

Perish 416

Chapter 416: Search of the Nix Soldiers

Though it was said like this, Siris was still a bit uneasy at heart. After all, the tribal traditions were deeply rooted, and during times of war, the power of the leaders and clan chiefs was immense. Any order beneficial to the tribe and the clan must be obeyed by the tribe members, or else severe punishment would follow.

Therefore, after Siris had a falling out with the Clan Leader, tribe members frequently visited him to persuade him to apologize to Icarus, but he refused to comply.

By dusk, suddenly no one came anymore because the Nix people had entered the village.

More than a hundred fully armed Nix Soldiers, with a dozen Carriages, had just entered the village. All the Segestica citizens who were still moving about the village ran back to their homes as quickly as possible, shutting doors and windows tight.

Of course, Siris was no exception.

No one knew how much time had passed. "Dong! Dong! Dong!" His courtyard gate was knocked.

Although Siris had reasonable and well-founded arguments when persuading the tribe members, when the Nix Soldiers came knocking, he felt equally uneasy. Trying to appear calm, he comforted his trembling wife and children with a few words, then went to the courtyard and carefully unbolted the gate.

Outside stood a dozen Nix Soldiers and a Scodisqi slave, whom he recognized as belonging to the Icarus family.

The leading Nix Soldier stared at him sharply and asked in fluent Pannoni Language, "How many Scodisqi slaves are there in your home?!"

Siris was taken aback. He had been guessing why the Nix people were seeking him out at this time, but he never expected them to open with such a question.

"Answer me, how many Scodisqi slaves?!" The Nix Soldier sternly reiterated the question, raising his voice.

Siris snapped back to his senses and shook his head: "None, there are no Scodisqi slaves in my house."

As he answered, he noticed that the Nix Soldier questioning him was actually a Skodisqi, which bewildered him a bit.

His expression led the soldier to misunderstand, and he gritted his teeth and said, "Damn Segestica person, daring to lie. Do you have a death wish—"

A slightly older soldier behind him pressed his shoulder, whispering, "Alright, Taripasi, calm down! Do your task properly, don't carry too many personal feelings!"

The soldier hastily defended himself, "Boss, but he's lying on purpose. We've checked so many houses; every house had slaves!"

"Whether there are slaves or not, we'll know after checking." The man referred to as "Boss" was actually a centurion. He stepped forward and said in broken Pannoni Language, "We... are ordered to rescue all... Scodisqi slaves. Regardless of what you say, we have to check ourselves. But I promise you! As long as you cooperate, we won't harm anyone or destroy anything in your house!"

Siris glanced at the Nix Captain striving to appear amiable, then looked at the Skodisqi Soldier behind him filled with hatred, and finally took another glance at the dozen fully armed Nix Soldiers. He quickly made his decision: "Then come in and check. My wife and children are inside, please don't startle them."

He stepped aside to make way.

Siris's courtyard was relatively simple, with just a single large house, a pigsty, and an animal pen within the wooden fence enclosure.

Three soldiers went inside for a round, without any unnecessary actions, quickly completed the inspection, and exited the courtyard.

Siris breathed a sigh of relief and released his tightly held wife and children.

"Indeed, there aren't any," reported the soldier in charge of inspection truthfully.

The Nix centurion immediately spoke earnestly to the Skodisqi Soldier beside him, "Did you hear that? There's none in his house! Your recently rescued compatriot already said, 'This man doesn't have Scodisqi slaves in his house.' We can come to check, but you doubt your own compatriots and harbor even stronger hostility towards the people here. That's inappropriate!

Taripasi, our leader, Legion Commander, Great Captain, Centurion have repeatedly said that for us Nix to gain a firm foothold here, we must unite all possible forces as much as possible... If you can't understand this, I suggest you apply to leave our First Legion and return to Snowdonia or Westeni, where at least you don't have to face as many Segestica citizens, to avoid making a big mistake later, not only punishing yourself but also making us suffer with you."

"Boss, I will never leave the Third Legion! I'll never leave you! I'll... I'll change... can't I change?" The soldier called Taripasi was a bit flustered, repeatedly pleading.

"That depends on your future performance." The centurion replied sternly, then looked at Siris, switching to Pannoni Language and spoke gently, "We've completed the inspection and won't disturb you any longer. Rest well."

Facing the goodwill extended by the Nix people, Siris remained expressionless and did not reply.

The centurion curiously asked, "By the way, why don't you have any Scodisqi slaves in your home? I see others here have more or less."

Siris originally did not want to answer, but seeing the other side's persistent demeanor demanding an answer, he reluctantly replied, "I have limbs, I can manage. I don't need them."

The centurion gave a sly smile: "But I heard from the Scodisqi slaves here that because you grew up in a Scodisqi household, your attitude towards Scodisqi is different from your tribe members, so you repeatedly refused the slaves that your leader wanted to allocate to you, am I right?"

"Nonsense!" Siris finally couldn't suppress his emotions and cursed.

The centurion laughed heartily, "Siris, you're a peculiar Segestica person. I remember your name now. I hope we can meet again."

After speaking, he waved to the other soldiers, "Brothers, let's go, on to the next house."

"Please wait a moment." Siris gathered his courage and asked loudly, "Today you came to our tribe only to free the Scodisqi slaves in the tribe?"

