

Perish 461

Chapter 461: Bricks's Anxiety

The chief officers of the nine departments were directly promoted to knight by Maximus, without accumulating military merits, while Legion Commander Pequot was just one merit away from being promoted to a third-rank Viscount, and Maximus specifically encouraged him for this. Camillus, Fesaros, Torrelugo, Oluus, and a few team officers with outstanding battle merits were also just a few merits away from the third-rank Viscount...

Maximus maintained balance by not focusing on allowing one or two troops to win the entire war; instead, he divided the large pie of this war equally among the four legions. Of course, the four legions performed very well on their own, and there was no lagging behind.

In any case, this tribe commendation ceremony was a big bonus Maximus gave to his loyal followers, not only awarding them 20 acres, bringing each individual's land to 100 acres, but also announcing publicly:

These tribesmen who were promoted to knights are the nobles of the Nix Tribe. In public, other tribesmen must greet them formally, give them the right of way, and address them as "Sir So-and-so." They have priority in places like boarding boats, riding in carts, purchasing items, and have the rights to assist the village chief in resolving disputes among villagers, supervise the village chief and subordinates, and make recommendations where they live...

Even though the Legal Department had previously dispatched subordinates to various villages to read out the detailed content of the Twenty Peerage System, Maximus's public speech impressed the tribesmen more deeply.

Finally, Maximus announced that in the future, the Nix Tribe will hold a grand Danu Goddess festival every midsummer to pray for the coming of a bountiful harvest. Additionally, each town must select an oliveball team to compete in Ophelia, and the final winner will represent the entire tribe in the temple to offer sacrifices.

After the meeting, the tribesmen returned to their towns (villages) and recounted the grand occasion of the meeting to their neighbors and friends, greatly inspiring their ambition to earn merits for promotion and leaving them full of anticipation for next year's summer festival.

At the same time, all the newly joined tribesmen had the same question: what is oliveball?

While they were actively seeking advice from the old Nix tribesmen, a new decree came from the Political Affairs Hall: the oliveball team members participating in the summer festival sent by each town must consist of one-third old tribesmen, one-third new Segestica tribesmen, and one-third new Skodisqi tribesmen.

Subsequently, the Ophelia administrative chief, Sicropus, conveyed the decree to each village: starting next year, Ophelia will hold an oliveball tournament, and each village must send a team to participate, with the team members consisting of one-third old tribesmen, one-third new Skodisqi tribesmen, and one-third new Skodisqi tribesmen. The final winning team must be determined before the summer festival begins, and this team will represent Ophelia in the tribe festival oliveball tournament.

Thus, while urging tribesmen to plow fields, village chiefs in each village also began racking their brains to form the teams.

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Brochi Leader Bricks now regrets deeply.

He was the first to escape back to his territory, but to facilitate the safe return of the remnants and defeated troops from other tribes and to rectify his own mistakes, he stayed in a temporary military camp on the western edge of his territory for over half a month.

During this period, he learned about the "Nix Army invading Segestica Territory and occupying its Main Camp." He was surprised but not anxious because he did not believe that the relatively small Nix Army could swallow the enormous Segestica Tribe.

After discussing with several other major leaders, the Pannonian Tribe Alliance sent an envoy to Segestica's Main Camp, intending to temporarily negotiate and ceasefire with the Nix people. The goal was to retrieve Pannonian warriors captured by the Nix Army, allowing major tribes to recover faster and better comfort the warriors' families.

Over the 10-plus days the envoy took to travel back and forth, Bricks had already stopped searching for the remnants. Of the initially mighty main force of over 40,000 in the Pannonian Alliance Army, only about 13,000 survived and returned. Due to Bricks exhausting the entire tribe's grain reserves to ensure

the army's expedition, they couldn't support the returning army's stay in Brochi Territory, so the warriors gradually returned to their respective tribes.

Only a few major leaders did not leave; they were waiting for the envoy's return.

However, the envoy brought back bad news: the Nix people refused to negotiate peace talks with the Pannonian Tribe Alliance.

This made several major leaders furious: a year ago, the Nix people agreed to Segestica Great Leader Cabdes' peace talk request, signed a one-year ceasefire agreement, and released many captives. Yet, today, this budding small tribe ignores their peace talk request, which means it's determined to continue opposing the Pannonian Tribe Alliance.

As for the other message the Nix people asked the envoy to bring back, "The Nix are willing to negotiate individually with other major Pannonian Tribes except Brochi and Mazi..."—the envoy did not say it in front of the five major leaders, but envoys from each tribe naturally told their major leaders privately.

Although the Pannonian major leaders gritted their teeth in hatred for the Nix Tribe, the current situation of their own tribes made them incapable of launching another war.

Upon Pulikas' numerous pleas, they only reached a rough agreement at the alliance meeting: the Nix people have become a significant threat to the Pannonian Tribe Alliance, and they must find a way to eliminate them! Each Major Leader should return to their territory to comfort tribesmen quickly, gather military resources, and strive to form another army after the autumn harvest to defeat the Nix people, recapture Segestica's territory, and wait for an opportunity to annihilate the Nix.

When bidding farewell to the four major leaders, Temagis, Demikas, Maitilis, and Pagiras, Bricks felt their expressions were a bit strange, perhaps influenced by what their envoys told them privately.

A month had passed from Bricks' escape back to his territory to all the major leaders' departure. During this month, he increasingly felt the threat from the Nix people to his territory.

