

Perish 401

Chapter 401: Guidance

After Casinos finished speaking, there was a moment of silence below the watchtower.

But soon, the Segestica citizens began whispering among themselves.

"Well said." Maximus praised with a smile.

Casinos showed a complex expression and bowed slightly, but did not speak.

Maximus didn't mind, he walked to the wooden fence, overlooking the crowd on the bank, waited a moment, then raised his right hand, and the copper horn was immediately sounded.

Once the bank was quiet again, Maximus called out loudly: "People of Segestica, regarding whether to join our Nix Tribe, you have ample time to consider. Now, with so many of you gathered here, it's already dark, it's cold at night, and the wind by the river is strong, making it easy to catch a cold or fever, and any disturbance could threaten your lives. For your safety, listen to me carefully! Ahem..."

Maximus cleared his throat and shouted in a gentler voice, "Are any of you injured?!"

No one in the crowd responded.

Maximus called out anxiously: "We have doctors in our team with excellent medical skills, they have even studied with Emmerich Sage, they will surely treat your wounded well and strive to restore him to health! If any of you are injured, speak up quickly, if you delay, it will harm your own body!"

Still, no one in the crowd responded, but they began whispering again: "Is he talking about Emmerich?"

"He should be, wasn't Emmerich following Wallis to the Kupa River a few years ago? The Nix people occupied there, he might have joined them too."

"Even Emmerich joined the Nix, maybe what this Nix person said is credible..."

"Don't forget, Emmerich is a Skodisqi, he is not to be trusted!"

"But he really cured many of our tribe's diseases!"

...

At this moment, a Nix soldier suddenly shouted loudly from the edge of the crowd: "Tamosis, I just saw it, your leg is injured, bleeding heavily, what are you hesitating for! If you delay further, do you want your wife to lose her husband and your child their father?!"

Soon, a trembling voice echoed from not far in the crowd: "I...my leg is injured..." As the voice spoke, the surrounding people squeezed away a bit, revealing a small gap, showing a pale-faced man sitting on the ground, his wife and child holding him tensely, and a pool of blood on the ground...

Maximus, on the watchtower, pointed to the soldier who just spoke, and loudly asked: "What's your name?!"

"Leader, are you talking about me?"

"Yes, you!"

"My name is Sethonos, leader!"

"Which Centurion are you in?"

"The Third Legion, Third Battalion, Fourth Centurion."

"I now appoint you as the temporary Segestica Wounded Transport Captain, the Third Battalion, Fourth Centurion will assist you in taking all the wounded Segestica citizens to our medical team for treatment, you can also choose some Segestica recruits to help you complete this task, do you understand?!"

"Under...understood!" Sethonos was so excited he could hardly control himself; he had called out just to catch Maximus's attention, and now he had succeeded!

"Did the soldiers of the Third Battalion, Fourth Centurion understand?!"

"Understood!!" The soldiers of the Fourth Centurion responded in unison.

"Then hurry up and get started!" Maximus shouted, waving his hand.

"Come, come, everyone make way, let us bring out the injured Tamosis..." With Sethonos' persuasion, the Segestica people hesitantly made a narrow path.

Sethonos carefully carried Tamosis with his comrades, taking him out of the crowd, with Tamosis's wife and child following closely behind.

By this time, the Medical Team's doctors and nurses had received the notice and reached the outskirts of the Third Legion formation, immediately assessing the injury, applying pressure, stopping the bleeding, cleaning the wound, bandaging, and then having the soldiers carry the injured to the temporary base set up in the village by the medical team...

All of this was seen by the surrounding Segestica citizens, word spread from one to ten, ten to a hundred, and their looks toward the Nix people were no longer so frightened or hateful, but filled with curiosity and confusion...

So when Maximus asked again, "Is there anyone else injured?" responses echoed from all directions in the crowd.

Tamosis and his comrades kept busy, bringing the injured out for treatment.

Eventually, Maximus noticed that the Segestica citizens not only actively made way for them but also helped carry the patients, easing the tension between the Nix soldiers and the Segestica refugees.

Once all the wounded had been carried away, Maximus again shouted: "People of Segestica, it is very late now, you must be very tired, and surely very hungry, I have two suggestions for you! First, those who live in this village and nearby can go home to rest now; second, those who live farther away may have difficulty returning home tonight, you can choose to stay here, I will have the soldiers find a place for you to sleep tonight in the village, and even make you some food, fill your bellies, and leave tomorrow...what do you think?!"

The bank went silent, the Segestica people looked at each other, feeling very surprised, finally someone couldn't hold back, raised their head, and shouted: "You...will really let us leave?!"

"Of course!" Maximus answered categorically, simultaneously raising his right hand: "I can swear to the Goddess Danu, if I am lying, I will be punished by Her!"

Maximus's words were like a stone thrown into a pond, causing ripples: "You will really find us a place to sleep?!"

"You will really give us food?!"

"My child at home is not yet a year old, can we have some goat milk?!"

...

"Of course!...Of course!...Of course!..." Maximus continued to respond loudly.

"Excuse me...can we now...join the Nix?!" someone nervously shouted from the crowd.

"Of course!" Maximus smiled, responding even louder: "The sooner you join the Nix Tribe, the sooner you become official tribe members with fifty acres of land!"