"Of course not just that." Perhaps finding Siris agreeable, the centurion stopped and responded, "We are also here to collect food, but this has nothing to do with you ordinary tribe members."

"Collect food..." Siris's heart tensed, and he quickly asked again, "If it has nothing to do with us, then who does it concern?"

"You will find out soon enough." The centurion clearly didn't want to disclose more, leading the soldiers forward.

Siris hurried a few steps and urgently asked, "Can you tell me, what exactly do you Nix intend to do with us?!"

The centurion turned back to him and said, "No need to rush. You should find out by tomorrow."

Tomorrow?... Siris wanted to ask more, but the centurion no longer paid him any attention and made his way to the next household.

By early evening, when the Nix people left the village, their ranks were significantly larger, not only adding over 100 Scodisqi slaves but also nine more Carriages, each one fully loaded with food.

It had been quite a while since the Nix team left. Some Segestica citizens only then tentatively emerged to scout around, and they soon heard wailing from the homes of the various leaders and clan chiefs.

When they went to inquire, they learned: The Nix had almost emptied the food stores of the tribal leaders and clan chiefs, leaving only a small portion, and had seized their Carriages usually used for transporting food and goods. The family members of the leaders and several clan chiefs had tried to stop the Nix from looting but were knocked down, and some were even injured...

Had the Nix finally revealed their ferocity, beginning to plunder and slaughter?... The Segestica citizens, who had lost the Scodisqi slaves, felt terrorized.

Accordingly, that night, some people again ran to Siris for advice on "what should they do?".

In encountering the events that happened in the tribe today, Siris himself felt a bit puzzled. He spoke honestly to everyone who asked him about his thoughts: "I also don't know what to do, but when those Nix came to my house, I did ask them what they would do to us. The leader told me, 'By tomorrow, we will know,' so let's wait until tomorrow to see the situation before deciding."

"Siris, these Nix not only stole our slaves but also took the food of our leaders and clan chiefs, and injured their family members... I think their leader's words in the Main Camp were all lies, don't forget that among those Nicos who stormed into the village today, there were Skodisqi! The Skodisqi hate us, they will surely incite the Nix to kill us. We can't just wait for death here!"

"Hey, calm down. If the Nix wanted to kill us, they wouldn't have let you come back yesterday after surrounding you in the Main Camp. I still say, even if you want to escape now, where would you go? Can you bear to abandon the homeland you've lived in for decades? If tomorrow the Nix really intend to kill us, I won't let them have it easy, either. I'll die on the land of my homeland if necessary!"

Siris's persuasion and resolute spirit calmed many people down. Aside from a very small number of family members of leaders and clan chiefs who fled the village that night, other tribe members chose to stay and observe.

The next morning, a Centurion of the First Legion of the Nix Tribe arrived at the village, and the centurion was Stags.

His team went straight to the village center, where the tribal leader's main house was located. There was a large open space in front used for gathering tribe members to discuss or to form teams for going out to war.

Stags carefully inspected the surroundings, then said to the centurions, "I will announce the leader's order to the Segestica people of this village here. You each lead your men to bring everyone in this village to me!"

Chapter 417: Moving into the Village

"Yes, Captain!"

"Casaridaoa."

"Captain, I'm here!"

"According to the intelligence from the Third Legion that arrived here yesterday, the leader of this tribe and some nobles have already followed their Great Chief to attack our territory. Now, it is estimated that they are either dead or captured. Only two nobles remain in the village. Take your men to seize them, but be careful not to harm others."

"Yes!"

"Proconsus, assign four men to me. I heard that the Third Legion plundered the leader and nobles' grain here yesterday. I need to see how much grain is left to sustain our squad."

"Captain, don't worry about the grain," Casaridaoa interrupted. "Even if there's not much left from the leader and nobles, it should be enough for us for three days. After three days, the grain from those who have become Foreign Auxiliary Segestica people, from the families that fled, and sixty percent of those who joined the tribe, should add up to quite a bit. By then, we will negotiate with the transport team to leave enough grain for us."

"Hey, you're quite the quick thinker, no wonder you used to live well in Sarabia just by extorting slaves."

Stags' praise made Casaridaoa protest immediately, "Captain, you promised not to bring that up again!"

"Ah, sorry, my mistake, I forgot!" Stags hurriedly apologized and quickly changed the topic, "Nikocus, prepare well. Once everyone comes to the square, it will be up to you to persuade them to join us, the Nix."

Nikocus was a Segestica recruit, extroverted and eloquent. He originally did not belong to Stags' Centurion but was requested repeatedly by Stags from Great Captain Bubius.

At this moment, although Nikocus was a bit nervous, he said with determination, "Captain Stags, rest assured, I am ready!"

Stags patted him on the shoulder firmly, then looked at the others, "Alright, everyone, move immediately. We must get this done before noon!"

The door of Selis' house was knocked again by Nix soldiers. After opening the door, the Nix soldier who greeted him spoke politely: Please, Selis' family, go to the central square of the village to listen to the captain of their tribe announce the new decree for the Segestica citizens by the Nix Tribe.

Selis, more curious than uneasy, complied with the request of the Nix soldiers, calming his nervous wife while leading her to the village center.