The Segestica citizens, who fled from various villages, first arrived in the Gonami Lake region, and since no tribe around Gonami Lake accepted them, they gradually streamed into Brochi Territory, leading to some conflicts with Brochi citizens.

Bricks did not expel these refugee Segestica people from the territory because Brochi suffered significant labor losses during this war, causing a labor shortage. Hence, he tried hard to persuade the tribes to accept these refugees and employ them for tribal work.

Due to the Nix's vigilance, the tribal alliance envoy entered and exited Segestica Territory blindfolded and was not allowed outside while in Ophelia Village, so Bricks could not learn about the Nix's status in Segestica Territory from them.

Conversely, he learned some information from these refugees: the Nix people offered more land and tribal noble status to attract Segestica tribesmen to join their tribe; those who wouldn't yield had to sneak south to escape the tribe, and those who wouldn't yield but didn't want to flee became Nix's slaves. Many greedy and ignorant Segestica people joined the Nix... Since the Nix stationed fully-armed detachments in various Segestica tribes, the tribes dared not resist due to the lack of warriors. At least when they fled, no conflicts occurred in their tribes...

The information he gathered made Bricks uneasy. Though these refugees did not have a comprehensive understanding of Nix's methods in the Segestica Territory, the fragmented stories showed that the Nix's invasion of Segestica Territory was not driven purely by revenge and plunder; the Nix had greater ambitions—to annex the entire Segestica!

They stationed troops in various Segestica tribes and devised laws to lure Segestica citizens... Clearly, this was a carefully plotted plan from the start, and it seemed effective because these refugees came from Segestica's core areas, from tribes near Segestica Main Camp to those near Gonami Lake, indicating that the Nix already controlled Segestica's core areas, and their speed was beyond Bricks's expectations.

Bricks's misjudgment of the Nix's invasion intentions, hopes that the Nix Army would dwindle in strength amidst continuous clashes with Segestica people, dealing with post-defeat affairs, plus the anticipation of good news from the peace envoy... Thus, over a month was wasted.

Bricks was now growing anxious: if the Nix were allowed to gain a foothold in Segestica Territory, it would be a disaster for Brochi!

But as soon as he hinted at "wanting to help Segestica people drive away the Nix Army" in a tribal meeting, it was unanimously opposed by the leaders for one simple reason: no troops, no food.

Some leaders even criticized him due to the severe losses led by his tribal army, demanding compensation for all tribes and proposing to strip him of his command over the tribal army as Brochi Leader.

Fortunately, the stable development and order he maintained in the past decade made the major tribe gratitude, preventing enough votes to unseat him and allowing him to narrowly pass the crisis.

However, this was Bricks's first major rebuke since becoming Brochi Leader, causing him anger and caution. For this reason, he did not dare discuss it with his directly managed tribal citizens but instead targeted Pulikas and others lingering in Brochi Territory.

Chapter 462: After the modification: Pulikas Sends Troops

Originally, Pulikas, who had fled to Brochi Territory, not only frequently harassed Bricks, asking for his assistance to support Segestica, but he also recruited personnel from the Segestica refugees who had also fled to Brochi, forming a new team, which was a rivalry for labor force with Brochi...

Bricks had long been dissatisfied with him, and if not for fear of affecting his own reputation, he would have already wanted to expel him from Brochi Territory. Nonetheless, he started to reduce the food provisions given to Pulikas and his followers, making it difficult for them to sustain a military force, which even led to an argument between the two.

But now, Bricks changed his mind. He proactively sought Pulikas for a secret meeting, agreeing to provide weapons and food to help him form a team of five hundred on the condition that Pulikas would quickly lead this team into Segestica Territory to attack the villages occupied by the Nix people, disrupt the order there, and thwart the Nix people's plan to annex Segestica.

However, relying solely on Pulikas's strength was not enough, so Bricks also turned his attention to the Gonami Lake Region, dispatching a trusted subordinate to have a secret talk with Chief Iberus.

Iberus originally adopted a wait-and-see attitude towards the Nix people's invasion. His thinking was somewhat similar to Bricks', as he did not believe that the small Nix Tribe could annex the vast Segestica Territory.

But reality gave him a loud slap: in just one month, the Nix people had occupied all the villages in the core region of Segestica and had also built a military camp not far from the riverbank near his tribal territory, making him truly feel the threat of the Nix people.

In this situation, Iberus showed great enthusiasm towards Bricks' envoy's arrival, but the envoy clearly stated that "at present, neither Brochi nor Mazi and other major tribes can form an army to attack the Nix people," which left him feeling disappointed.

However, the envoy brought Bricks' promise: if Iberus could unite with other tribes around Gonami to send forces to harass the Nix people and disrupt their attempts to occupy Segestica Territory, then after the tribal alliance organizes a large army to drive the Nix people away, Bricks would propose at the tribal alliance meeting that Iberus becomes the new Segestica Great Chief.

Iberus never had such a lofty ambition to become a Great Chief. After all, the Pannonian tribes in the Gonami Lake Region had always been on the periphery in Segestica and Brochi, weak in strength, with low-standing leadership...

But now, the envoy's words presented him with a great temptation: if he could truly become the Segestica Great Chief, his tribe could leave this harsh environment at Gonami Lake and move to the fertile Segestica Main Camp, where they could rapidly grow and prosper!

Ultimately, Iberus agreed to Bricks' proposal: to gather the tribes around Gonami Lake to harass the Nix people within Segestica Territory.

For this, Bricks' envoy also arranged a meeting for Iberus and Pulikas to discuss the matter of dispatching their forces.

