

Perish 481

Chapter 481: Continuing the Mission to Norik

In front of the village gate, dozens of Noric Warriors wearing iron helmets and armor, with long swords strapped to their waists, stood in formation on both sides of the road. One of them, wearing a large horned helmet and gleaming silver armor, was a tall and broad-shouldered man with strong, muscular arms marked by bulging veins. His thick beard entirely concealed his mouth and nose.

Seeing the arrival of the delegation from Alakosia, he stepped forward a few paces and said in a booming voice, "Envoys of the Nix Tribe, I am the leader of the Iron Core Tribe. Welcome to our camp!"

Alakosia bowed and saluted, "Honorable Sphili Leader, I am Alakosia, envoy sent by the Nix Tribe. Leader Maximus has entrusted me to convey his sincere greetings to you, and on behalf of our tribe, I hope to discuss matters of friendship between our two peoples!"

Alakosia pointed to the wooden crate behind him and said solemnly, "This is a gift meticulously prepared by Leader Maximus to express his sincerity. We hope you will find it to your liking!"

"Good! Good!" Sphili laughed heartily, revealing a row of white, clean teeth, and waved his arm energetically, "Your leader is too kind! Come, let's step into the camp. We can sit down and talk at our leisure."

To be honest, Alakosia hadn't expected the tribal leader to come out personally to greet them. Still, the line of heavy warriors forming a welcoming display was also a show of strength from this tribe.

Having faced numerous hardships, Alakosia wouldn't be perturbed by such a spectacle. Calm and composed, he followed Sphili, passing between the imposing Noric Heavy Warriors, admiringly glancing up at the towering stone walls ahead and the fully armed patrols atop them.

He noticed that, compared to the Segestica Army, the warriors of this Noric Tribe had an impressively high armor rate. This was understandable, considering the Noric people were renowned across the Mediterranean for their skill in ironwork and blacksmithing.

Through the gate's corridor and across the short mountain pass, a relatively flat and spacious valley unfolded before Alakosia's eyes.

At the valley's central area stood rows of neat wooden houses and stone cottages, accompanied by a sizable square where children played and laughed while elders basked in the sun, chatting leisurely.

Along the stream near the cliffs, multiple water channels had been constructed, diverting the river water toward a row of stone buildings on the shore. This was where iron ore was smelted. Roaring flames burned ceaselessly day and night, melting impurities that dripped outward under high temperatures. Iron, softened in vertical furnaces, was referred to by the Noric people as "iron fish." Once cooled, these iron fish were carried into a spacious stone warehouse nearby for storage.

On the other side of the valley lay low-lying forests, nestled between which and the valley were additional stone cottages. This was the site where the tribe's iron tools were forged. Noric blacksmiths, wielding iron hammers, labored tirelessly to pound and shape iron blocks. Through repeated hammering and polishing, exquisitely crafted iron tools gradually took shape—some were agricultural tools, but most were weapons such as long spears, longswords, short swords, javelins, shields, helmets, breastplates... all meticulously displayed in weapon stalls lining the road Alakosia and his delegation passed by.

The air resonated with the unending clang of iron and was thick with the scent of charcoal smoke. Listening to Sphili's introduction about his tribe and observing the many detailed and refined weaponry along the roadside, Alakosia's mind couldn't help but ponder—what were the Noric people's true motives behind this demonstration?

Entering the main house, Sphili led him into the reception hall, where Alakosia was surprised to find another individual present. Sitting at the head seat was an elderly man dressed in a long linen robe, his hair cascading over his shoulders and a white beard flowing onto his chest. Though advanced in years, his face retained a lean and rosy complexion, and his gaze was profound yet gentle. His refined and ethereal presence contrasted sharply with the rugged Noric warriors Alakosia had encountered along the way.

"Sage, the envoy from the Nix Tribe has arrived," Sphili said courteously, bowing.

This gesture briefly startled Alakosia.

The elder smiled, "Guests from afar, I am Bodamochi, Druid of the Iron Core Tribe, and on behalf of our tribespeople, I welcome you. Please take a seat!"

Druid!... Alakosia, who had previously studied information about the Noric people, was instantly enlightened. In many traditional Celtic Tribes, the primary duty of the tribal leader was to lead warriors into battle, yet the Druids occupied the highest status and wielded the greatest authority within the tribe. They presided over rituals, judiciary matters, diplomacy, education... and even appointed tribal leaders themselves.