Along the way, he saw other tribe members also being ushered out by Nix soldiers. For those who refused to go, the Nix soldiers resorted not to persuasion but enforcement. Unfortunately, violence could not be avoided, using shields to push and short swords to threaten. Even the most stubborn tribe members, facing the sudden change in demeanor of the Nix soldiers, had to comply for the sake of their and their families' lives.

The tribesmen mostly appeared tense and uneasy, not daring to say much when passing by Selis, everyone silently walking to the village center square.

Stags stood on a haystack at the edge of the square, observing the people of Segestica gathering from various roads.

He noticed hundreds of Segestica people gathered, almost filling the square, yet there were few young and able tribe members, many were disabled. The boys mostly were under twelve or thirteen, while the elderly men were likely over forty-five, with gray hair and beards, some even unstable on their feet. The majority were women, fewer were frail, and more were robust, and some families were without elderly men completely, just women bringing children...

It seems that because of the war, the women in this village have become the main workforce... Stags sighed inwardly, keeping a solemn expression on his face.

Once his subordinates came to report "all the people of this tribe have been brought over," he immediately spoke loudly in stiff Illyrian, "Segestica people, I am the First Legion, Second Brigade, Fourth Centurion Captain of the Nix Tribe—Stags! I have been ordered to lead my men here, and we will manage this village for the foreseeable future! Now my soldier Nikocus will tell you the new decree issued by Leader Maximus of the Nix Tribe; you'd better listen carefully!"

The square was unusually quiet, Segestica citizens blankly looking up at Stags standing high on the haystack, then seeing a Nix soldier also standing on the haystack, removing his helmet, some felt surprised as the soldier had a complete Segestica appearance.

The soldier calmly looked down at the crowd in the square and loudly introduced himself, "My name is Nikocus. Some of you might know me because I grew up in a tribe not far from here. The leader was Laxias; later, I joined the new tribe built by Leader Wallis, fought the Aldeans, and later when the Nix came, I was captured and joined the Nix Tribe..."

Because I am your fellow countryman and you can understand what I say, the captain asked me to explain the new decree issued by Leader Maximus of the Nix Tribe regarding this land and you all!"

At this, he raised his voice and spoke with an exceptionally loud voice, "From today, this village and the surrounding land belong to the territory of the Nix Tribe!"

The square remained utterly silent.

Stags waited a moment, seeing no objections, which spared him some trouble, he nodded to Nikocus.

Nikocus then continued to speak loudly at a slower pace, "Fellow countrymen, you must be wondering, 'What about us living here?'. Don't worry, Leader Maximus has specially formulated a new decree for you. As long as you are willing to join the Nix Tribe and swear in front of the soon-to-be-built Danu Goddess Temple to be loyal to the Nix Tribe and never betray—"

Nikocus paused here, seeing the surprised faces of the Segestica populace that had been silent, starting to murmur, he immediately said loudly, "You should not be surprised. The Nix Tribe members, like us, honor the Danu Goddess, the Mother of All Things. Soon, a Danu Goddess Temple will be built on this land, allowing everyone to go and worship and pray!"

A small commotion immediately arose in the square.

"... After you join the Nix Tribe, you will become Reserve Tribe Members, and the tribe will allocate 50 acres of land to each household—"

This statement caused a larger commotion than before.

Nikocus seized the opportunity to say, "That's right, each family that joins the Nix Tribe will be allocated 50 acres of land! Think about it, have you ever owned so much land before?! In any case, my family didn't, and the tribesmen in my former tribe didn't either; only the leader and clan leaders owned more than 50 acres.

I originally chose to join Leader Wallis's new tribe to avoid competing for land with my brother so that our family's land could support my brother's family. Unexpectedly... I eventually joined the Nix Tribe, where I lived... very well!

Furthermore, with the protection of the Danu Goddess, I achieved successive merits in this war and am now promoted to a Second-class Tribe Member in the Nix Tribe, earning sixty acres of land—don't be surprised! Fifty acres is your initial reward for joining the Nix Tribe, and if you in the future..."

Nikocus earnestly explained the Twenty Peerage System of the Nix Tribe to his compatriots, seeing everyone in the square with their mouths agape in astonishment, some showing longing in their eyes...

With some satisfaction, he said, "In our previous tribe, we worked ourselves to the bone, and the land was always that much, ordinary tribe members remained ordinary tribe members! But in the Nix Tribe, as long as you continue achieving merits, you can have more, maybe even change your identity, becoming a noble like the leader and clan leaders!"—"

"Nonsense!" Suddenly, a woman in the crowd shouted, "To become a leader and clan leader requires noble lineage and must be recognized by the Divine. This has been our Pannonian sacred tradition, and anyone who violates this sacred tradition will be cursed by the Divine!"

"Did you know that Leader Maximus of the Nix Tribe is a descendant of the Danu Goddess, favored by the Divine? Therefore, although the Nix Tribe is small, the Pannonian Tribe Alliance has repeatedly dispatched large armies yet has always suffered defeat! These decrees were issued by Leader Maximus after receiving divine inspiration. How could they lead to divine punishment for us!"

Nikocus confidently proclaimed the words he had heard, which Emmerich deliberately spread aloud: "Because the Danu Goddess created all things and treats everyone fairly, those diligent and brave, contributing more to the beloved Nix Tribe of hers, naturally deserve more rewards, not those leaders and clan leaders who only command others to work but are lazy themselves!"