Pulikas harbored a great disdain for Iberus, believing that as a part of Segestica, Iberus stood by watching amidst the tribe's peril, showing no respect to the sons of Andres who fled. Now, under Bricks' mediation, he's willing to cooperate in harassing the Nix people, perhaps because he has already pledged allegiance to Brochi and betrayed the tribe.

Iberus also held no fondness for Pulikas, considering that he had lost his land and had few followers left, becoming a stray dog, yet still adopting an aloof attitude that was detestable. Moreover, the son of Andres whom Pulikas supported would be a future rival for the position of Segestica Great Chief!

However, under the current circumstances, both needed each other to divert the Nix people's attention and increase the success of the harassment, so they eventually formed an alliance.

In reality, Bricks also sent envoys to contact the northern tribes of Segestica, as he found that there were no northern tribesmen among the Segestica refugees. He also asked Pulikas, learning that to defend against the Yabod people, the northern tribes still had many warriors and had not participated in the previous offensive against the Nix people, leading Bricks to speculate that the northern tribes of Segestica had not been conquered by the Nix people yet.

However, the northern tribes of Segestica were far away, separated by the core region occupied by the Nix people. Could the envoy reach them smoothly? Would the northern tribes be willing to send forces to harass the Nix people upon arriving? These were all uncertainties.

Bricks was unwilling to wait any longer, as it had been two months since the Nix people invaded Segestica, and the more time passed, the more disadvantageous it was for the Pannonians.

Urged by Bricks, Iberus and Pulikas set the date for the harassment operation.

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It was one day in the beginning of the year, the sky overcast and gloomy.

After a day's march between the reed marshes and the hills on the west side of Gonami Lake, Pulikas led five hundred Segestica warriors to the northern edge of the reeds.

"Chief Pulikas." A scout emerged from the reeds, whispering to Pulikas hidden inside, "There is no one around the tribe ahead. I saw a lot of smoke from cooking fires inside; they might still be preparing breakfast. I didn't dare to look closely for fear of being discovered."

"You did well!" Pulikas was delighted.

The reason he chose to attack from the west side of the reeds was because he had learned from Iberus that the Nix people had built military camps along the banks of the Sava River not far from the north end of Gonami Lake. With his fewer forces, he didn't want to engage in a direct confrontation to avoid casualties... It seems his choice was correct, as the people in this village weren't prepared at all.

"Everyone, listen." Pulikas turned to face the warriors, his expression stern, "We will quickly advance on the tribe ahead. Do not make any noise to avoid alerting the enemy prematurely and causing unnecessary casualties!

Once inside the village, kill everyone there! Let me emphasize again, those who surrendered to the Nix are no longer our tribesmen; they are traitors to Segestica, and we must show no mercy!"

Saying this, Pulikas sharply glanced at several warriors in the group who came from that tribe ahead.

Those warriors nodded vigorously; they couldn't forget the derision they faced while trying to dissuade their tribesmen from surrendering to the Nix and were further angered by the hardships they endured during their escape, while those who surrendered enjoyed comfort. Therefore, their hatred for those tribesmen was no less than that for the Nix people.

"After wiping out everyone in that tribe, do not linger. Follow closely behind the team, evacuate back here quickly before the Nix Army arrives, and then we will all return safely!" Pulikas emphasized again, reminding everyone.

He had to do so because the remaining strength of Segestica was limited, and the life of every warrior could not be easily sacrificed.

He gave a heavy gaze to the crowd and then turned to wave his hand: "Follow me, let's move out!"

The five hundred Segestica warriors, led by Pulikas, pushed through the reeds and advanced swiftly in silence.

This village, located in the southwest corner of Segestica's core region, was more than two miles from the reeds, not very close. This was normal, as no tribe wanted to be next to the Gonami Lake reed marshes—not just because of the floodwaters during the rainy season, but also because of the dense mosquitoes in the reed marshes during summer and autumn that were unbearable.

Though the journey was flat, it wasn't easy. The land around the village had been plowed, with many wooden signs and stakes, and some even had stones with carved words buried by the field paths...

Most of the warriors had fled from various tribes and understood what all this meant, so they marched with deep and shallow steps, cursing the Nix people and the traitorous tribesmen responsible for it all; their anger fueled their strength.

The former Segestica tribe was just ahead. In the dim light of the sky, the houses ahead appeared dilapidated in Pulikas's eyes.

As he got closer to the village, his heart began to pound harder, and his pace quickened. Using his familiarity with Segestica's overall architectural layout, he quickly found a path into the village and led the team toward it.

Just then, someone from the village was heading out along the path, perhaps to work in the fields, and noticed Pulikas's approaching team from afar. The villager immediately dropped the wooden basket in his hands and ran back, shouting loudly, "Oh no, enemies are attacking! Oh no, enemies are coming!..."

His shouts immediately stirred the once quiet village into chaos. The villagers hurriedly ran out of their homes and followed the first person, desperately sprinting towards the interior of the village.

"Damn it!" Pulikas couldn't help but curse. Just when he was about to sneak into the tribe successfully, it was ruined at the last moment. But watching the panic-stricken villagers fleeing for their lives showed they were completely off guard.

"Chase them down, kill them all!..." Pulikas brandished his Longsword, shouting loudly.

The warriors roared in unison, their fury for revenge ignited by the fleeing villagers. Each of them stretched their strides, rushing forward eagerly, with some even surpassing Pulikas and first setting foot on the road into the village.

