most of his troops were new recruits. Additionally, the night was extremely dark with no moon, and the enemy leader was cautious, making it likely that an attempted surprise attack could mistakenly alert the enemy instead.

He repressed this impulse and decided to continue with his original plan.

This morning, he and his soldiers finished eating their dry bread with the rainwater. Guided by the Scodisqi new soldiers familiar with the forest terrain, they began a silent march through the dense woods towards the forest road. The drizzle and thin mist proved advantageous, as most birds and beasts stayed in their nests, not causing any disturbances that would arouse the Pannonians' suspicions...

Finally, the entire team concealed themselves in the dense forest at the rear of the Pannonian Army, who were crossing the river, constantly updated on the Pannonian crossing by dispatched scouts.

After a successful march and camping the day before, Cabdes had let down his guard considerably. Today, he focused all his attention on the river crossing, only habitually dispatching a few scouts around; having done so, others were even more neglectful.

Upon learning that more than half of the enemy troops had crossed the river, Pequot decisively issued the command to attack.

To ensure a swift attack and a longer fight, Pequot didn't have the soldiers wear armor but only equipped them with shields and short swords. Now his goal was achieved: the enemy troops remaining

on the north bank were in disarray without sufficient time to reorganize. He even saw some enemies, in their anxiety, inadvertently pulling out their long spears strapped to their backs, breaking their waist belts, causing their trousers to slip to their feet...

"Let's earn our merit!" Pequot raised his short sword and shouted loudly.

"Let's earn our merit!!!..." The soldiers responded in unison, full of excitement.

"Avenge!" He shouted again.

"Avenge!!!" Most of the soldiers roared, like thunder.

Besides some old soldiers especially requested by Oluus and Pequot from the Military Department to act as team officers, the rest of the Fourth Legion comprised mainly Skodisqi Reserve Tribes, with only a few Panoni Reserve Tribes members. Previously, Maximus left the Fourth Legion behind to implement a deception strategy. Distrustful of the Panonian new soldiers within the Fourth Legion, he removed them all and replaced them with Skodisqi people.

Now, under Pequot's command, this troop, eager for merit and filled with hatred for the enemy, charged towards the enemy with high morale.

Had Andres been present, in such an emergency, he would have led the charge to boost morale. But Cabdes only rode his horse behind the troops, shouting anxiously. His son, Casinos, whom he appointed to command the main force, was no different.

A general is the soul of his soldiers; if the leaders cannot set an example, how can the soldiers dare to fight bravely?

Pequot charged at the front but did not blindly rush into battle. His sharp eyes scanned the enemy frontlines, noticing a spot where the enemy was without shields, potentially intimidated by his side's momentum, trembling while holding long spears...

He sprinted towards them.

Before he reached, the pale enemy let out a desperate shout, thrusting the spear forward.

Pequot only slightly tilted his head, effortlessly dodging the spear tip, accelerated forward with a leap, and swiftly stabbed with his short sword, piercing the opponent's neck. Then, using his left hand's square shield, he forcefully shoved forward, pushing the severely wounded enemy away, blocking an incoming spear from behind while making them retreat.

Seizing the opportunity, Pequot wedged into the gap at the enemy front, guarding his head and chest with the square shield while rapidly stabbing his short sword towards the left-front, immediately eliciting several painful screams.

The enemies struck by the sword exposed their bodies beneath the shield's protection, soon stabbed down by the pursuing Nix Soldiers...

Following closely behind Pequot were seasoned veterans who had fought beside him back in Italy. With rich combat experience and fearlessness, they formed a sharp spear-tip, effortlessly slicing through the hastily assembled formations of the Segestica Army. They continued slaughtering at the front while soldiers poured in from the back, constantly widening the breach in the enemy lines...

On the opposite riverbank, seeing the friendly army under sudden attack, Temagis, in shock, immediately intended to order the troops across to aid. However, the river was clogged with Segestica Warriors wading across, blocking the path for any rescue effort. He had no choice but to dispatch people to the riverbank to force the warriors to return quickly and fight the enemy.

Some Segestica Warriors in the river complied, while others ignored the orders, speeding up their crossing. Upon nearing the riverbank, they clashed and bickered with the Desitia Warriors blocking their way, creating additional chaos near the riverbank...

An exasperated Temagis almost wanted to cut down these cowardly warriors himself, but that was impossible. He had to order the troops to open a path first...