"Blasphemy! How dare you blaspheme the Divine! Just watch; the great Danu Goddess will punish you, traitor!" the woman shouted angrily.

"The Segestica Tribe has perished!" Nikocus roared, "This is the divine punishment of the Danu Goddess! Who exactly is blaspheming the Divine, everyone should understand in their hearts. Only by joining the Nix Tribe can one regain the favor of the Divine!"

"Nonsense! Nonsense! You traitor!..." the woman shouted madly.

Stags, with a stern expression, gestured to his men.

Immediately, soldiers squeezed into the crowd.

The Segestica populace recognized the woman as the wife of the tribe leader. Previously, no one dared to offend her. At this moment, seeing her mouth stuffed with rags and her hands restrained, not a single person dared to obstruct, instead stepping aside like avoiding a plague, watching her being taken away like a criminal from the square by the Nix soldiers.

Chapter 418: Nikocus's Persuasion

Compared to the Twenty Peerage System mentioned by Nikocus (after all, some people had fled to the Main Camp and heard Maximus announce it publicly), the favor of the Danu Goddess granted to the Nix Tribe shocked the Segestica citizens present even more. After all, many have long been puzzled: The Segestica Tribe's battles had always gone smoothly, yet since the Nix people arrived, the tribe faced repeated defeats against the much weaker Nix, losing everything in just over a year. Why was this? Perhaps what this compatriot who joined the Nix Tribe said was the answer!

Additionally, the statement "The Danu Goddess is fair, and tribe members who contribute more to the tribe should receive more rewards" also caused quite a stir among the Segestica citizens. It was as if a skylight had been opened in their minds, long confined by the centuries-old traditions of the Pannonians, and many fell into deep thought.

Nikocus continued, "You might think that joining the Nix Tribe, where you can receive fifty acres of land, and gain the protection of the Divine, is too good to be true—isn't that a lie? Of course, it's not that simple!

You should all be aware that people from other Pannonian tribes wanting to join the Segestica Tribe must live here for many years before they might get land, unless they join Chief Andres' army, shed blood, achieve Battle Merit, and defeat the Aldeans, then they might get a small piece of the occupied land. The Nix Tribe is not so harsh, but it still requires you, who join the tribe and become Reserve Tribe Members, to, in the first three years...

Some may think that giving sixty percent to the Nix Tribe is too much! But you must understand that you receive forty percent of the income from fifty acres of land each year, which is still more than what you finally harvest from the land you currently own.

Moreover, if you perform well in these three years or gain merit in battle, you might become an Official Tribe Member in less than three years. For example, I spent less than a year and not only became an Official Tribe Member but also got promoted to a Second-class Tribe Member. I believe that you, joining the Nix Tribe and receiving the favor of the Divine, will be as fortunate as I am!"

The previously quiet square was now bustling, with citizens whispering to each other, starting to discuss.

Starks felt this was a good sign and was preparing to quietly praise Nikocus, "Well done!"

Suddenly, someone loudly asked, "If we are willing to join the Nix, but there are no men in our family, will you still allocate land to us?"

Starks looked closely and saw that the speaker was a middle-aged woman, with three children standing beside her, two boys and a girl.

Stags was surprised; he did not expect that the first question posed by the tribe members would relate to a decree amended urgently by the Political Affairs Hall before they departed.

Under the previous Nix Decree, single women or women with children but without husbands who joined the tribe would not receive land separately. This was to encourage them to marry and have children quickly. However, yesterday, when the Third Legion's soldiers went to the villages around the Main Camp to liberate the Skodisqi slaves and collect food supplies, they discovered some problems. Eorokus summarized these issues and reported to Maximus last night.

Originally, Maximus and the chiefs of each department had already finished the Political Affairs Hall meeting at the dining table and had to hold another emergency discussion.

Among those issues, two main ones conflicted with Nix's decrees.

One was that Cabdes, to prepare enough military grain for attacking the Nix Tribe, required each tribe to turn over more grain. This grain collection burden was mostly shifted to the ordinary tribe members, so the food remaining in the homes of the Segestica tribes was not much. If it were a forty-sixty split, they couldn't sustain themselves until next autumn. Therefore, Maximus and the chiefs ultimately canceled the decision to distribute grain to Segestica citizens.

The other main problem was that, over the past two years, the Segestica people had suffered repeated defeats in battles against the Nix, resulting in many warriors either dying in battle or being captured, leading to a severe lack of able-bodied men in each tribe. Many homes had only women and children

left. They were more easily persuaded to join the Nix Tribe, but if they were not given land and were forced to hurry into marriage, it would undoubtedly cause dissatisfaction among the Segestica people, making them doubt the sincerity of the Nix Tribe.

After discussion, Maximus and the others drafted a temporary decree specifically addressing the unique situation of the Segestica Tribe.

"According to the new decree issued by Nix, as long as there is a boy over six years old in the family, even without a man at home, you can receive fifty acres of land," Nikocus responded earnestly.

"However, it will be exhausting for women to farm the land and raise children alone. Therefore, I advise you to marry an Official Tribe Member of the Nix Tribe,

This way, you will not only immediately gain the status of an Official Tribe Member of Nix, but your children will as well. They will immediately enjoy some benefits provided by the Nix Tribe, such as being able to attend the tribe's school, or paying less when seeing a doctor at the hospital...