"Then...I...I also want to join the Nix now!"

"I will join too!"

...

With someone taking the lead, some Segestica citizens cast aside hesitation and reserve, shouting out.

Maximus had to signal backward, and the copper horn was blown once more.

"Everyone, don't rush, let's handle things one by one!" Maximus shouted loudly: "Commander Camillus!"

"Yes!"

"Have the soldiers make way and maintain order, those who want to go home can leave now!"

"...Yes!" Camillus acknowledged the order, first dispatching a team of soldiers to stand on either side of the road leading from the floating bridge to the West Gate, only then letting soldiers make a path wide enough for three people to walk side by side.

"Those who want to go home can leave now, but don't rush, walk steadily towards that way!..." Maximus shouted while pointing in the direction of the exit from the watchtower.

Under Maximus's repetitive reminders, the crowded people began to move slowly...

When no more people came out of the passage, less than half of the people remained on the bank.

Maximus didn't know how long he had stood on the watchtower, his legs were somewhat numb, another wave of drowsiness hit him, yet he continued to persist, shouting: "Valerius!...Crossbow Soldier Team Captain Valerius!"

"Ah...ah... Leader... I'm here!" Valerius, who led the Crossbow Soldier Team, was stationed at the rear of the Third Legion formation, in case of a major riot, they could assist the Third Legion in suppression.

Due to Maximus's actions, the surrounded Segestica citizens remained calm, Valerius, being elderly, after a whole day of marching, his body couldn't hold up, he had fallen into a deep sleep leaning against the wall of a house by the road and was hastily woken up by his subordinates.

Maximus, overlooking Valerius rubbing his eyes hard downstairs, apologized: "Valerius, I know you are very tired now, but I need your help, would you consider accepting my order?"

To maintain the initiative in this war against the Pannonians, Maximus led the army in constant rapid movement, which resulted in him penetrating deeply into the Segestica Territory with the Third Legion as the main force, even Quintus, Flanitus, and other Military Department officials did not follow, let alone officials from the Agricultural Department and Public Works Department; consequently, now that he needed their ability, Maximus had no one available around him.

However, he quickly thought of Valerius. In the past, Valerius was unnoticed, and Maximus only knew of him but did not know him well.

But when Valerius became the Crossbow Soldier Team Captain and performed calmly and outstandingly in a battle on the Kolana River's east bank hills, he immediately caught Maximus's attention, leading to a special conversation, where Maximus learned that Valerius was originally a slave who gained freedom by saving his master's life unintentionally, then joined the Roman Army, served for thirty years in various roles such as coachman, duty soldier, lightly equipped auxiliary soldier, copper horn player, legion soldier, centurion, and even centurion, and later, as he aged, he transitioned to logistical roles like Military Equipment Guardian, geodetic team member, actuarial accountant, and Assistant Deputy Officer, practically having done all the low-level jobs in the Roman Army, making him a small encyclopedia of the Roman Army, astonishing Maximus, who also regretted knowing him too late.

Chapter 402: Spy

Now that Maximus has encountered a difficulty, the first person he thinks of is this experienced Roman veteran.

"Leader, I have no problem, I just took a nap and regained some energy," Valerius responded.

"That's good." Maximus gestured with a hand: "Now, come to me immediately."

Valerius went up to the watchtower, and Maximus pointed at him, shouting to the crowd below: "Next... anyone who wants to join the Nix Tribe right now can report to my subordinate here, and he will lead you to cook, distribute food to your tribesmen, and arrange accommodation for everyone... Please remember that anyone who joins the Nix Tribe tonight and helps with the work will have earned a merit, which will shorten the time for you to become an official member of the Nix Tribe!"

As Maximus finished speaking, the crowd below immediately stirred.

"Leader, I don't speak Illyrian well, and there aren't many in the crossbow soldiers who do," Valerius softly reminded.

"No worries, I'll have Camillus select some Segestica recruits for you to command, along with these few of my attendants—" Maximus turned and pointed to five attendants: "They will help you register those who want to join our tribe, with pen and paper, and then follow your arrangements to get those people working."

"Leader, there are quite a few people beneath us. Where do we get enough food for them? And... you've let the people in this camp go, where are we going to find enough space for them to sleep?" Valerius asked again.

"When I entered this camp just now, I saw that there are quite a few large houses, suggesting there are many nobles here. Actually, these nobles' houses will serve as our temporary military camp tonight, using their stored food to cook, letting the Segestica citizens live in their rooms. If they dare to obstruct, we just capture them, and it also lets the Segestica citizens know that we treat them differently compared to these leaders and nobles."

"I understand, I will do my best to complete the task you assigned." Valerius finally saluted in response.

"Thank you for your hard work!" Maximus returned the formal gesture, then watched from the watchtower for a while, observing Valerius arranging for the Segestica citizens who wanted to join the tribe to register. The order was well maintained, and only then did he feel assured to descend the tower to his temporary quarters.

The main house of Segestica is in the East Camp, but after Andres became the Great Chief, in order to better attack the Alde Tribe, he built a large compound in the West Village, and constructed a training ground inside, where he usually resides, often leading the warriors he recruited in training together.

The Guard first occupied this compound and performed a simple cleanup.