During this process, the assaulting Nix Army had already pierced through the enemy lines, with Pequot heading straight for Cabdes behind the formations.

Riding on horseback, Cabdes personally witnessed Pequot's invincibility, slashing down many within the formations. Now, this bloodied, fierce warrior was charging towards him, filling him with fear, shouting in panic, "Quick... block him!" while instinctively turning his horse away.

The warhorse jumped into the river immediately, with Cabdes, as he did last year, abandoning the troops and fleeing...

Unfortunately, in haste, the horse collided with returning soldiers, tumbling amidst neighs into the river.

The event unfolded too swiftly, and before Cabdes could react, the icy river water filled his mouth and nose, followed by the warhorse's body crashing heavily on his right leg. Overwhelmed with excruciating pain, he opened his mouth, only to let more river water flood in...

Originally left on the north bank, the Segestica warriors numbered slightly over 3,000, offering no absolute numerical advantage. Moreover, being thrust into battle hastily, under the fierce assault of the Nix people, the hastily assembled formation quickly collapsed. In addition to their Great Chief fleeing first, some people witnessed him engulfed by the river...

Among the Segestica warriors in this expedition, some were captured by the Nix people last year and redeemed later, harboring innate fear for the Nix. The fierce Nix soldier assault further shook their morale. Seeing Cabdes submerged in the river revived painful memories from last year, prompting them to toss away their weapons and run...

The Segestica Army fighting on the north bank of Kupa River soon crumbled, with most of the fleeing soldiers plunging into the river to escape to the south bank, while a smaller fraction fled along the riverbank...

Pequot hadn't expected the enemy to be defeated so quickly, with the river suddenly filled with panicked screams that almost blocked the flow.

Some Nix soldiers followed into the river in pursuit. The felled fugitives not only dyed the river red with blood, but their cries further terrified those ahead, pushing them to flee desperately, even at the cost of trampling others...

Observing the river's misery, Temagis painfully closed his eyes and then ordered the riverbank troops to clear a path and do their utmost to rescue the allied soldiers ashore.

Meanwhile, noticing the opposite bank's enemy formations intact and orderly, Pequot quickly sent men to halt the soldiers from crossing the river and called back those pursuing other fugitives.

Pequot regrouped his forces on the north bank, while Temagis collected the fugitives on the south bank...

After some time, the river stretch was void of people, only distant downstream silhouettes bobbing and faint cries for help echoed...

The north bank of Kupa River then held nearly 2,000 Nix soldiers, opposing over 10,000 warriors of the Panoni Alliance Army on the south bank. The Panoni Alliance undoubtedly boasted greater strength, yet the Nix men yelled insults from the riverbank, even making mocking gestures like urinating and mooning. Nevertheless, the Panoni Alliance remained silent.

"Leader, these Nix are too outrageous! They merely defeated the Segestica Army via surprise, yet dare act so arrogantly! We should cross and wipe them out, avenging our fallen Segestica comrades and Great Chief Cabdes!" a Desitia tribal leader furiously remarked.

Another tribal leader, understanding Temagis' thoughts, also advised, "Great Chief, the enemy's forces are few. If we retreat without fighting, it would invite ridicule and tarnish your prestige. Defeating them, on the other hand, would greatly boost our morale!"

Temagis pondered for a long time, then shook his head, saying, "You've all crossed the river earlier and should know clearly that although the river here is shallow, it's quite difficult to traverse. Now, with the enemy guarding the riverbank, attacking by crossing the river puts us at a significant disadvantage, increasing unnecessary casualties!"

"Look at our warriors; they show no anger against such enemy insults, indicating the Segestica's defeat greatly affected them. Fighting with shaken morale and on disadvantageous terrain, even if victorious, the casualties our warriors would bear might be truly unbearable—"

Chapter 389: Oluus's Decision

Temagis surveyed the now-calm tribal leaders around him, emphasizing his words, "What we need to do now is lead the warriors to the Segestica village, allow them to rest, regain their morale, and then coordinate with the armies of several other major tribes to attack the territory of the Nix and utterly annihilate them. By then, I want to see if this damned Nix army dares to shout provocations at us again!"

Temagis's words convinced the tribal leaders of Desitia, while some of the Segestica tribal leaders, who were already like defeated dogs, had even less reason to oppose him. They were eager to leave this place that filled their hearts with dread.