I'll let you in on a secret: there are many single tribe members in the Nix Tribe right now. If you marry a tribe member who is not a Pannonian, you will also receive a reward from the tribe... All in all, think it over."

The woman was lost in thought,

Another woman loudly asked, "I have a husband, but he was drafted by the leader to fight against you. I don't know if he was captured by you or if he's already... dead? If he's still alive, if I and my children join your Nix Tribe, can you release my husband and let him... come home?"

The woman looked at Nikocus, both nervous and full of expectation. Some other women, though silent, also focused their gaze on him, their faces showing similar expressions.

Nikocus did not immediately answer but was lost in thought for a moment before speaking with a complicated expression, "Your question reminds me of when I was captured last year. Because I refused to join the Nix Tribe, I was sent, along with other companions, to the Aldeans as a slave. The Aldeans, of course, hated us; not only did they make us do hard labor, but they also constantly beat us...

Fortunately, not long after, my wife found me with our children and persuaded me to join the Nix. To avoid further suffering and to prevent my wife and children from suffering, I eventually took my wife's advice and became a Reserve Tribe Member of Nix. Looking back now, thanks to my wife, I didn't miss the great opportunity to join the Nix Tribe, which provided a better life than in Segestica!

What I want to tell you is—it's impossible to join the Nix Tribe and expect your husband to be released unless you persuade your husband to join Nix, just like my wife, then you can reunite your family, understand?!"

"But how do I know if my husband is still alive?! If he is alive, how can I meet him?" the woman asked anxiously again.

"Yes! Yes! Only when I see my husband in person can I persuade him to join Nix!" Some women followed suit, clamoring.

"Don't worry." Nikocus loudly reassured them, "First, you have to join the Nix Tribe, and then when you register and become Reserve Tribe Members with our officials, make your request, tell them your husband's name. The tribe will search for your husbands among the prisoners, and once found, you'll be arranged to meet them. Then it's up to you to persuade them, and I certainly hope your family can have a better life within the Nix Tribe!"

"Great!!" A group of women in the square cheered because they saw hope.

Seeing this scene, Stags felt excitement surge; he felt that he had taken a big step forward in completing his assigned tasks within this tribe.

"Excuse me, excuse me!" Another woman urgently shouted, "My husband went to war with Andres to the Kupa River last year, and he was captured by you! He hasn't returned since then. At first, I thought he was dead... Later I asked the fellow tribesmen who were released by you, only to learn he is still alive but became an Aldean slave, helping them mine iron ore. I heard he... he is living a miserable life!

I am willing to join your Nix if you bring my husband back from the Aldeans. I am willing to persuade him to also join Nix! Really! I can swear to the Holy Stone—no, I can swear to the Holy Forest—no, I swear to the Danu Goddess!..."

The woman was tongue-tied by the end, with tears welling up in her eyes.

Nikocus looked at Stags with difficulty.

Stags, of course, knew why he hadn't responded yet. This was due to the decree issued by Quintus, Chief of Staff, when he arrived at the First Legion this morning, which only covered the Segestica prisoners from this war, without mentioning those from last year.

After a brief thought, Stags spoke loudly, "The orders given to us by the tribe did not mention anything about last year's Segestica prisoners, possibly because they no longer fall under our tribe's jurisdiction. However, I will quickly convey your request to the leader, and he should discuss your request with the chiefs—namely, the elders. Once there is a result, I will inform you."

"Thank you! Thank you so much! Please, do let me know as soon as possible! If you can rescue my husband, I am willing to bring my whole family and join your Nix!" The woman's voice choked, tears streaming down her face.

The surrounding people also gathered around, comforting her and offering their blessings.

The extremely oppressive atmosphere in the square was greatly alleviated.

Chapter 419: Nick's Methods

At this moment, someone loudly asked, "I want to ask, if we don't agree to join the Nix, you will send us... to the Aldeans as slaves, right?"

The speaker was a young man with a wounded right leg. He stiffened his neck, held his head high, and had an accusatory stance, though his voice trembled slightly.

"Last year, the reason we Nix handed the captives over to the Aldeans was because we had just arrived here and didn't have enough grain to feed them. We had no choice but to do so. Of course, this won't happen now."

A Segestica recruit, who had once been a captive of the Nix and had experienced what was described, defended the actions of the Nix, making it somewhat difficult not to find it odd. Yet Nikocus spoke with an extremely serious demeanor, not only because he wanted to continue making achievements but also because he genuinely wanted to help these tribesmen, preventing them from making wrong choices.

"Let's first see how we used to deal with captives. I've heard from the elders that over ten years ago, when we defeated the Skodisqi people, we killed all the young and strong Skodisqi men, and the rest became slaves, working for us day and night. In the past few years, after we defeated the Aldeans, we killed all the captured Aldean warriors... This is how we treated captives, but the Nix will not do this!

If you are unwilling to join the Nix Tribe, you will, under the control of the Nix soldiers, become foreign auxiliaries of the Nix Tribe. The tribe will ensure you are fed and rested. As long as you do not resist or violate the decree, your safety will be ensured. However, you must obey the tribe's arrangements and work well.

You might say, 'Isn't this just being a slave?' Think of the Skodisqi slaves in your homes; the life of foreign auxiliaries is much better than theirs! Because the Nix Tribe has specifically enacted decrees to protect their rights!