The dirt road leading in and out of the village wasn't wide, flanked by villagers' houses, which in turn reorganized Pulikas's team that had grown somewhat scattered due to the chase, into a more compact formation.

Chapter 463: Ambush

The teams entered in single file, focused solely on pursuing the villagers fleeing ahead, not even barging into the houses on either side because they knew: given the commotion, the villagers here couldn't possibly still be hiding at home.

After pursuing for some distance, the fleeing villagers reached the center of the village where there was a wide plaza. The villagers entering the plaza swiftly ran to either side, and fully armed soldiers immediately lined up to meet them, blocking the path of the Segestica warriors.

During the chase, Pulikas was no longer at the forefront of the team; he did not see the appearance of the Nix Army at first. It was only when the team stopped advancing and sounds of battle came from the front that he sensed something amiss. He immediately squeezed forward, shouting loudly, "Sikras, what's happening?!"

The Segestica warrior at the forefront replied with a scream, while other soldiers ahead shouted in a panic, "Chief Pulikas, lots of Nix Soldiers have appeared here, they are blocking us in front! They are all wearing armor; we can't defeat them! Hurry and escape!..."

Upon hearing their shouts, Pulikas felt as if he'd been punched in the head, buzzing all over. His first reaction as a relatively experienced one in war was: Damn, we've fallen into an ambush! The Nix people were well prepared, otherwise, they couldn't have gathered so many fully armed soldiers at once and accurately blocked our path of advance! Someone must have informed the Nix of our plan to raid beforehand!

He didn't have the time to ponder over who the traitor was; his previous excitement for slaughtering the enemy vanished completely. He was just in panic, constantly shouting, "Retreat! Immediately retreat!..."

First Legion's First Battalion Captain Lufus was standing on this village's plaza. He didn't pay much attention to the battle his soldiers were engaging in with the foe. Because his soldiers were equipped in Iron Helmet and Armor, holding large shields, while the enemy mostly lacked armor protection, only wielding round shields and spears. How could they, who had made a long march, be a match for the soldiers awaiting them while rested and ready?

"Report to the Great Captain." A lightly equipped soldier came running breathlessly from another road entering the village, "The unit led by Centurion Polikamis has already gone around to the enemy's rear, completely blocking them!"

"Excellent!" This was the concern closest to Lufus' heart. He decisively ordered, "Sound the trumpet for the attack!"

"Woo woo woo!..." The high-pitched sound of the copper horn echoed through the village, and the Nix Soldiers immediately shifted from defense to offense.

The Segestica warriors were caught in a pincer attack, with cries of fighting shouting from all sides. Understanding that they had fallen into an ambush, fear of the Nix people instantly took over their bodies. Even the leader of the group, Pulikas, was urging his men to retreat at this moment, hence no one fought to the death in resistance; everyone was busy knocking over fences on the sides, trying to pass through the houses to find a way to escape.

Unbeknownst to them, many Nix soldiers were lying in ambush behind the houses as well, who suddenly burst forth, stabbing the panicked and disoriented enemy one by one. The entrapped and demoralized Segestica warriors were completely reduced to helpless sheep waiting to be slaughtered. As escape seemed impossible, many chose to kneel and surrender.

Only Pulikas, under the desperate protection of his trusted aides, managed to escape from the village. Looking back, he saw the Nix soldiers being desperately held off by his trusted aides, the distance between them growing larger. He sighed with slight relief, then recalled how the 500 warriors he had brought along were completely trapped in the village, only he himself escaping, without causing any damage to the Nix people... For a moment, he felt so sorrowful and indignant that he wanted to cry out loud.

Just then, he saw a squad of Nix Cavalry coming around from behind the village, galloping towards him at full speed.

Terrified to his core, he dashed off desperately towards the reed marshes, even tossing away the longsword in his hand in haste.

However, how could a person outrun a horse? Shortly thereafter, he heard the "clatter" of hooves behind him. As a cold light flashed, he felt a sharp pain in his neck, followed by the world spinning around...

With a "thud", a head fell to the ground.

Then, someone was seen gripping the horse's belly tightly with both feet, holding the reins firmly with his left hand, his whole body leaning right. He reached out his right hand like lightning and snatched the head off the ground.

This person was none other than Nix Cavalry Captain Haguks. Amidst his subordinates' cheers, he carefully examined the blood-dripping head and said, "This enemy was wearing a helmet, carrying a longsword, and had a group protecting him during the escape. He should be the organizer of this ambush as mentioned in the prior intelligence report, the former Segestica Tribe elder, the able aide of Andres, Pulikas! Brothers, we have indeed made a contribution!"

The cavalrymen felt excited, and subsequently handed over the helmet and longsword they picked up to Haguks.

A cavalryman unwillingly asked, "Captain, can I keep this longsword? I'm still not used to using a long spear on horseback."

"Have you forgotten our military decree? Spoils must be handed over." Haguks said sternly, "However, infantry prefers large shield and short sword, this type of longsword is more suitable for us cavalry. From the preceding few major battles, our tribe has already collected a fair number of longswords, stored in the Military Department's armory, yet to be repaired... I will submit a request to the Military Department in due time to exchange equipment for our cavalry. Each of you shall not lack a longsword—"

The cavalrymen cheered.

"At that time, I will be assessing your riding skills first. Anyone who fails the test, when others update their equipment, you'll be stuck watching with envy, understood?!" Haguks continued to remind them sternly.

"Don't worry, Captain. Riding a horse is as simple as eating for me, I can pass the evaluation with my eyes closed." A cavalryman responded immediately, with other riders echoing the sentiment.