Evidently, the Iron Core Tribe was a traditional Celtic Tribe, which explained why Leader Sphili would personally come to greet them outside the village—he was clearly not the tribe's ultimate master. This system starkly differed from the power structures of the Nix Tribe, Alde Tribe, and Pannonian Tribe!... Alakosia became mentally alert and quickly introduced himself once more.

"The envoy is an Illyrian?" Bodamochi inquired.

"Yes." Alakosia nodded, emphasizing further, "Our Nix Tribe is indeed an Illyrian Tribe."

"But your Celtic is spoken exceptionally well."

Seizing the opportunity, Alakosia responded, "That is largely due to the many Skodisqi people within the Nix Tribe. Although they are Celtic, our tribe still accepts them as tribesmen because our Leader Maximus has always advocated, 'No matter what ethnicity someone belongs to, as long as they are willing to join Nix and contribute their strength to Nix, we should not reject them; we should treat them as our own.'"

"Your leader's magnanimity is truly admirable! I deeply appreciate how kindly you have treated the Skodisqi people!" Bodamochi exclaimed with visible surprise, his tone warm.

Then, his tone shifted, "We live in the mountains and know little about events to the south, only being aware there is an Illyrian Tribe named the Alde in the south. For a long time, we have been unaware of the Nix Tribe's existence—a regretful oversight!"

These apologetic words carried a hidden implication to Alakosia, who responded calmly, "Our Nix Tribe's early tribesmen originally hailed from Illyrian Tribes farther south. However, due to the hardships of living in the mountains, they were compelled to leave the highlands and became mercenaries. Reluctantly, they survived for years while being hired for warfare by various coastal City States.

Later, representatives of the Alde Tribe approached us, asking for assistance in defeating the powerful enemy—the Pannonians—that had invaded their homeland. They promised that if we drove the Pannonians away, they would grant us the lands along the Kupa River to settle. That was how we came here and eventually established the Nix Tribe..."

What Alakosia recounted wasn't improvised but an official narrative drafted by the Political Affairs Hall and crafted by the Commerce Department to later disseminate among neighboring tribes. This aimed to erase traces of the rebel army, leading other tribes to believe Nix was a local tribe instead.

"I see now." Bodamochi nodded slightly, then remarked, "The Pannonians have a large population and formidable strength—they are a dominant people in the Southern Mountain Great River Plain. Among them, the Segestica Tribe is particularly powerful in combat. For your Nix Tribe, so new to this region, not only to defeat them but also allegedly to annihilate them, is truly astonishing!"

"Honorable Bodamochi Sage," Alakosia earnestly explained, "Indeed, when we first arrived, our strength was far inferior to the numerous Pannonians. However, despite our small numbers, we are seasoned warriors, with every soldier being battle-hardened through years of campaigning.

We also learned advanced military techniques from the Romans and Greeks. To survive on the battlefield, our soldiers invested their earnings to purchase better weapons and armor to equip themselves... Consequently, in terms of warfare alone, the Pannonians are far from capable of matching us Nix.

However, the Pannonians, arrogant about their strength, underestimated us Nix in each confrontation. Thanks to the decisive wisdom of our Leader Maximus, we gained victory repeatedly.

Nevertheless, all wars between us and the Pannonians were initiated by them! It was they who invaded the lands of the Alde people, seeking to extinguish the entire Alde Tribe, which prompted our invitation to help.

After settling along the Kupa River, we even proactively signed peace agreements with the Segestica Tribe. Unfortunately, the Pannonians, discontented with their defeat, mobilized a large army a year later to try to eradicate us completely. Once we decimated the Segestica Tribe in counteraction, we again signed peace treaties with Desitia and several Pannonian Tribes...

But I anticipate the Pannonians harbor deep resentment against us Nix, and it's only a matter of time before they instigate another war. As Leader Maximus proclaimed, 'The Nix Tribe is new to this land and must strive to maintain friendly relations with neighboring tribes so that our tribesmen can live in peace. But if any tribe dares to bully Nix, Nix will retaliate fiercely, for only victory assures peace!'"

Alakosia deliberately mentioned how the Nix people had learned military techniques and weaponry from the Romans and Greeks because the Nix Army had fought the Yapode people not far to the south of here. Should the Noric people inquire, they would naturally observe similarities between the Nix soldiers' equipment and Roman styles. Given the Noric Tribe's trade ties with Rome, Alakosia needed to supply a plausible explanation to prevent excessive surprise that might lead them to disclose findings to Rome, thereby risking exposure of the truth.