Moreover, you won't always be foreign auxiliaries. Once you come to your senses and wish to join the Nix Tribe, you can apply to those who govern you. The Nix Tribe will periodically give foreign auxiliaries some positions, and those who work hardest and perform best can successfully become reserve tribe members of the Nix.

However, I advise you to join the Nix Tribe from the start, rather than being forced to become foreign auxiliaries and then regretting it later. By that time, your possessions and grain will have been confiscated by the tribe. Although there will be compensation after becoming reserve tribe members, you'll still suffer a loss, won't you?

Moreover, those who join the tribe early can become official tribe members several months, or even half a year or a year earlier than others, gaining more land income. Compared with them, aren't you at a bigger disadvantage!"

As Nikocus spoke, he suddenly raised his volume, "I've said so much to you to hope you can understand the goodwill of the Nix Tribe. Joining the Nix Tribe is your best choice! From now on, we will give you three days to go back and think it over carefully!

Once you have made up your mind and wish to join the Nix Tribe, come to the main house here to find us. Someone will register you, and then after a while, they'll take you to the temple to take an oath and allocate land to you.

Those who have not joined the Nix Tribe after three days will automatically become foreign auxiliaries, and at that time, there will be troops who will take those who become foreign auxiliaries elsewhere... You all understand, right?! Attention! There are only three days now to join the Nix Tribe!"

Just as Nikocus finished speaking, some women in the square started shouting, "I want to join the Nix Tribe! ... I also want to join! ... Our whole family wants to join!"

"Quiet! Please, everyone, be quiet!" Nikocus was delighted to see such enthusiasm in the square, but he had to loudly remind, "The people responsible for registering reserve tribe members have not arrived yet, so don't rush to sign up!"

"When can we come to sign up?!" some women asked eagerly.

"Tomorrow! You only need to wait until tomorrow, then you can come to the main house to sign up and join the Nix Tribe!"

Nikocus wiped the sweat from his forehead, not feeling relieved by stopping the women's impulse. Instead, he took a deep breath and used an even louder voice to suppress the impending uproar in the square, "Next, we have another important announcement to make!"

When the Segestica citizens were drawn in by Nikocus's words and focused their attention on him again, they saw that behind him was a group of Nix soldiers escorting two people out of the main house.

When these two people were pushed onto a haystack, the citizens were taken aback: because they were the only two clan leaders left in the tribe. At this moment, their mouths were stuffed with rags, their hands were tied behind their backs, and they were half-bent, standing before everyone in fear.

Then Nikocus loudly declared, "We learned that although these two people are your clan leaders, they did not serve the tribesmen well but often abused the people, so we arrested them to be judged by

everyone. If they indeed committed major errors, we will punish them according to their mistakes! Now, those of you who have been bullied by them can loudly state their crimes!"

The citizens were astonished by this action of the Nix people, exchanging glances in disbelief: Did I hear it wrong? Are the Nix people going to punish the clan leaders for us?!

The square immediately fell silent again.

Nikocus said loudly once more, "Is no one coming forward to speak?! Could it be that we made a mistake?! Are these two good clan leaders?! Often helping the tribesmen who work under them?! Able to greatly reduce the grain submitted by the tribesmen in bad harvests, handle disputes fairly and justly, and bring in priests to help when the tribesmen are injured—"

"Let me speak!" A hoarse voice accompanied by an elderly figure leaning on a cane approached Nikocus.

"Elder, whatever grievances you have, feel free to speak! ... We will stand up for you!" said Stags loudly in broken Illyrian, as he had been following Maximus in Apulia and participated in several public trials of farm managers and guards, having some experience.

Stags's timely promise gave the elder more courage. He raised his cane, pointing forcefully at one of the clan leaders: "I want to expose him, my clan leader Icarus!

More than twenty years ago... I can't remember exactly which year; anyway, the old clan leader was still there, but his health was poor. The position of clan leader should have been inherited by Icarus's brother, Escus. But after the harvest festival that year, it was Escus who led several tribesmen for night watch at the Holy Stone, and my elder brother was one of them.

But the next morning, someone discovered urine stains on the Holy Stone! The Holy Stone had been desecrated; this was a grave matter. The leader was furious and personally investigated the matter. Naturally, Escus, the night watcher of the Holy Stone, and my elder brother, among other tribesmen, were first questioned. My brother and a few others all identified that Escus, in a daze, got up to urinate, standing seemingly near the Holy Stone that night...

Consequently, the leader and the other clan leaders unanimously decided it was Escus who had committed the foolish act. Despite the old clan leader's fervent pleas, the Scodisqi Priest from Savatoy—oh, it's the current Main Camp—passed a severe judgment of desecrating the Divine upon Escus. The next day, Escus was stoned to death by the tribesmen, and the old clan leader soon passed away from excessive grief..."

The elder heaved a heavy sigh, his aged face filled with sorrow for past events.

Behind him, the citizens began whispering among themselves. The "desecration of the Holy Stone incident" was a major event in their tribe's history; almost everyone knew about it. At this moment, the elder's mention of it seemed related to clan leader Icarus, but how could that be possible?! The ruling was unanimously made by the leader, all the clan leaders, and priests. Escus's guilt was indisputable!