Their confidence stems from their Celtic origins, having been raised with herding since childhood, honing excellent riding skills.

"Alright, stop the chatter, and continue the search quickly, do not let a single Segestica enemy escape!"

"Yes, Captain!!" the cavalrymen replied in unison, turning their horses around to begin patrolling around the village again.

Following behind them, Haguks unconsciously recalled the previous encounter with Leader Maximus.

On that occasion, he had learned that a significant number of horses were seized by the army during the conquest of the Segestica tribe. He rushed to the Military Department to claim them but Flanitnus informed him: Leader Maximus had given an order that these horses were not to be touched lightly.

He could only go to Maximus, but Maximus told him: those horses could not be moved for the time being. They were to be handed over to Agricultural Deputy Officer Seksepis, who would thoroughly screen them to select mares and stallions to breed excellent warhorses for the tribe in the future.

Yet Maximus reassured him: telling him not to worry. When the tribe possessed sufficient horses in the future, the cavalry to be formed wouldn't just number 100 men, but thousands. By then, he wouldn't only be a cavalry captain, but possibly a cavalry corps Legion Commander, commanding the powerful Nix Cavalry to play a decisive role in future wars.

Cavalry Corps Legion Commander!... Haguks mouthed this phrase, feeling invigorated all over, and smiled watching his subordinates gallop ahead. He suddenly felt: that perhaps in the future, he should not only focus on matters of horses but also pay attention to tribesmen with good equestrian skills...

"Report to the Great Captain, the battle has concluded, with 237 enemy casualties and 264 captured, no enemy has been found to have escaped so far!" Centurion Polikamis reported the battle situation to Lufus.

"Excellent!" Lufus listened and asked, "What about our losses?"

"Eight soldiers have minor injuries, the only one seriously injured soldier fell during pursuit and impaled his thigh on a wooden fence. The field doctor has already done bandaging."

"A victory so secure, yet conducted so carelessly, hopefully, this injured soldier will learn from this." Lufus thought for a moment, and solemnly said, "We were able to completely annihilate the enemy this time thanks to the accurate intelligence provided by the Military Information Department. Your village is an important target for the enemy from the south; you must not let your guard down. Each day, send people to scout the area between the reed marshes and mountains. If you discover more enemy activity, remember to follow the prior instructions from the Military Department and light smoke at the plaza to signal danger. I will quickly gather soldiers from surrounding villages to aid you."

Lufus mentioned this because the Military Department had dispersed the most capable First Legion's First Battalion soldiers in these villages bordering Gonami Lake. In each village, at least 200 soldiers had been relocated. Lufus had settled in another village not far to the north. Aside from Legion Soldiers, the majority of the residents in these villages were Scodisqi slaves, with very few of the original Segestica residents remaining.

It wasn't that the Nix Tribe, for safety and stability, intentionally relocated the original Segestica residents. It's because this place is on the southern edge of the core region, not far from Brochi, and given the late timing for military restructuring, most of the original villagers fled to the south, influenced by each other.

"Rest assured, Great Captain, I will remain vigilant at all times," Polikamis said with a smile, "In fact, the brothers all hope for another enemy attack. Without them, where will we find opportunities for merit?"

"Polikamis, I warn you, don't go acting rashly just for merits, causing excessive casualties; not only will you not achieve merit, but you'll also face punishment from the Military Department." Lufus sternly looked at his subordinate and issued a warning.

"Great Captain, I've been following you for almost two years now, don't you know me? I never take unnecessary risks."

"Indeed, otherwise, I wouldn't have recommended to the Military Department to station you here." Lufus stood up, patting the dust off him, "I'll leave the aftermath work to you; I need to take the captives and spoils to Ophelia, to report on your merits to the Military Department. However, you shouldn't have too high expectations, this battle was too easy, and your merits might not compare to that of the Military Information Department."

Chapter 464: Naval Battle

When Pulikas' troops were annihilated, the team participating in the harassment on Iberus' side had not yet set off.

Iberus, of course, had his own selfish motives. He wanted to achieve a greater result to overshadow Pulikas, gain greater prestige for himself, and reduce the casualties of his tribesmen. But the reason the team had not set off was because he was waiting for the wind to come.

Iberus and Pulikas had already agreed in advance; he would lead the attack on the villages on the east bank, while Pulikas would attack the villages on the west bank.

Iberus' tribe was very close to the core region of Segestica, and the Nix camp was not far from his tribe either. This meant it was convenient for his team to invade the areas controlled by the Nix, but it also meant they could easily be intercepted and attacked by the Nix Army.

After discussing with other tribal leaders by Gonami Lake, Iberus decided to launch an attack via the waterway, bypassing the Nix Camp and penetrating into the heart of the area controlled by the Nix people. They would quickly land and raid the riverside villages before they had time to react, and then quickly return by boat...

They believed: The Nix had only occupied the Segestica Territory for over two months, so it was impossible for them to have established a fleet capable of fighting on the Sava River in such a short time. After all, even the other Segestica tribes weren't skilled in river combat before, which is why they couldn't do anything about their Gonami Lake tribe... Since the Nix Army couldn't challenge them on the river, traveling by water was undoubtedly the safest route.

To increase the success of their surprise attack, relying on the weather patterns that they had explored for generations living there, they discussed with Pulikas and finally set the attack date for this day.

By morning, the sky was still gray, but the clouds began to move, and the south wind finally arrived!

The 100-plus ships summoned by the various tribes by Gonami Lake had long been anchored near the northern lake's entrance waiting. After Iberus gave the order to set sail, each ship hoisted its sails, and the south wind filled the sails, pushing the boats upriver.