Nevertheless, Bodamochi's focus wasn't on the military equipment of the Nix soldiers. Instead, the diplomatic stance expressed by Alakosia stirred his emotions, somewhat easing his concerns.

Chapter 482: Soft Power

Bodamochi pondered for a moment before saying solemnly, "Our Iron Core Tribe has lived here for over a hundred years. Though the Great River Plain to the south is fertile, it has never sparked any greed in our hearts.

Like other Noric Tribes, we enjoy living close to the mountains, listening to the pleasant sounds of hammering iron, and watching the fiery red iron blocks transform into exquisite iron tools under the strike of a hammer...

Over the past century, we have witnessed the Skodisqi people conquer the Pannonians, only for the Pannonians to later enslave the Skodisqi people... Throughout this process, our Iron Core Tribe has never interfered with any side. Regardless of who our neighbors are, as long as they harbor goodwill, we are always willing to sell our iron tools."

Alakosia immediately took over the conversation, saying tactfully, "Precisely because of such goodwill your tribe has always shown, we Nix have sent me here, hoping to establish a friendly relationship with the Iron Core Tribe. In the future, the Nix Tribe would like to regularly purchase iron ingots made by your tribe. The only question is—will you accept gold and silver coins, or do you prefer exchanging other resources?"

"Grain! Of course, we prefer grain!" interjected Leader Sphili, who was sitting in the hall.

Bodamochi glanced at Sphili. Since the topic was already on the table, he spoke candidly, "Our Noriki Territory is rich in iron ore of exceptional quality, and we have a large number of tribesmen skilled in iron smelting and forging tools, allowing us to fully satisfy other tribes' needs for iron products.

But this region is mountainous, with little farmland. Fishing and hunting alone are not enough to fill the bellies of our tribesmen. In the past, we often traded our iron tools for grain with the Skodisqi people and later with the Pannonians. However, starting from the second half of last year, the Segestica Tribe has greatly reduced the grain they trade with us. We later learned it was because you had occupied their core territory. This year, the Segestica people, in order to defend against the invading Yapode people, have completely ceased grain trading with us—"

Bodamochi paused, then smiled slightly. "Of course, this is not a disaster for our Iron Core Tribe. The Noric Tribes, though scattered, are highly united. Every year, the Romans buy large quantities of iron tools from us Noric people while providing us with substantial amounts of grain in return. This trade is the most important economic activity for the entire Noric race.

Since it's difficult to acquire grain from the southern regions, we can turn to our fellow tribes near Roman territories to the west, taking iron tool orders from Roman merchants in exchange for grain. This is more effort due to the longer distance, but it is feasible. After all, given our tribe's location, trading with the south is far more convenient, wouldn't you agree?"

"Indeed," Alakosia responded. "The situation of our Nix Tribe is somewhat similar to yours. When we settled along the Kupa River, we established our own iron workshops, sourcing iron ore from our allies, the Alde Tribe. The farming tools our tribesmen use and the weapons used by our warriors are all produced in our own workshops. After we defeated the Segestica Tribe, our territory expanded rapidly, and so did our population, leading to a significantly increased demand for iron...

As you just mentioned, for our newly acquired Sava River territory, your Iron Core Tribe is geographically closer, making it more convenient for us to purchase iron ingots from you. My visit this time is firstly to convey our Nix Tribe's goodwill to the Iron Core Tribe and secondly to negotiate the purchase of iron ingots.

However, since we've just emerged from war, food supplies in our tribe are currently tight. The initial transactions may not be substantial, but after the harvest season in September, the grain available for trade will increase significantly! Our Nix Tribe has abundant farmland, plenty of tribesmen, and, most

importantly, excellent agricultural techniques. In the future, we will have a surplus of grain sufficient to meet your needs!"

"Excellent! War only brings destruction, but trade leads to prosperity!" Bodamochi said with a smile.

Bodamochi felt he had grasped the Nix people's intentions, and a weight lifted off his heart. Feeling joyful, he said, "Our Iron Core Tribe is willing to accept the goodwill of the Nix Tribe. From now on, let our two tribes coexist in harmony and strengthen our bond through trade."

"Thank you, Sage Bodamochi!" Alakosia, pleased with the preliminary success of his diplomatic mission, turned to the wooden chest he had brought and the composed Sphili, seated in a subordinate position near Bodamochi. His eyes lit up, and he declared loudly, "This is a carefully chosen gift from Leader Maximus to the Iron Core Tribe! We hope this gift will fortify the budding friendship between our two tribes!"