When the Nix team officers saw the Pannonian army on the opposite riverbank stop their standoff and begin marching westward along the river, they were dumbfounded and immediately turned to Pequot in desperation, asking, "Legion Commander, what do we do now? The enemy didn't take the bait—they're retreating! Should we just chase them across the river and keep fighting them!?"

"Shut the hell up!" Pequot roared fiercely, silencing everyone around him.

Though his subordinates were anxious, Pequot's heart was even more troubled. According to his initial plan, they would launch a surprise attack as the enemy crossed the river. The enemy left on the northern riverbank would be caught off guard and suffer defeat, forcing the forces that had already crossed the river to return for reinforcements. At that point, the other part of the Fourth Legion, led by Oluus, would quickly arrive at the southern bank to launch an ambush on the forces remaining there. This way, the Pannonian army would be caught in a pincer attack, trapped in the river. Even if they managed to escape, their casualties would be heavy.

But what he hadn't anticipated was that once the surprise attack was launched, the situation spiraled out of his control. The enemy on the northern bank proved too weak and collapsed quickly without waiting for reinforcements from the southern bank. This caused the plan to succeed only halfway—and that was a huge problem!

"Quick! Quick! Quick! Start two fires immediately, and they must produce thick smoke!" Pequot barked his urgent instructions to his subordinates.

As two thick plumes of smoke rose into the sky, Pequot could only hope that Oluus saw them and retreated promptly to avoid any losses.

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"Legion Commander, look quickly!" a subordinate called out loudly to Oluus, pointing to the two columns of smoke rising in the distance against the sky.

"I see them," Oluus replied with a grave expression. He and Pequot had previously agreed upon a signal: if the plan succeeded, one fire would be lit, and he would lead his army to flank the enemy; if the plan failed, two fires would be lit, and he would immediately lead his troops back to fortify Westeni.

Due to the formidable Pannonian cavalry, Oluus hadn't dared to send scouts to assess the battle directly. Instead, early that morning, he had dispatched boats from the Westeni River Port down the Kupa River. These boats were anchored at intervals, with the furthest stationed near the dismantled pontoon bridge to observe the general course of the fight and relay information back. Thus, it was only after learning that Pequot had initiated the assault that Oluus had led his troops out of Westeni. Based on reports from the boat men, Pequot's forces appeared to have gained the upper hand, prompting Oluus to accelerate his march.

But now, the two plumes of smoke told him: The plan has failed?!

After a brief moment of thought, he quickly realized the likely cause: the main forces of the Pannonian army that had crossed the river never turned back to assist their allies. This meant that if he continued his march, his army might directly collide with the far superior numbers of the Pannonian forces. Without the advantage of terrain or Pequot's coordinated efforts, facing such an overwhelming enemy head-on would be suicidal.

Confronted with an increasingly dire situation, Oluus took a deep breath and resolutely issued a command: "Speed up the march! We must reach the Segestica village ahead of the enemy!"

He paused for a moment before instructing further, "Notify the nearby boatmen to find Pequot urgently! Tell him that Leader Maximus has already sent a messenger, and his army will soon arrive. We must do everything in our power to pin down the enemy. Before the main force arrives, we cannot let this enemy retreat back into Segestica's territory or escape to the village ahead!"

"Understood!"

This was why Oluus chose to take the risk of pushing his forces forward.

In fact, Maximus had sent a messenger the day prior, approving the plan he and Pequot were to execute, while warning them to exercise caution and not alert the enemy prematurely.

Earlier that day, after Oluus had already set out with his troops, Maximus sent yet another messenger to find him. The messenger was none other than Cavalry Captain Hagux, delivering the same order—to ensure that they gave no quarter to the enemy. This underscored Maximus's determination to annihilate the opposing forces entirely.

As Oluus's troops rushed forward, small recon groups from the Pannonian alliance kept watch from the front. However, rather than engaging, they retreated cautiously, reporting the Roman advance as they fell back.

But by the time Oluus's forces circled around the village of Anrotas, the Pannonian alliance army was still nowhere to be seen.

Oluus quickly ordered 2,000 soldiers to form a tight square formation about a hundred meters from the village's eastern gate, effectively blocking the road leading to the village.

Once his soldiers were in position, Oluus raised his voice to deliver a rousing speech: "Brothers! Weren't you complaining earlier about lacking opportunities to earn merits? Now, the opportunity is here! So long as we hold off the enemy approaching from the front and stop them from reaching the village, it won't be long before our leader arrives with the main army to wipe them out entirely! When that moment comes, each of you will have achieved great merit, securing your promotions and rewards! Tell me, do you have the confidence to complete this mission?!"