Maximus entered the bedroom, just about to lie down with his clothes on when the guard reported: Commander Carmine requests an audience.

"Let him in." Maximus yawned helplessly.

Carmine came in and immediately reported: "Leader, the two large squads I sent out to scour the riverbank have returned, they seized a total of 67 boats..."

"Well done!" Maximus said happily: "Including the ships we captured in this camp, we now have 84 boats!"

"The enemy on the other side should have more ships! When I let the Segestica people out of the camp, I asked them, and they told me that on both sides of the Sava River, in the Segestica Tribe, there's roughly one boat for every two households, they rely mainly on fishing as their fields are not extensive."

Carmine first poured a bucket of cold water, then comforted: "But they don't have large boats, the largest boat here can probably carry only six or seven people, it's even smaller than the few boats they've built on the Kupa River. They have never fought on this river, lacking experience in naval warfare.

Moreover, the widest part of this river is only over 100 meters, as long as we are well-prepared, we can cross to the other side with these 80-plus boats when the opponent is off guard, transporting three to four hundred soldiers at once, sweep their riverbank, and the returning boats can more easily transport the next batch of soldiers..."

After listening, Maximus showed a sudden understanding: "I almost forgot that you, Carmine, were once a sailor!"

"Even though I've been fighting on land for the past two or three years, I haven't forgotten how to row a boat!" Carmine said proudly: "And in the Third Legion, there are quite a few sailors from Napolet who are old friends; rowing these small boats on such a calm river is very easy for them."

In fact, Maximus chose to lead the Third Legion to attack the Segestica Territory with this in mind, and at this moment he asked in a deep voice: "When do you think is the best time to use boats to transport soldiers across the river?"

"At dawn tomorrow," Carmine confidently replied. "The Segestica people don't have a dedicated river fleet; if they want to stop us from crossing, they'll have to organize the boatmen on the opposite riverbank to obey unified command and dispatch, which can't be accomplished in a short time, and when we're attacking this camp, it's already dusk, they don't have enough time to arrange..."

"I see, we must cross the river and attack quickly, catching the Segestica people off guard so they don't even have time to defend!" Maximus nodded and said, "Carmine, I leave the task of attacking the Segestica East Camp to you! Go ahead and make the arrangements!"

"Yes, Leader!" Carmine excitedly responded loudly.

After Carmine left, just as Maximus was about to lie down, a guard came again to report: "Leader, there's a person from Segestica who wishes to see you, he claims to be under Glicus."

Maximus's heart moved, Glicus was personally recruited by him from among the Segestica prisoners as a spy. After returning to the Segestica Territory, he has used every means to send information to the Nix Tribe, which kept Maximus well-informed of the Segestica Tribe's movements.

For example, being able to know in advance that the Pannonian Tribe Alliance would attack the Nix Tribe, and after annihilating Segestica's viable forces, daring to quickly penetrate the Segestica Territory and directly seize the Segestica West Village was also thanks to the intelligence provided by Glicus before the battle...

Given that Glicus has been diligently working for the Nix Tribe ever since returning to Segestica, Maximus appointed Glicus as the head of intelligence within the Segestica Territory as early as April this

year, allowing him to secretly recruit personnel within the Segestica Tribe, and also had Casius find ways to meet his requests, providing as much support as possible...

"Let him in," Maximus said softly, rubbing his face vigorously.

A middle-aged man was brought in by the guard, and Maximus found him a bit familiar. Upon a little thought, he realized: this was the person who was the first to shout he wanted to join the Nix Tribe when Maximus was giving a speech to the Segestica citizens on the riverbank!

Instantly, a faint smile appeared on Maximus's face.

The man walked in, looking uneasy, hurriedly bowing and saying, "Hon... Honorable Leader Maximus, Sirisis greets you!"

"Oh, you are Sirisis! Glicus mentioned you in his reports, saying you performed very well, once risking sneaking into the main camp to find out about Andres's injury, seeking merit for you. I've always remembered that!" Maximus said with a smile, pointing to a wooden chair next to the bed, and gently said, "Come, come, don't stand, sit down and speak slowly."

Maximus, as the leader for so long, has deliberately trained the great skill of remembering names. Now, with tens of thousands of people in the tribe, daily affairs abound, but Maximus also takes a bit of time to memorize the remarkable figures mentioned in the reports of his subordinates, first to avoid missing talents, second to grant favors.

Sure enough, Sirisis did not expect that Maximus would actually know him, and was so thrilled that he couldn't speak for a moment.

It should be known, this leader of the Nix Tribe had defeated Segestica hero and former Great Chief Andres multiple times, resulting in his death, and had again defeated the formidable Pannonian Tribe Alliance, causing the new Great Chief of the Segestica to be destroyed, while also leading his army to capture the main camp. In the eyes of the Segestica citizens who revered strength, he was a terrible enemy! Yet to those who had pledged allegiance to the Nix, he was a leader so powerful that he was deeply revered, hence Sirisis's great reaction.

"Relax, don't be nervous, sit down first." Maximus kindly said again.

"Yes, yes..." Sirisis replied repeatedly, hastily complying.

"I saw you leading the people to join our Nix Tribe in the crowd just now, very well done!" Maximus praised, "You coming to see me so late, is there something important to tell me?"