Bodamochi looked at the chest with interest and said, "May I open it now to have a look?"

"Of course." Alakosia signaled to two of his subordinates, who promptly carried the chest in front of Bodamochi.

"Allow me." Sphili stepped forward, standing before Bodamochi. Once the two subordinates stepped back, he opened the chest lid.

Inside the chest were four pieces of pottery and a long wooden box.

Sphili casually picked up one piece of pottery, stroking its surface before giving it a firm tap, which produced a heavy sound. "This pot is well-made, much better than what our tribe produces. Look, it even has designs on it—"

Sphili's words abruptly stopped as his gaze locked onto the pot. On its black and shiny surface was a beautifully detailed painting: a herd of deer drinking by the riverside, with a panther crouching in the nearby grass...

Aside from the light blue of the river and the faint green of the grass, most of the colors used were red. Black pottery with red artwork was typical, but unlike the simple line-drawn figures popular on the market, the painting on this pot was entirely different. The deer and panther were vividly lifelike, each with distinct expressions—the deer's elegance and alertness perfectly contrasted with the panther's cunning and ferocity. Sphili was completely captivated, even feeling an involuntary sense of unease at the imagined bloodshed that the scene seemed to foretell.

"This artwork... is extraordinary!" Sphili exclaimed in awe.

"Let me see," Bodamochi extended his hand.

Sphili handed the pot to him and then retrieved a large basin from the chest. "I've never seen pottery shaped like this before. What's it used for?"

"It can be used for holding water for washing your face or body, or for serving soup and porridge—much more convenient than eating directly from a pot. This was crafted by our tribe's potters under Leader Maximus' instructions. It took significant effort to perfect this design.

Look at how large it is, yet it maintains a flawless round shape. Even the sides aren't straight but curved—a feat requiring exceptional skill!"

Alakosia introduced the item with pride. He recalled how the craftsman who made the basin had earned commendation from Leader Maximus and was recorded in merit by the Civil Affairs Department.

Sphili, however, wasn't particularly interested in pottery techniques. His attention once again settled on the artwork covering the basin. The red designs filled the entire surface, this time depicting not animals but a group of people chasing and competing for a ball. The lifelike scene radiated tension and energy. Sphili, engrossed, clenched his fists and furrowed his brow, fully immersed in the depicted frenzy.

Finally, he couldn't help but ask, "Is the activity shown on this basin artwork the ball game your tribesmen often play near the village to the south of the mountains?"

"Indeed, it is that very game," Alakosia replied casually. "Has Leader Sphili been there to watch?"

"Of course not, how could I have?" Sphili hurriedly denied. "It's just that some of our tribesmen, while hunting, chased prey to the southern side of the mountains and saw your tribesmen playing this game. It seemed quite entertaining, so they mentioned it when they returned."

"Oh," Alakosia responded smoothly. "This ball game is called olive ball. It was invented by Leader Maximus and is truly enjoyable! Nearly everyone in our tribe loves participating in it, and we even hold tribe-wide olive ball tournaments!"

Leader Sphili, if your tribe finds olive ball interesting, I can have someone teach you how to play. In the future, our two tribes could even compete against each other in olive ball matches!"

"I think that's a splendid idea," Sphili's eyes lit up as he turned to Bodamochi and asked, "Sage, what do you think?"

Bodamochi did not immediately respond. He stepped forward, took the basin from Sphili, and closely examined its artwork. He then said, "If the envoy doesn't consider it too much trouble, we would indeed like to learn this olive ball game. Competing against the Nix Tribe in such matches could further foster friendship between our two tribes!"

"Not at all; we would be delighted to do so!" Alakosia replied enthusiastically.

Bodamochi added, "From your earlier words, I sense that your tribe's leader is a person of great talent. Not only can he lead you to victory in battle, but he can also instruct you on crafting pottery and even invent such a ball game."

"That is because our Leader Maximus is blessed by the Danu Goddess!" Alakosia declared loudly, recalling the earlier advice from Chief Priest Emmerich to avoid shocking their hosts sensationally by claiming "Leader Maximus is the offspring of the Danu Goddess."

"The Danu Goddess?!" Bodamochi was taken aback. "Your Nix Tribe is an Illyrian Tribe, and your leader should also be an Illyrian! How could this be?!—"

"The Pannonians are also a branch of the Illyrians, which does not prevent them from worshipping the Holy Stone and the Holy Forest," Alakosia calmly explained. "Our Nix Tribe has a significant group of

Druids, originating from both the Skodisqi and Pannonians. They unanimously agree that Leader Maximus is blessed by the Danu Goddess! Oh, and here is the most compelling evidence!"