"We have confidence!!!" the soldiers shouted in unison, their voices shaking the heavens. Although they were somewhat fatigued, their morale remained high.

Oluus looked at their excited faces, and his tension eased slightly. He felt comforted that he had insisted the soldiers wear their armor before setting out, even if much of it was still just leather helmets and leather armor. In a phalanx fight, even basic protection could help them hold out longer.

This veteran of the Roman Army, relying on his intuition and adherence to traditional practices, had made a critical decision at this key moment.

Oluus then spoke in a much gentler tone: "Everyone, sit down and take the chance to recover your strength. Wait patiently for the enemy to deliver us our moment of glory!"

The soldiers burst out laughing. Amid the clattering of armor, they all sat themselves down on the ground.

Temagis's slow marching pace was partly due to the demoralized Segestica troops under his command, who were dragging their feet after a crushing defeat. On the other hand, he had to remain vigilant, wary of another potential Nix ambush across the river.

When word arrived that another enemy force of roughly 2,000 soldiers was advancing toward him, Temagis's first thought was: My earlier decision was the correct one; otherwise, we'd be in big trouble now.

His second thought was: Good—this enemy couldn't have arrived at a better time. I need a victory to restore morale!

Before long, he spotted what looked like a "thick wall" blocking the road ahead. Though it appeared the enemy intended to hold their ground, a large detour into the fields on the left could easily bypass this blockade, leading him into the Segestica village.

But Temagis adamantly refused to consider such a move. With no prior assistance provided to their allies, avoiding battle again would disgrace him in the eyes of the Segestica people and deeply disappoint the warriors of his own tribe...

These crafty Nix forces, who had only managed a victory through a sneak attack, now presumed they could win again despite being outnumbered! What a foolish delusion! Glaring at the phalanx arrayed

ahead and waiting silently, Temagis felt a surge of irrational anger. However, he restrained himself, and when his army advanced to within 300 meters, he finally gave the order: Halt the march!

He directed 500 cavalymen to form a line at the front while instructing the Desitia tribal leaders to organize their warriors into overlapping long spear and shield formations. Approximately 5,000 warriors formed a front-facing battle array, while around 2,000 oriented themselves toward the rear to guard against the Nix forces recently located on the northern riverbank.

Between the two infantry formations stood nearly 3,000 Seg warriors from Segestica, temporarily commanded by Cabdes's son Casinos. Temagis had no intention of letting this allied force fight; he merely instructed Casinos to keep his troops under control and out of his way.

Though mustering his troops and forming ranks took time, Temagis deemed it necessary. Since the enemy had issued a formal challenge, he needed to respond in kind, defeating them decisively to affirm his reputation as the Great Chief of Desitia. This was his first open-field battle against the mysterious Roman Army that had previously defeated Andres. In the earlier engagements, the Nix forces had relied on fortified defenses or ambushes during river crossings; Temagis felt an unshakable sense of humiliation.

"Terles, it's time to attack!" Temagis called loudly to his younger brother, who commanded the cavalry.

"Cavalry, follow me into battle!" Terles raised his longsword high in his right hand, then jerked the reins with his left hand. His warhorse immediately bolted forward, hooves pounding the ground.

The remaining cavalry followed in quick succession. Initially, they proceeded at a light trot, but their speed gradually increased. Within 100 meters, the warhorses broke into a full gallop, manes flying. The cavalry formation stretched into a long column several dozen meters wide. Led by Terles, the riders roared with fury, brandishing their longswords as they surged toward the left flank of the Nix square formation at breakneck speed, exuding overwhelming determination to break through.

The inexperienced recruits of the Nix Fourth Legion had never witnessed such a spectacle. The pounding of the warhorses' hooves, like a deafening drumbeat, sent shivers down their spines. The imposing sight of the massive four-legged beasts charging full-speed ahead radiated an almost unstoppable energy. Many couldn't help but think: If this thing crashes into me head-on, wouldn't my bones be shattered to pieces!

If not for their hatred of the Pannonians and their burning desire to earn merits and promotions, many might have already turned to flee. Even so, those who remained standing trembled—hands and legs alike—out of sheer fear.

Chapter 390: Bluff and Deception

At this moment, Oluus in the center of the formation shouted loudly: "Brothers, don't worry! Just hold your position! Grip your square shield tightly, protect your body well! These cavalry wouldn't dare crash into us! Believe me, they absolutely wouldn't dare crash into us!..."