"...then Escus became our clan leader!" The elder spoke again, emphasizing his words, "And my brother started acting strangely, dazed while working and speaking, as if he'd lost his soul, often being unable to sleep well, and becoming haggard within two months.

One night he came to me, confessing that the one who actually desecrated the Holy Stone that night wasn't Escus but him—my clan leader Icarus!"

There was an uproar among the citizens, and Icarus, being held, widened his eyes and shook his head desperately, only to be slapped hard by the Nix soldiers behind him, leaving him too frightened to move.

"...my brother said, 'Icarus had promised them benefits after he becomes the clan leader as long as they accused Escus...' My brother and they, driven by greed, agreed with Icarus, leading to Escus's innocent death!

But after seeing Escus's tragic fate, my brother dreamed of Escus every night. He felt deeply uneasy, believing the Divine was punishing him... So I advised him to confess to the leader. He hesitated for a long time, then agreed.

However, the next day, Icarus sent my brother to deliver goods to a Skodisqi noble named Manjini in Savatoy City. Then my brother—"

The elder glared at Icarus with eyes full of hatred, gritting his teeth as he spoke, "was beaten to death by Manjini's men, accused of stealing! Over the next three years, I noticed the other three who were with my brother that night were killed by the Skodisqi people one after another for various reasons. Although at that time the Skodisqi people treated us as slaves and often murdered our tribesmen with impunity, I found that their deaths were all related to Manjini.

Icarus was close to Manjini, regularly transporting goods like grain and livestock to him until we rebelled against the Skodisqi when it ended. Thus, I believe Icarus asked Manjini to kill my brother and the others to cover up his 'desecrating the Holy Stone but blaming Escus' crime!"

Chapter 420: Oath and Execution

Icarus struggled desperately once again, and the Nix soldiers behind him struck him another blow, yet he still refused to stop struggling.

The crowd behind the elder could never have imagined that the "Holy Stone Desecration Incident," long considered a closed case more than 20 years ago, would be dredged up at this specific moment in time. What's more, it seemed as if a new culprit had emerged, like a massive stone thrown into a pond, causing an uproar throughout the square. Everyone began discussing it fervently. After all, 20 years wasn't that long ago; many of the tribespeople who lived through that period were still alive. Several involved parties still had family and friends among them, and everyone began digging through the recesses of their memories to piece together and verify the elder's claims.

Someone impatiently shouted, "Uncle Siris, is everything you said true?! Was it the Clan Leader who arranged for my father to be killed?!"

The elder turned to look at the man, his voice filled with profound guilt as he said, "Kredes, I failed your father! When my elder brother died, I should've gone to the leader and accused Icarus! But... but I was afraid, afraid that I would end up like my elder brother... I had no choice but to feign ignorance, only then would Icarus overlook me...

I've held this secret in my heart for over 20 years. These past 20 years have been agonizing! I often dream of my elder brother, your father, and the others, all covered in blood—"

"Shut up! Siris, you lame old fool! How dare you spout nonsense here and slander our Clan Leader! What proof do you have that he was the one who desecrated the Holy Stone?!" A relative of Icarus furiously interjected.

"I... I..." Siris struggled to respond.

Over 20 years had passed, and most of the involved parties were long dead. Other than his late elder brother, the others who were killed were slain by the Skodisqi people, who either died in subsequent wars or became slaves of some Segestica tribe, surviving under arduous conditions. Siris had no way of providing evidence.

A rare chance had arisen for someone brave enough to expose the crimes of the Segestica nobles, and Stags naturally refused to allow this individual to be doubted or the momentum of this critical moment to be disrupted. He immediately roared, "Everyone quiet! Quiet down now!..."

"Siris!" Starks loomed over the elder and demanded in halting Illyrian, "Do you dare swear by the Goddess Danu that every word you've spoken is the truth?!"

"I dare!" For the first time in his life, the perpetually timid Siris was resolute. He decisively threw aside his cane, knelt rapidly to the ground, and kowtowed several times in the direction of an empty space. Then he sat up straight, puffed out his chest, pressed his left hand against it, raised his right hand high, and solemnly declared in a loud voice, "Great and merciful Mother of All Things — Goddess Danu above! Humble Siris swears to You that every word I have spoken is the truth. The one who desecrated the Holy Stone all those years ago was Icarus! If I have spoken falsely, may I suffer Your divine wrath! May my family and I meet tragic fates, and may our souls find no peace in the afterlife!"

The crowd couldn't help but shudder upon hearing these words: Siris's oath was too severe!

"Alright, I believe you!" Stags immediately proclaimed in a booming voice.

With no concrete evidence, relying solely on Siris's testimony and his deadly oath, the Nix people had found Icarus guilty. This seemed an incredibly reckless decision!

However, most of the Segestica citizens present didn't share this sentiment. As believers in the Divine, they rarely swore oaths lightly, as breaking an oath would undeniably summon divine punishments — a universally held belief. For Siris to dare make such a severe vow to the Mother Goddess, it was highly likely his words were true. Moreover, in reflecting on his testimony, many among the crowd began to notice peculiarities as they revisited memories of the events from all those years ago.

Stags himself had not overthought things; he merely wanted justification to convict these two Segestica nobles he had detained. Thus, he assertively nodded and said, "I now believe your account. This man has indeed committed grave crimes! Stand aside; we will pass judgment shortly!"