The boat on which Iberus was located was at the forefront of the fleet. It was a common single-masted, spindle-shaped fast boat on Gonami Lake, about seven meters long, generally seating eight. There was a helmsman at the stern, a sailor in the middle, a poleman at the bow, rowers on both sides, and ten long spears were placed inside the boat... Despite the boat's small size, it was quite fully equipped.

Iberus himself served as the helmsman, skillfully maneuvering the ship, maintaining a fast speed while navigating against the current in a zigzag pattern.

Soon, he spotted the Nix Camp on the shore, and the Nix soldiers patrolling on the wooden walls pointed in their direction, shouting loudly about something, and more soldiers gathered on the wooden walls...

Sailors on each boat saw this scene and began loudly mocking the Nix soldiers: "Hey, Nix people, stop yelling nonsense. If you're so bold, come and catch me in the river!"

"Don't get cocky just because you look fierce on the shore. On the water, I can take on two of you alone!"

"Come, try the mash water grandpa made for you, it's really sweet!"

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Some sailors even pulled down their pants and peed into the river, while their companions laughed out loud.

Compared to the wanton arrogance of the tribesmen, Iberus began to feel tense. He knew that from the moment the soldiers at the Nix Camp discovered their fleet, time became critically important to them!

Fortunately, the south wind was growing stronger, making the ships sail faster and faster.

This is the Divine protecting us! Iberus watched the riverbank rapidly recede and felt his confidence soaring.

However, when this fleet moved further away from the Nix Camp, the crew members didn't notice a thick smoke rising from the Nix Camp, reaching straight into the sky.

After a while, Iberus, who had been keeping a close eye on the riverbank in front, suddenly said, "Everyone, take note! Start taking down the sails, prepare to dock!"

Upon hearing the order, the sailor didn't immediately take down the sails but slowly closed them. This was to allow the ship to decelerate gradually, eventually docking smoothly without damaging the hull and signaling the boats behind, allowing them ample time to prepare accordingly, thus avoiding chaos during the docking process.

The boat slowly decelerated as it entered a "U"-shaped river bend.

During the rainy season, the river here could exceed five hundred meters in width, and sometimes flood over the riverbed into fields on the east bank. But during the winter, when the water was less, the river would shrink to half its size, revealing a large river beach on the east bank, enough to accommodate this thousand-man fleet's landing.

Moreover, the riverbank here was gentle, so the tribesmen could easily climb onto the ground and launch an assault against a tribe less than a mile from the river beach...

This was a carefully chosen attack target by Iberus and other leaders, located right between the Segestica Main Camp and the Nix Camp, ensuring that Nix reinforcements would take considerable time to arrive here, enough for them to complete the raid and return to the river beach to depart by boat...

The boat docked steadily on the northernmost river beach, and the poleman immediately inserted one end of his wooden pole through the iron ring at the boat's bow, deeply into the river beach's mud and sand, firmly anchoring the boat.

Iberus jumped out of the boat, directing other boats to dock and constantly urging, "Everyone, hurry up! ... Get off and assemble quickly! ... Stop dawdling, hurry up! ..."

More than 100 boats were docked on the river beach. Except for the helmsman who had to stay and guard the boats, over nine hundred people armed with long spears followed Iberus ashore, rushing towards the village ahead.

By this time, it was almost noon. Some villagers working in the fields around the village saw a group of fierce people charging from afar and fled towards the village in panic, further fueling the bloodthirsty impulse of the Gonami Lake warriors.

But just as they approached the village, Iberus saw a thick smoke rising from the village, reaching the sky. Although the Pannonians had never used smoke as a warning signal, Iberus, who had remained highly vigilant since the onset, felt an intense unease at this anomaly, forcing him to halt and loudly order his accompanying warriors to stop advancing.

However, only the three hundred tribesmen of his own tribe heeded his command. Warriors from other tribes seemed to ignore his words and rushed into the village ahead.

This might be for the best, let them scout the path first... Iberus thought, choosing not to forcibly stop them.

But his tribesmen were not pleased: "Leader, we've come all this way, why make us stop now?!"

"Leader, the others have rushed in, and we're just standing here like fools while they take everything good in the village!"

"That's right, we can't just stupidly wait here. Leader, if you don't let us in, we might just—"

The tribesmen clamored noisily, their emotions becoming increasingly agitated. Iberus felt he was losing control. Just as he was about to nod in agreement to let everyone raid the village, someone suddenly exclaimed, "Enemies! The enemies are here!"

The entire team quickly fell into panic as they soon saw a fully armed Nix team coming around from behind the village. Upon spotting them, the Nix forces rushed at them even more fiercely.

By this time, Iberus could tell that the enemy was well-prepared. His team, with their crude weapons, was no match for the well-equipped Nix. The situation was urgent, and he couldn't afford further thought: "Retreat! Hurry, retreat! Get back to our boats! ..."

As he gave the order, the tribesmen had already turned and begun running back. Their earlier arrogance on the boats was forgotten as they scrambled to escape, completely abandoning their comrades who had entered the village. When they realized the enemy was in hot pursuit, they even began discarding the burdensome Wooden Shields and Spears.

To their credit, their reaction was prompt, and they retreated lightly while the Nix soldiers pursued in full gear, quickly leaving the Nix soldiers far behind.

Iberus led his tribesmen back to the river beach in one breath, where they boarded the boats, and their nervousness eased slightly.