Upon receiving further praise, Sirisis finally overcame his tension and emotionally said, "Honored Leader, after you brought your army here today, Glicus took advantage of the opportunity, leading us to blend into this camp with other fleeing Segestica people.

He had me stay behind to find a chance to report to you, then he, along with others, crossed the pontoon bridge early to the East Camp on the other side of the river... He said that when you lead the army to attack the East Camp, he would find ways to cooperate with you in the camp."

"Oh?!" Maximus truly hadn't thought that Glicus, besides gathering intelligence, also knew how to cooperate with him to capture the main camp; he really is a talent!

"You all did very well!" Maximus sincerely praised, then asked: "How many people does Glicus have under him now?"

Chapter 403: Attack on East Village

"Including me, there are seven people in total, with six following Glicus to the East Village."

"How did Glicus persuade you to work for my Nix Tribe?" Maximus asked with interest.

Siris is calmly replied, "Leader, Glicus and I were originally tribesmen of the Mazi Tribe. Because we committed a grave mistake, we were exiled and wandered to Segestica together.

Although Glicus is younger than me, he is very clever. He helped me make decisions in my affairs. Not long after he escaped back last year, he found me quietly and persuaded me to join the Nix Tribe, and I agreed... By the way, the other six companions who followed Glicus in joining the Nix are also from Mazi."

"Oh, I see." After listening, Maximus said solemnly, "Glicus has done a great job! You all have done a great job! Once we capture the East Village and you all return, I will fulfill my previous promise to make you all official members of the Nix and also record your great merit so you can advance your tribal citizen level and gain more land."

Of course, Sirisis had heard from Glicus about the matter of meritorious promotion, and he appeared very excited.

Maximus talked with him a bit more to make sure that Glicus hadn't mentioned any method to assist the army in capturing the East Village, and then he had the guards escort him out and arranged for him to stay in the residence.

He then summoned Camillus to have a brief discussion on the issue of having an insider in Segestica East Camp.

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The next day, at the crack of dawn, Maximus arrived at the riverbank. Camillus had already assembled three battalions of the Third Legion, lined up and ready. There were 83 ships densely placed on the riverbank, with four soldiers without armor or weapons standing beside each ship. They were all sailors responsible for rowing the boats.

"Leader, we are ready to cross the river." Camillus saluted.

Maximus turned his gaze: The light was dim, the river was shrouded in white mist, and visibility was limited; even the flowing river couldn't be seen, let alone the scene across the river...

Can we sail under such circumstances? Maximus felt worried but did not reveal it. He returned a solemn salute, "Camillus, it's up to your Fourth Legion now!"

"Leader, rest assured!" Camillus spoke confidently, then turned to the troops and gave orders.

Soon, two Centurion soldiers helped the sailors push the ships into the river. Then, each boarded a ship, with about four sailors and two to three fully-armed soldiers on each vessel. The sailors began to row vigorously, and the ships quickly drifted away, swallowed by the thick fog, disappearing from sight, with only the faint sound of rowing...

Maximus stood quietly by the river, waiting anxiously with Camillus and other soldiers.

Not long after, a series of clear bird calls pierced through the fog and reached everyone's ears.

The soldiers all looked excited but didn't dare make noise.

"Leader, they have successfully landed!" Camillus exclaimed with excitement as he waved his fist, showing that he wasn't as confident as he appeared.

"Well done, Camillus!" Maximus encouraged.

The return of the ships wasn't as fast as their departure because they didn't head straight across but angled downwards. This allowed them to leverage the water's speed, making it faster to reach the shore while also being safer during navigation. Once ashore, being further from the East Village significantly reduced the chance of being spotted by the enemy.

However, on the return trip, the ships had to go upstream; thus, it was more time-consuming and laborious. Nonetheless, they eventually all succeeded in crossing, and then another two Centurion soldiers boarded the ships and sailed away...

As the number of soldiers waiting on the West Bank of the Sava River gradually decreased, Valerius arrived with over a hundred Crossbow Soldiers, who were also carrying six wooden ladders.

"Leader, last night I had my men gather some wood from various residences and asked the carpenters among the Segestica citizens to make us some wooden ladders..." Valerius said calmly, without any boast in his tone.

"Well done, Valerius!" Maximus praised sincerely. He was too exhausted last night, with many matters to attend to, and forgot about making such preparations. Thankfully, the experienced Valerius thought of it.

Camillus was even more delighted, expressing his gratitude repeatedly, "Valerius, thank you! Thank you! This makes us more confident in capturing the East Village!"

The soldiers at the riverbank had already been mostly transported away, and Camillus was preparing to board the ship. Before departing, he bid farewell to Maximus.

"After taking the East Village, you and the soldiers may have to stay there for a while. It's best not to launch any attacks, focus on holding and managing the village, listen to Glicus's suggestions, and try to have him and his men, along with the Segestica Recruits in your team, promote to the Segestica citizens over there to persuade them to join our tribe, just like last night..." Maximus instructed.

"Yes, Leader, I remember it all!"

"May the Danu Goddess protect you!" Maximus solemnly raised his right hand and uttered the words.

Camillus hesitated for a moment, then his eyebrows relaxed, and he saluted with excitement, "Thank you, Leader!"