He then swept his gaze over the crowd and declared loudly, "Who else has the courage to step forward and expose the crimes of these two men?!"

This time, the square no longer remained silent. Siris had set an example, and others, emboldened, began to step forward and speak out at an increasing pace. Their accusations ranged from hurling insults and favoritism to seizing lands or ordering subordinates to injure others. The timelines of their testimonies spanned from the years following independence all the way back to the period of Skodisqi rule. Initially, the citizens only denounced the two captured Clan Leaders, but soon, they began to include other tribal leaders and even the Chief himself in their accounts...

Stags did nothing to suppress these revelations; in fact, he welcomed them. Yet, even he grew shocked as the accusations escalated. Over the past year or so, the Military Department had disseminated information to the officers about the Pannonians, painting them as a newly independent and relatively united people. The impression was that their citizens loyally followed the commands of their chiefs and nobles, enabling them to launch multiple wars against the Nix in such a short period after achieving independence. Stags hadn't expected such a seemingly cohesive people to contain so many sordid affairs.

He could never have anticipated it. After defeating the Skodisqi people and rising to power, the Pannonians had naturally sought to learn from the Skodisqi's downfall. Offending a powerful enemy like Rome was foolish, but failing to forge a strong tribal alliance and swiftly mobilize military forces to suppress uprisings was also a key factor in the Skodisqi's demise. Moreover, the surrounding tribes were not particularly friendly toward the newly independent Pannonians. To counter this, the Pannonians had established a tribal alliance, granting chiefs and nobles greater authority to enhance their power and capacity for military mobilization.

Originally, the Pannonians had modeled much of their political system on the Skodisqi, a Celtic tribe where Druid Priests wielded significant authority. However, following independence, many of the powers of the Pannonian Priests — such as judiciary rights, rituals, and mediating inter-tribal disputes — were stripped away. The tribal council, composed solely of chiefs and Clan Leaders, became the sole institution deciding the fates of the tribespeople.

Since the tribal leaders couldn't convene frequently to resolve every internal issue, many minor disputes and conflicts were delegated to their respective Clan Leaders to handle. Over time, could such concentrated power not influence the mentalities of the chiefs and Clan Leaders?

What's more, the Skodisqi elite, who had grown corrupt while living luxuriously under Pannonian servitude, undoubtedly made an imprint on the Pannonian nobles and chiefs after decades of interaction. Even after gaining independence, instances of corruption, abuse of power, and arrogance were not uncommon among the Pannonian tribes. It was only because the leaders and nobles, having secured independence through arduous struggle, still retained a sense of urgency and ambition — and because life for the tribespeople had improved significantly compared to before — that harmony between the ruling and common classes had been maintained.

But today, the Nix people had lifted the lid on this pot. With their deliberate agitation, all the sludge that had settled to the bottom was stirred up and brought to the surface.

By the time no one else came forward to expose the crimes of the chiefs and Clan Leaders, it was already midday.

Most of the citizens in the square still felt tense and uneasy, much like when they had first arrived. However, their unease now stemmed from having broken tribal traditions and offending the all-powerful chiefs and Clan Leaders.

At the same time, they no longer appeared as repressed and indifferent as when they had first arrived. In contrast, hints of smiles appeared on their faces — a catharsis of grievances and frustrations long-buried in their hearts.

"Tribespeople, based on what you've just revealed, these two individuals have committed numerous heinous crimes!" Nikocus pointed to the two men bound before them, his expression solemn as he declared loudly, "According to Nix law, they are sentenced to death! Now—who among you is willing to personally execute Icarus?!"

These words sent waves of disbelief across the crowd: Was he serious? It was bold enough to denounce these bloodline-noble chiefs and Clan Leaders, men born to rule them, but to execute them? That was sheer madness!

"Does no one dare?!" Stags's gaze swept over the crowd.

Everyone lowered their heads, avoiding his eyes.

Stags sneered, "No wonder they could bully you so brazenly—because you're all cowards—"

"I will!" The voice came from none other than Siris, the elder.

"Good! Segestica still has warriors among its people!" Starks laughed heartily, motioning for the elder to step forward. Drawing the short sword at his side, he handed it to him and quietly asked, "Are you sure you can do this?"

"I killed plenty of Skodisqi people back in the day!" Siris replied, taking the short sword and limping toward Icarus.

Icarus let out muffled cries, shaking his head frantically, his eyes filled with terror and pleading. However, upon seeing that his pleas carried no sway, and as the glinting blade was raised high in the air, his body began to tremble uncontrollably with fear.

In a flash of cold steel, the restrained Icarus was struck at the neck. Amid gasps of shock, blood spurted out, splashing onto Siris.

The elder neither dodged nor flinched. He gazed at Icarus's convulsing body lying on the ground. At that moment, the wrinkles on his face, as rough as tree bark, seemed to smooth out. Decades of suppressed remorse were finally released. With a smile on his face, he murmured repeatedly, "Brother, did you see? I've avenged you! Truly, I've killed that Clan Leader Icarus we didn't dare provoke—he lies dead before me..."

Stags surveyed the restless square and pointed at the other captured Clan Leader, now so terrified he had collapsed to the ground, his pants soaked. Once again, he roared, "Who among you dares execute this man?!"

"...I... I will!" To everyone's surprise, a woman stepped forward.