"Leader, should we set sail?!" The poleman called out.

Sitting on the deck, Iberus saw no trace of the Nix soldiers pursuing them. Confident the enemy had abandoned the chase, he breathed a sigh of relief, striving to remain calm.

He stood, carefully scanning the others on the boats, and then said, "Let's not leave just yet; let's wait a bit longer and see if any of our tribesmen manage to escape back."

Iberus made this risky decision because he noticed that only the members of his own tribe had escaped back to the boats. As the organizer of this raid, he couldn't face the other tribes upon return. He also recognized that while the poorly equipped warriors couldn't win against the Nix soldiers, they might escape, potentially allowing some warriors to return, making it easier to explain upon return.

Iberus issued this order to his tribesmen, and no one protested. Returning to the boats felt like returning home, and their courage returned.

But during the wait, Iberus instructed his tribesmen to disperse among all the boats to avoid leaving boats of other tribes for the Nix people when they departed.

Just as Iberus anticipated, some tribesmen managed to escape the Nix's encirclement, desperately running towards the river beach, only to be struck down by pursuing Nix cavalry with long spears just as they were about to reach the shore...

Iberus and his tribesmen watched helplessly as their compatriots screamed and rolled down the bank...

The Nix Cavalry stared coldly at them on the boats before turning their horses around and leaving.

Chapter 465: Naval Battle (Continued)

The riverbank fell into silence, and Iberus began to feel relieved: if those cunning troops had appeared while he was leading the retreat... things might have ended differently.

"Leader, should we keep waiting? The enemy has cavalry—our people may struggle to return successfully!" a sailor on board couldn't help but plead.

Iberus was still hesitating when the poleman standing at the bow suddenly shouted, "Leader, there's a fleet heading straight toward us ahead!"

Iberus sprang up in shock, rushing to the poleman's side in just a few strides. Indeed, at the bend of the river, several boats appeared, packed with people, floating downstream and sailing toward the riverbank.

"The Nix people have a fleet!..." Iberus opened his mouth in astonishment.

Since the Nix Tribe had occupied the Segestica Main Camp, he had dispatched boats upstream multiple times to probe into the heartland and gather intelligence. Yet, he had never detected any signs of a Nix fleet. Though wary of ambushes, he never dared navigate too close to the Main Camp. But if the Nix had established a fleet, shouldn't they be patrolling the river daily to familiarize themselves with the waterways? And yet, none of his reconnaissance boats had ever encountered them. Could this just be a hastily assembled fleet? But how could it have arrived so quickly?!...

Of course, Iberus was unaware that, ever since the Nix Fleet was formed to safeguard the newly constructed wooden bridge, they had been training and patrolling along that stretch of the river.

Regardless of whether the approaching fleet was temporary or long-established... Iberus faced an urgent situation where his 400 tribal people manned over a hundred boats, with an average of only four people per boat—not well-suited for naval warfare. Time was too tight to make adjustments.

Iberus hurriedly commanded, "Everyone, initiate departure immediately! Leave the riverbank and retreat to Gonami Lake!"

Even faced with the enemy's assault, Iberus's tribesmen who performed poorly on land acted rather composed on the Sava River. They did not frantically rush for position but instead departed orderly, one vessel after another, leaving the riverbank.

Soon, Iberus's fleet formed a long, single-file column, hugging the east bank of the Sava River, moving downstream.

By this time, the Nix Fleet had also begun their pursuit, maintaining a distance of twenty to thirty meters from Iberus's fleet without getting too close.

The two fleets seemed like two parallel lines along the river, stretching southward—albeit Iberus's fleet led while the Nix Fleet followed behind.

However, the Nix Fleet's sailing speed was faster, steadily gaining ground due to their larger crew per vessel, and their oarsmen were rowing with all their might.

It was clear that the lead boat of the Nix Fleet was about to catch up with the one carrying Iberus at the forefront.

Yet, Iberus remained unflustered. Having observed this stretch of the river, his plan had crystallized: although the Nix Fleet had fewer boats, their vessels were crowded, whereas his crew was sparse. Speed competition was a lost cause, but sparse crews meant lighter boats, greater agility, and easier maneuverability. His people were adept at handling boats. If the enemy wanted to expend effort overtaking, intercept the fleet or engage in close combat, his tribesmen could utilize the current and skilled ship handling to avoid enemy vessels and break free from encirclement. Once they reached Gonami Lake, the enemy's stamina would likely be drained—that would be the perfect time to counterattack.

Although Iberus couldn't directly relay his orders to the following boats, the fact that his vessel maintained a steady course downstream effectively communicated his decision to the fleet behind. Hence, Iberus's fleet made no changes and allowed the Nix oarsmen to continue their frantic rowing.

Iberus fixated on the enemy's boat to his right as it overtook his own. However, oddly, this vessel did not veer to block them; instead, it continued parallel forward. On its bow sat an enemy pointing in his direction, speaking to those on board. Soon, two men who had been idling in the middle of the vessel raised their hands toward him.

The vessels of the Nix Fleet differed from those of Iberus and his tribes. Though the lengths were similar, the Nix boats were broader, originally used in Segestica's core region for cross-river transportation of goods. After confiscating and consolidating them into their fleet, the Nix Tribe had assigned ten people to each boat for this operation. Besides the helmsman and sailor, six oarsmen on either side, and two idle individuals sat in the center. This design prompted Iberus's assumption that their boats were sluggish and incapable of blocking his fleet.

At this moment, the two idle Nix men were holding wooden items, but the dark, gleaming tips of these objects sent chills down Iberus's spine.