As more and more battle-ready soldiers were transported to the opposite bank and were almost entirely ferried over, the sun had risen high in the sky, the light becoming bright, and the fog thinning. The outline of the Segestica East Camp on the opposite bank came into view. Similarly, a large group of Nix Soldiers, forming up about a hundred meters away from the South Gate of the East Village, became visible. Therefore, it wasn't long before the alarmed cries of the Segestica Warriors from inside the East Village were clearly audible to Maximus.

Maximus grew nervous, although he discussed with Camillus the previous night and felt confident about capturing the East Village by surprise. But the risks were equally significant. If they couldn't seize it quickly and allowed the leader of Segestica East Camp to rally the citizens and stabilize morale for a staunch defense, Camillus's troops would be in trouble. They lacked strong siege weapons and only carried a day's worth of provisions. If the enemy organized a fleet to blockade and intercept the Sava River, Camillus and his soldiers would be in a dire situation.

Thus, Maximus clenched his fists, his eyes unblinking, fixed on the progress of the battle across the river...

He didn't know that the person who destroyed the pontoon bridge, preventing the Nix Army from capturing the East Village last night, was currently in trouble.

Pulikas had imprisoned the steward of the East Village yesterday afternoon and then led his men to cut the pontoon bridge, temporarily securing the village.

However, the fleeing citizens who entered the East Village did not gratefully thank him. Instead, they watched helplessly as their relatives and friends across the river were unable to escape because the bridge was down, surrounded by the Nix Army, and many wept loudly.

With the instigation of those with ulterior motives, they grew resentful of Pulikas, gathered together, and demanded an explanation from him.

Pulikas hid embarrassedly in his residence, relying on his guards to avoid being beaten, but as a result, he was trapped in his house, unable to leave, and his previous prestige among the tribesmen dissipated in this conflict.

Moreover, he faced another major problem.

Although Cabdes personally led an expedition against the Nix, he did not relax his vigilance against Pulikas and those opposing him. Consequently, most of Pulikas's tribe warriors were drafted to fight, and Pulikas himself was placed in the East Village under the claim of "needing him to stabilize the Main Camp and maintain order," keeping him close for surveillance. Therefore, he didn't have many men with him.

The main armed force in the East Village came from the warriors of the tribe led by Chief Kaxikes, who were temporarily responsible for the entire tribe's affairs. When the Nix Army attacked, they panicked, allowing Pulikas to seize the opportunity to imprison Kaxikes quietly.

Originally, Pulikas intended to persuade these warriors to join his forces and gain control over the entire village in the temporarily secure state after dismantling the pontoon bridge, enhancing the defense against the enemy. However, the uprising of the refugees interrupted his plans, and in the process of searching for their chief, the warriors of the East Village discovered clues and angrily sought an explanation from Pulikas.

Pulikas had no choice but to find Kaxikes inside the house for negotiations.

He told Kaxikes: With the Nix Army pressing on the border, regardless of whether Cabdes drowned or was captured, the position of Great Chief was already vacant. He hoped Kaxikes would support making Andres' son Ankasus the Great Chief immediately to stabilize morale, boost spirits, and rally the village's citizens as well as remaining warriors from various tribes on both banks to fight the enemy together and ultimately drive them out of the territory.

Kaxikes was a cousin of Andres and a blood relative of the Segestica Great Leader. His tribe was not far from the East Village and was not weak in strength. However, due to a lack of prowess in combat, Andres didn't value him during his reign, which led to his resentment and extended hatred towards Andres' family. Cabdes had treated him well in the past, which is why Kaxikes contributed significantly to Cabdes becoming the Great Chief.

Pulikas imprisoned him, harmed his prestige among the tribe, and being vengeful, he naturally hated Pulikas. He knew that Pulikas was in trouble because he was urgently seeking negotiations. Thus, no matter how Pulikas persuaded him, he remained silent.

It wasn't until Pulikas half-kneeled and apologized that Kaxikes slightly wavered, pretentiously hesitating for a while before proposing his demand: Ankasus could become the Great Chief, but Kaxikes must oversee all affairs of the entire tribe.

Chapter 404: Disappointment

Upon hearing this, Pulikas understood that the other party wanted to become "the second Cabdes," and he immediately felt a surge of anger: He had already compromised so much, only to be mocked by this person, considered by others as a coward!

So, he angrily broke off the negotiations and continued to imprison him.

Fortunately, it was already late, and the crowd surrounding the manor had dispersed. The warriors, wary and hesitant, did not dare to storm in forcefully.

Pulikas lay in bed, tossing and turning, unable to sleep: At times, he felt he had acted too rashly, making the situation difficult to control; at times, he hated Kaxikes's cunning and greed, the people's ignorance and lack of unity in resisting the enemy, instead causing trouble for the one who saved their lives; at times, he worried that if the Nix Army attacked the northern bank while the camp remained in such disarray, they would be unable to fend off the enemy's assault...

In the morning, Pulikas awoke to find the sheets soaked with sweat.

After a night of torment, he finally made a painful decision and went to see Kaxikes again, agreeing to his request from the previous night. However, he hoped Kaxikes would quickly settle the refugees within the camp, gather men for defense, and seek aid from nearby tribes...

Kaxikes readily agreed, but on the way to being released and taken back to his residence by his warriors, he was thinking about how to send someone to capture Pulikas, humiliate him, and vent his frustration.