Oluus shouted this over and over again, his voice becoming hoarse in the end. Under his influence, the team officers also joined in the shouting. The soldiers were half-believing, but at least their bodies stopped trembling.

The enemy cavalry was getting closer! Closer! The momentum of their charge grew stronger!... Some of the soldiers facing them closed their eyes out of nervousness...

Terles saw that he had already rushed to the front, but the enemy line still stood firm, and a sense of disappointment filled his heart.

Sure enough, the warhorse beneath him then slowed down, its long neck turning to the left, so he had to pull the reins to the left, and the warhorse successfully made a left turn.

The horse is a timid and sensitive animal. As long as it senses danger ahead, it will never foolishly charge forward unless its eyes are covered or it undergoes special long-term training to overcome this fear. But apparently, the Pannonians were unwilling to make such an investment and lacked the technical skills.

As he turned, Terles swung his longsword to the side, "bang" — it struck against a thick square shield.

Missing with one blow, Terles didn't pause and was carried swiftly to the left by his warhorse...

The soldier who blocked the strike with his shield felt a weight lift from his heart, thinking: The Legion Commander was right; these cavalry might look terrifying, but they're actually nothing and rather easy to deal with...

With these thoughts flashing through his mind, he instinctively raised his head, wanting to see the departing form of the disappointed enemy cavalry.

Suddenly, the urgent shout of the team officer came from behind: "Fool! Get down! Get down!..."

It was too late!

A cold flash streaked by — a longsword swung by the cavalryman following behind Terles, who had also turned left. The sword grazed the edge of the square shield and struck the soldier's helmet. Though the helmet protected him from being cut, the powerful impact left the soldier dizzy and exposed even more weaknesses.

Another cavalryman following closely behind swung his longsword. The sword shimmered through the air and struck the exposed neck of the soldier. Blood splattered instantly, and he fell backward.

The centurion behind him, disregarding camaraderie at this moment, kicked him forward with great force. The soldier's body flew out of the formation, landing in the path of the advancing cavalry, causing the galloping warhorses to panic and stumble on the muddy ground, affecting the cavalry following behind...

Taking advantage of the chaos among the enemy cavalry, the centurion took a big step forward with his shield raised, reestablishing the foremost shield wall.

Meanwhile, the team officers loudly reminded their soldiers to hold firm to the shield formation, protect themselves, and not be disturbed by the enemy's attacks.

The Desitia Cavalry Formation, after turning left, galloped swiftly along the Nix formation parallel to the left. Taking advantage of their momentum, they continuously swung and slashed, creating a flurry of flashing blades in front of the Nix's Shield Formation.

As longswords forcefully struck against the shields held by them, and the flashing blades swooped from above or beside, with the enemy's roaring and the heavy whinny of warhorses, despite the team's officers' constant reminders, there were still a very few soldiers who, under such suffocating pressure,

nervously relaxed their grip and had their shields chopped off, lost their protection and were struck down by swords, or couldn't resist attacking and were eventually struck down by exposure...

Although the Desitia Cavalry seemed to be in an advantageous position, the road became slippery after the rain. During the rapid gallop, the warhorses easily lost their footing. Moreover, although square saddles help cavalry sit more steadily on the horse, if the longsword became embedded in a square shield and couldn't be promptly withdrawn or released, the immense forward inertia would still push the cavalryman off, and falling to the ground often resulted in broken limbs, which was minor compared to being trampled by the following warhorses, which was almost fatal...

This led to a strange phenomenon where, after the Desitia Cavalry assault formation, their casualties outnumbered those of the opposition.

During this period, Temagis had already combined the spear formations from various tribes into two large square formations. Upon seeing the cavalry's attack failed to break the enemy's shield formation, he quickly issued the command for an "infantry attack."

The two Desitia formations advanced side by side. When they reached about thirty meters from the enemy, the warriors on the right formation launched a frontal charge against the enemy, and the warriors on the left formation also accelerated their pace, preparing to assault the enemy's flank.

Meanwhile, Casinos, who had retreated with the cavalry to rest behind the enemy formation, led his subordinates once again to attack the rear of the enemy formation.

In no time, Oluus's troops were attacked on three sides (except for the left side along the Kupa River), and the situation became even more severe.

However, the soldiers did not feel afraid. Previously, the assault by the Desitia Cavalry caused them to be nervous, as they had never encountered such a battle style. But now with the enemy attacking on three sides, having already been tested, they felt a surge of fighting spirit fueled by hatred for the enemy and a desire for merit.