Before he could warn his crew, he saw the two men sharply jerk their hands.

Instinctively, he tried to dodge. However, at a distance of just over twenty meters, it was far too close. Sharp pain erupted in his left chest as a crossbow arrow embedded deep into his flesh, causing him to collapse backward onto the deck.

Simultaneously, the helmsman on the same boat was struck in the face by another crossbow arrow and fell into the river.

Soon after, the crossbow soldiers on the other Nix vessels began firing at the enemy as well.

One by one, the helmsmen of Iberus's fleet were hit and fell. With their vessels suddenly uncontrolled, collisions and chaos erupted among them.

For decades, the sailors of Gonami Lake regarded river battles as ship collisions followed by boarding combat. The outcome depended on ship-handling skills, the crew's swimming prowess, and bravery—in short, close-quarters melee. They never expected the Nix Fleet to revolutionize naval combat by equipping boats with crossbow soldiers for ranged assaults. Completely unprepared, they were caught off guard.

On each boat, once the helmsman was knocked down, other crew members hurried to take over the position. But they, too, were quickly shot by the rapidly reloading crossbow soldiers. With only four to five men per boat, after two volleys, most boats were left with no crew at all.

The Nix Fleet's attack was swift and lethal. Iberus's fleet fell into despair without offering any meaningful resistance. Except for a few individuals who managed to flee by swimming, the remaining survivors had no choice but to surrender...

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"Leader, a messenger on horseback has delivered urgent news from Anfeltaas, the Sava River Fleet Commander. He led the fleet against the Pannonian Fleet in battle on the river and secured a decisive victory! Over 200 Pannonian sailors were captured, including the heavily injured leader of the Pannonian Fleet, Iberus. Additionally, they seized all 103 enemy ships without suffering any losses!

In other words, Anfeltaas successfully annihilated the entire enemy fleet! Leader, previously, the Third Legion's report mentioned that nearly half of the enemy forces escaped the ambush and fled onto their boats. I was worried they might get away, but now I can finally relax!" Flanitnus said with a delighted smile.

"We worried beforehand that our fleet wouldn't stand against those Segestica shippeople from Gonami Lake who have roamed there for years. Now it appears that despite this being Anfeltaas's first time commanding a naval battle, his capabilities are quite commendable. Your Military Department can rest assured!" Maximus also smiled and offered praise.

Today, Maximus and the chief officers of the Military Department gathered in the main hall of the leader's residence. They were awaiting results from the various units countering the enemy invasion and ensuring they could promptly make new strategic plans should any unexpected events arise to protect the territory from significant losses. Now that the battles had gone as planned, the atmosphere in the hall grew relaxed and cheerful.

Quintus, wearing a relaxed expression, said, "Leader, Anfeltaas's command undoubtedly contributed to the great victory. However, without smoke signals from the Nix Camp and Village 123, Anfeltaas wouldn't have been able to mobilize the fleet in time.

The fleet's ability to secure victory with zero casualties was undoubtedly due to the crossbow soldiers, who played a primary role. Without your approval to integrate them into the fleet—"

"Quintus, now you're learning to give compliments too," Maximus joked with a smile. "But while you're praising others, let's not forget that our ability to thwart the enemy's harassment plans so handily and protect our new territory from harm was due to Glicus's precise intelligence!"

Glicus was also present in the hall. As the chief officer of the Military Intelligence Bureau and effectively one of the leaders of the Military Department, he was key to uncovering the Pannonians' plot against the Nix Tribe's new territory. It was due to this intelligence that Maximus had invited him to attend this military meeting.

For Glicus, this was his first time participating in the Nix Tribe's military meeting. Faced with the seasoned Military Department leaders who had long served Leader Maximus—particularly Quintus and Flanitnus—and being a relatively new member of the tribe who had only joined two months ago, Glicus kept quiet and sat unobtrusively at the back, like a shadow.

Upon hearing his name mentioned by Leader Maximus, Glicus humbly replied, "Leader, you're too kind. This is simply the duty of the Military Intelligence Bureau."

"Leader, the establishment of the Military Intelligence Bureau was a brilliant idea! With Glicus as the chief officer, its effectiveness has been outstanding! In such a short period, he managed to set up the intelligence network you envisioned in the Gonami Lake Region and the Brochi Territory, and it immediately yielded such accurate and critical intelligence. It exceeded all my expectations!"

Quintus was ordinarily reserved but inwardly quite proud. However, he made no effort to hide his admiration for Glicus this time, as the successful counter-offensive had deeply impressed upon him the importance of the leader's newly-formed Intelligence Bureau for the Staff Department.

The sincere praise from his superior left Glicus slightly overwhelmed. He modestly responded, "Given how negligent the Brochi and Gonami Lake Segestica people were, the intelligence operatives merely needed to pose as fleeing Segestica refugees to infiltrate the displaced groups lingering around Gonami Lake and the Brochi Territory.

Moreover, the enemy was planning an invasion with almost no attempt at concealment. Pulikas openly recruited warriors at the refugee camp, and Iberus assembled his fleet—training for several days at Gonami Lake. My operatives merely needed to use simple methods to extract information from those sailors and warriors prepping for departure."

"Indeed, the Pannonian Tribe's loosely organized and backward military setup proved to be like a sieve under our targeted investigations, unable to guard any secrets. But to not only obtain precise intelligence about the enemy's surprise attack but also relay it cleverly and effectively—I'm impressed, truly!" Quintus continued to commend.