Just then, a guard anxiously reported: Many Nix Soldiers have appeared outside the south gate!

Kaxikes was shocked and hurried off to the southern wooden wall to inspect, where he found Pulikas already present.

At this moment, neither man had the heart for scheming. They both stared at the countless fully-armed Nix Soldiers arranging ranks not far outside the camp, their scalps tingling. They hadn't expected the Nix to cross the river and attack so swiftly, and they regretted the time wasted due to their internal strife the night before.

Faced with impending disaster, Kaxikes was at a loss, but Pulikas remained relatively calm, as he was an experienced subordinate of Andres and had been through many battles.

Therefore, he requested Kaxikes to allow him to command all the warriors in the camp to resist the enemy's attack. He asked Kaxikes to return to the camp to gather more men to assist in defending the

stronghold and organize the people who had boats to patrol the riverbanks and intercept the reinforcements of the Nix.

All the warriors within the camp, including some nobles, took to the wall, totaling just over 300 men. Despite Pulikas's efforts to boost morale, the sound of the trumpet reached their ears, and seeing the fully-armed enemies advancing fiercely towards the camp, many felt weak in the knees and trembled all over.

The East Village was either the residences of leaders and nobles, who usually managed their tribesmen at their respective tribes and only came to reside here during tribal meetings or ceremonies, or the humble homes of some clanspeople of the Great Chief. Originally, the population within the camp was not large, and in the past few battles, these clanspeople were either captured or killed, leaving few capable of holding a spear to fight. Therefore, Kaxikes could only personally go and mobilize the refugees who had fled into the camp to join the battle.

But as soon as he reached the gathering place of the people and before he could say anything, he was surrounded by some people demanding food from him.

It turned out that since last night, when he was imprisoned and Pulikas was trapped in his own manor, with the two main figures absent, no one was there to settle the numerous refugees. Fearing trouble, the residents and nobles within the camp had shut their doors, leaving only some brave refugees to sneak into empty manors to find food, while others went hungry and slept by the pontoon and roadsides. Upon waking the next day, their hunger was even worse.

Kaxikes couldn't have imagined the camp would be in such a state and could only persuade them to first help defend the camp, promising to have the servants prepare food for them afterward.

The people were unwilling, insisting on filling their stomachs before doing anything.

As both sides argued, fires broke out throughout the camp, followed by loud cries among the refugees: "The enemy has breached the camp! Run! Flee the camp, or you'll be captured by the enemy!"

The already panicked refugees, who had been frightened by the sounds of fighting from outside the southern wall, exploded into chaos. Incited by provocateurs, they desperately rushed towards the

northern and eastern gates, where no combat sounds had been heard. Kaxikes and his subordinates, trying to stop them, were knocked down and quietly trampled amidst the crowd...

The uprising of the refugees quickly affected the original residents of the camp. Unaware of the situation, they too panicked and fled.

The inside of the East Village was in complete disarray...

Already low in morale, the Segestica warriors, seeing the chaos within the camp, had no will to fight. Despite Pulikas's loud shouts, he found it impossible to stop the warriors from fleeing.

He knew the defeat was sealed, sighed deeply, and hurriedly joined the retreating soldiers, but instead of returning to his manor, he headed to where Andres's son, Ankasus, resided.

Upon pushing open the gate, he saw Ankasus and his subordinates standing anxiously in the courtyard. As soon as they saw him, Ankasus urgently asked, "Uncle Pulikas, many people outside were shouting that the enemy had attacked, is it true?!"

Pulikas, with a solemn expression, gravely replied, "Yes, we've lost. We must flee quickly!"

Ankasus panicked immediately: "Flee... Where shall we flee to?"

Pulikas, having observed the situation from the wooden wall, said, "There are too many people in the camp causing chaos, blocking the roads to the various gates, and we can't escape. We must take boats downriver to the south!"

"Ah, to the south? Isn't going back to the tribe better?!" Ankasus was somewhat reluctant, as he was unfamiliar with the south, never having been there.

Why head south? It was not something that could be explained in a few words, so Pulikas just urged urgently, "The enemy has already invaded; we must leave quickly, or we won't be able to leave at all!..."

Pulikas's continuous urging caused unease among his subordinates, let alone the young Ankasus, who followed Pulikas out of the manor in a daze, running frantically towards the river port.

At the river port, chaos reigned as people fought each other for boats, screams and splashes filling the air...

Pulikas led them through the turmoil to a small dock at the innermost part of the river port, where three boats were moored. Four heavy armor warriors with longswords were guarding the place, deterring anyone from causing trouble.

When Pulikas learned that the Nix had crossed the Sava River and were preparing to assault the camp, he had little confidence in his ability to defend East Village, and so he had discreetly arranged for a retreat.

The group boarded the boats, which departed the dock and drifted downstream.

Pulikas reluctantly looked back at the camp, his gaze filled with melancholy: More than a decade ago, he had followed Andres to seize this camp from the Skodisqi people through bloody combat. More than a decade later, he repeated the pattern, allowing the Nix to capture it. It was like a dream...

.....

Watching the Nix Soldiers flood into the camp across the river, Maximus exhaled a long breath, finally relaxing. It was then he realized his legs were a bit numb from standing for too long.