Under the loud reminders of the team officers, they contracted inwardly, crouching down simultaneously, with the square shields tightly protecting their heads and chests, gripping the

shortswords in their hands, their eyes fixed forward, ready for a life-and-death struggle with any attacking enemies... the entire Nix Square Formation turned into a solid stone.

In that moment, the battle cries shook the heavens...

Temagis, mounted on his horse, observed the battle situation ahead, anticipating victory. He could tell this enemy was not easy to deal with, but that was precisely why winning would be even more delightful.

"Report to the Great Chief, enemies have arrived behind us!" The reconnoitre hurried to report: "It's the same one from the other side of the river before!"

The cunning Nix people were trying to take advantage again, but this time they wouldn't leave once they arrived! ...Temagis sneered and ordered: "Go tell Terles to bring the cavalry team over!"

"Great Chief, our cavalry is currently besieging the enemy in front, and bringing them over might be too late," a subordinate reminded.

"Never mind then." Temagis waved his hand indifferently and said, "Since the cavalry can't come for now, tell our tribesmen not to charge, lest we scare them off. Let's wait until they get closer and then attack."

Indeed, Temagis had already considered the possibility of the enemy in the rear causing trouble and had positioned nearly 3,000 warriors in the back formation, so they were not afraid of any surprise attack.

To better understand the enemy situation, Temagis rode ahead of the rear formation. In his view, a large group of enemy forces appeared in a wide fan formation, surging towards him. Because they were not wearing armor, they moved quickly and, without any pause, advanced within a hundred meters...

Not only was Temagis not nervous, but he also felt delighted: these enemies at the rear seemed much easier to deal with than those in the front!

"Attack, finish them off!" Temagis returned on horseback, issuing the command.

"Woo...woo...woo..." The horn sounded, and nearly 3,000 Desitia Warriors in the rear launched a charge, colliding head-on with the enemy.

At this moment, from behind the seemingly scattered Nix Soldiers' charge line, three hundred elite soldiers personally led by Pequot, moved at lightning speed, rounding their far left flank, then circling the enemy's far right flank, pouncing like a swift hunting cheetah towards their desired prey—the Segestica Army protected between the front and rear Desitia forces.

When Pequot received Oluus's order from a crew member, he immediately knew it was an exceedingly difficult task; however, failing to act, allowing Oluus and his troops to be annihilated, and letting the chief reckon after the war would mean all his previous achievements would go down the drain, and he would also face severe military law punishment.

Determined to engage, Pequot did not act blindly. He first requested the crew to take him to a point in the river near the battlefield, quietly observing the enemy's formation process, forming a plan in his mind, then returned to his troops, gathered the team officers, and explained and refined his combat plan... finally leading to the current scene on the battlefield.

When Temagis saw a suddenly arrived enemy force rushing from the rear directly towards the Segestica Army, his expression changed, and he shouted in dismay: "Quick, stop them! Quickly send someone to stop them!"

Unfortunately, with five thousand soldiers and cavalry actively besieging Oluus's military formation in the front, and nearly three thousand warriors engaged with Pequot's force of 1,300 soldiers in the rear, Temagis had no additional troops to dispatch. Even if he could pull a portion from the nearly three thousand troops nearby to intercept, it was already too late.

The Desitia people fought valiantly, while the Segestica people found themselves in the battlefield but mostly absent-minded, with compatriots gruesomely fallen by enemy swords and drowned in the cold river, even their new Great Chief was not spared... Last year's dreadful shadow loomed once more, leaving them deeply worried: What path lay ahead for the Segestica tribes?...

Suddenly, terrifying Nix soldiers appeared before them, at the forefront being that grim and fearsome god of slaughter!

Safe within the Desitia protective circle, the Segestica warriors originally felt secure. Some soldiers even took the opportunity to wring out their soaked clothes, utterly unprepared for battle, resulting in an almost immediate rout, with the quickest to flee being their current leader, Casinos.

"Drive them over there!..." Seeing things unfolding as he anticipated, Pequot excitedly raised his sword and shouted.

In reality, his voice was drowned out by the Segestica men's screams of terror, unlikely to be heard by his following soldiers, yet his highly faithful subordinates diligently executed the prior plan—driving the fleeing Skodisqi people towards the rear of the nearly three thousand Desitia Warriors' spear formation.