"Congratulations on capturing the Segestica Main Camp and becoming the new ruler of this land!" came a congratulatory voice from beside him.

Maximus turned to glance at Casinos, and while moving his legs, he replied with a faint "Hmm."

Maximus's indifference left Casinos a bit uneasy, so he mustered the courage to speak softly, "Leader, most of the leaders and clan chiefs of the Segestica Tribes around East Village are my direct relatives. I am willing to persuade them to join the Nix and become your tribesmen!"

This made Maximus pay attention. "Are you saying that these Segestica Tribes on the east bank are blood relatives of your Great Chief's lineage?"

"Not all of them," Casinos said, with a touch of boastfulness, indicating a certain spot across the river with his hand, "From there southward, those tribes aren't, as their kinship is far removed from us!"

Maximus squinted his eyes, looked in the indicated direction, then blandly said, "I will consider what you propose."

Disappointed that Maximus did not immediately agree, Casinos dared not speak further.

Maximus then ignored him and turned to look around. On the riverbank, besides his attendants, Guard, Crossbow Soldiers, and some soldiers from the Third Legion, were some of the Segestica citizens who remained from the previous night.

These people had witnessed the fall of East Village and were now somewhat lost, as since the independence of Segestica, this camp had always been the power center and symbol of the Segestica Tribe. Now, with it fallen, for some Segestica people, it felt as if the sky had collapsed, leaving them without a backbone.

Having focused on the battle at the opposite bank earlier, Maximus hadn't had the mind for other concerns. Now that the battle of East Village was over, he called Valerius over and asked, "How many Segestica people have joined us Nix since last night?"

"103 people."

"Only 103 people?!" Maximus was a bit surprised. There were at least 5,000 Segestica citizens surrounded by the pontoon bridge last night. When asked if anyone was willing to join the Nix, he distinctly recalled at least half the people shouting their willingness, yet there were so few. Did the old man get it wrong?

Valerius understood what he was thinking and quickly explained, "The Segestica people were surrounded by us last night, and out of fear, they shouted along to 'willing to join.' But when it came to

registering, they hesitated. These 100 or more people joined because they were familiar with Sethonos and those Segestica Recruits, and were persuaded by them. However, now that we've completely occupied the camp, if we persuade them again, more might join."

Chapter 405: Reinforcements Arrive

"It seems that persuading the Segestica people with words alone is not enough. We'll have to resort to other methods..." Maximus contemplated.

"Leader, though few Segestica people joined our tribe last night, many Skodisqi people chose to join us. There were more than 2,000 of them!"

Maximus was stunned for a moment and then overjoyed: "Valerius, why didn't you tell me such great news earlier! Hold on—when we entered the camp last night, we didn't see any Skodisqi slaves. Could it be that the Skodisqi new recruits in our ranks went out of the camp last night to find them?"

Facing Maximus's doubts, Valerius explained: "Leader, our soldiers wouldn't dare leave without orders. These newly joined Skodisqi are actually the slaves of this camp! Here's what happened..."

Apparently, since last year, when Gowes led some Skodisqi to become mountain bandits and repeatedly raided Segestica villages, the Segestica people began tightening control over the Skodisqi slaves within their territory. Among the decrees issued was one mandating that Skodisqi slaves must remain indoors by dusk each day, forbidden to leave under threat of being killed on sight.

When the Nix Army entered Segestica territory and launched the attack, the Skodisqi slaves were already following the decree, staying indoors as usual. Seeing the enemy invasion, the Segestica people prioritized their own escape, abandoning concern for the slaves. The Skodisqi slaves, hearing the commotion outside, didn't dare leave their houses due to past bloody lessons. Even though it was evident that Segestica was under enemy attack amidst the chaos, they considered it safer to stay hidden indoors.

It wasn't until nighttime, when soldiers from the Fourth Legion occupied the homes within the camp, that they discovered the Skodisqi slaves hiding inside. Through communication facilitated by the Skodisqi new recruits in their ranks, these slaves willingly joined Nix and even helped the soldiers prepare food...

When Maximus heard this, he immediately deduced: "In other words... these 2,000 newly joined slaves are just from this West Village. In the East Village and other surrounding villages, there are likely many more Skodisqi slaves?"

"Yes, Leader, that seems to be the case."

"Good! Good!..." Maximus grew excited. The Segestica people's temporary reluctance to join didn't matter; the Skodisqi slaves throughout the territory, soon to be liberated from oppression, would surely become loyal supporters of Nix. With their addition, the tribe's population shortage could be significantly alleviated, and they could occupy as much of this fertile land as possible!

Thinking about population, Maximus raised another question: "Valerius, yesterday you led people to prepare dinner. Was there a substantial supply of food in the camp?"

"The camp doesn't have a dedicated granary. Each household has some food, but not much, as these residences are only temporary homes for various tribal leaders and clan elders.

I didn't check the houses of the commoners, as, Leader, you had just given them a speech last night, and I feared that such actions might provoke their dissatisfaction. However, I inquired among those Segestica people who just joined us, and they mentioned that the tribal leaders and elders store a considerable amount of food in their own households across the villages."

Maximus had posed the question casually, not expecting that Valerius had already considered the matter thoroughly and taken preparations. This made Maximus look at him in a new light.

After contemplating briefly, Maximus instructed his attendant to summon Eorokus.

Eorokus, the First Battalion Captain of the Third Legion, was originally part of Maximus's Supply Camp, and joined during the recruitment wave from Napolet's sailors and laborers. Eorokus had both considerable ability and great luck. Despite the Third Legion's tumultuous fate since its formation, having suffered significant casualties in several campaigns, Eorokus not only gained many merits but also remained uninjured, steadily rising to the rank of First Battalion Captain, second only to the Legion Commander. He was highly trusted by Carmine, who entrusted Eorokus to guard the West Village while attacking the East Village.

At the moment, Eorokus rushed up before Maximus and saluted, saying, "Leader, please issue your command, and I shall execute it resolutely!"

"It's not a major matter; don't be so tense." Maximus laughed and said, "The East Village has already been conquered. There likely won't be significant battles ahead, so relax a bit."

Eorokus still maintained a serious expression, fixating on Maximus.

This reminded Maximus of Carmine's remark that "Eorokus handles matters with utmost earnestness," so he restrained his expression, speaking solemnly: "I need you to dispatch some troops from the camp to nearby villages for two missions. First, persuade the Skodisqi slaves in those villages to join our ranks. Second, confiscate the food reserves held by the tribal leaders and nobles in these villages and transport the supplies back to the camp..."

Hmm, I advise that you send some of the newly joined Skodisqi slaves along with the troops. This will make it easier to convince their compatriots and assist in food transportation. If Segestica people obstruct your efforts to gather food, don't show them any mercy!"

"Understood!" Eorokus quickly departed.

Maximus turned to his attendants: "Who wants to take a boat to the far bank to relay my orders to Commander Carmine?"

"I do!" The attendants responded unanimously and loudly.

Maximus nodded in satisfaction, pointing to the oldest youth among them: "This time, Markus, you go."

Markus exclaimed joyfully, "Thank you, Leader!"

"Don't get too excited yet; make sure to carry out the task properly." Maximus beckoned him closer and said in a low voice: "Once you find Carmine, have him carry out three tasks swiftly. First, persuade the Skodisqi slaves on the East Bank to join Nix. Second, once East Village is securely defended, gather the

food reserves of Segestica tribal leaders and nobles from all the villages on the East Bank and relocate them to East Village. Third—"

Maximus's voice grew heavier: "While collecting the food, find ways to eliminate as many of the Segestica Great Chief's family's leaders and nobles as possible!... Have you noted everything?"

"Yes!"

"Go quickly!"

"Understood!"

Cassinus' earlier remarks made Maximus realize that the Segestica Great Chief's family had too many kin and concentrated power, making them highly unstable factors in Nix's takeover of Segestica. To ensure a smoother governance of this territory, even at the risk of triggering disturbances, he deemed their eradication necessary!

Maximus stood in place, pondering whether Markus's trip would stabilize the East Bank's situation, with a trace of worry in his heart.

After some time, he returned his focus and said to Valerius: "Let's go and meet our newly joined tribal members in Nix."

The Skodisqi slaves had already heard plenty about the Nix Leader from their compatriots, holding great reverence for the young leader.

However, Maximus interacted with them with a constant smile and a gentle demeanor, answering their queries earnestly, which greatly eased their concerns.

The Skodisqi slaves, having previously suffered severe oppression and hardships, saw Nix's policies concerning reserve tribe members as a significant improvement to their current plight, leaving them optimistic about their future lives in Nix.

Maximus's interactions with them were relaxed and pleasant.

By afternoon, however, when he met the 103 newly recruited Segestica citizens, the situation became quite different.

Although these Segestica people had lived in hardship over recent years due to warfare, they still had houses and land, and as Segestica tribe members, they held some rights. Their standing was far superior to that of the Skodisqi slaves, and they accordingly had greater demands.

During their meeting with Maximus, they raised concerns such as: since they had joined Nix Tribe, why would they need to work for three more years before being given land?... They had houses, property, and land, so why should these things not remain theirs after joining Nix Tribe?...

Maximus patiently explained to them, but the Segestica citizens were visibly dissatisfied.

After sending them away, Maximus stayed in his room lost in thought.

At dusk, as Maximus was having dinner, an attendant came to report: "Leader, Quintus, Volenus, Capito, Gaius, Pigeris, and the others have arrived—"

The attendant hadn't finished speaking when Maximus abruptly stood up and strode out of the room. He met Quintus, Volenus, and the group as soon as he reached the courtyard.

"Ah, at last! I've been waiting for you for ages!" Maximus blurted out joyfully.

"Leader!... Leader!... Leader!..." The group hurriedly saluted.

"You must be starving after traveling all day. Tilius, go have Valerius prepare more food," Maximus instructed the attendant, then called out to the group: "Come, come, let's head inside. We'll eat as we discuss."

The group entered the room and sat around the table.

Maximus first asked with concern, "Did you face any trouble during your journey here?"

Quintus replied, "The journey went smoothly. As we passed through Segestica villages, the Segestica people hid inside their houses. None dared to confront us. It seems, Leader, that your capture of their main camp has completely crushed their morale...

Oh, the First Legion, carrying some supplies, traveled slower, so Fesaros had them camp near Lin Kou Village tonight. They'll arrive tomorrow."