Chapter 483: The Soaring Summer Tax

Alakosia stepped forward, opened the wooden box inside the chest, and carefully and respectfully took out an object.

"This is the statue of the Goddess Danu! It was personally carved by Leader Maximus, inspired by the Goddess Danu who visited him repeatedly in his dreams and enlightened him. He entrusted me to bring it to you, Sage, hoping the Goddess's radiance could also illuminate the Iron Core Tribe!"

Bodamochi took the statue with a mix of respect and skepticism, examining it closely: it was a half-meter tall wooden statue of a woman. Her hair was elegantly arranged in a high bun adorned with a wreath of oak branches, she wore a simple white gown with finely detailed folds that draped naturally like flowing water. Her smooth, pale left hand held a water-filled ceramic jug on her left shoulder, while her right hand extended forward, scattering soil from her palm. Her figure was graceful and upright, noble and elegant, with a serene and compassionate expression. Her deep-set eyes gazed downward mercifully at all living things, and the gentle smile on her lips conveyed a sense of tender care...

The more Bodamochi looked at the statue, the more he felt a profound connection and a sense of holiness...

He hurriedly placed the statue respectfully on his seat, stepped back a few paces, and bowed deeply in reverence.

Observing this, Alakosia continued from the side, "Within the territory of the Nix Tribe, multiple temples dedicated to the Goddess Danu have already been established. Almost all tribesmen visit the temple to pray and deeply revere the Druids who guard the temple..."

Bodamochi gazed intently at the statue, his thoughts in turmoil.

The Druids believe that the natural world harbors countless gods and spirits, but they hold the Holy Stone Sacred Forest in highest esteem. This is not only because gods are unknowable and unimaginable, but also because rocks and forests are tangible realities. They believe that touching and praying before

the Holy Stone grants divine protection, and that forests are homes to gods—essentially using the Holy Stone Sacred Forest as a bridge to communicate with the divine.

But now, standing before this exquisitely crafted and solemnly magnificent statue, Bodamochi felt a mysterious impulse: this was the Goddess Danu! We are made in Her likeness because She created us! She is perfect because She is a deity, transcending mortals! Yet She is also loving and compassionate, for She created all things and desires harmony between humanity and nature...

Bodamochi took a deep breath and said with conviction, "It seems I need to make time to travel to the Nix Tribe."

Sphili was taken aback, and asked in surprise, "Sage, are you going to visit the Nix Tribe yourself?!"

Bodamochi looked at him and said resolutely, "Traveling for spiritual learning is an essential practice for us Druids. Shamefully, it has been many years since I last did so. This time, I'll take the opportunity of our cordial relations with the Nix Tribe to visit their temples dedicated to the Goddess Danu and exchange knowledge with their Druids. The only question now is whether the Nix Tribe will permit my visit?"

This last remark was evidently directed toward Alakosia.

Equally surprised, Alakosia quickly snapped out of it and eagerly responded, "I believe our Leader Maximus would be thrilled to welcome Sage Bodamochi to our tribe!"

.....

In late September, the golden fields of the Nix Tribe had turned to gray-black soil. The wheat from the village threshing grounds had already been stored in granaries, and households were immersed in the joy of harvest, with laughter and merriment everywhere.

In the main hall of Ophelia's administrative building, Maximus was listening to the Finance Department Chief Officer Gaius's report: "...This time, the Finance Department has received ### kilograms of wheat as the summer tax, as well as ### kilograms of flax."

"### kilograms of wheat! This year's field tax has increased six or seven times compared to last year!" Maximus said with a smile.

"Leader, not only has the number of cultivated fields in our tribe increased significantly this year, but the harvest from those fields has also surpassed last year's yield, so the tax revenue has exceeded our department's initial estimates," Gaius said softly. "The Finance Department has already filled grain silos in Snowdonia, Westeni, Ophelia... among other towns, but there's still a small portion of remaining wheat that has no storage space. We are urgently requesting the construction team to expedite the expansion of granaries."

Maximus was evidently aware of this issue, and he said mildly, "How much of this remaining small portion of wheat are we talking about?"

"Approximately... roughly one-sixth of the wheat remains without proper storage," Gaius replied meekly.

"The Finance Department is supposed to be the department that values accuracy the most! A 'small portion'?" Maximus sneered, his tone sharply critical. "Is this the kind of careless attitude you bring as the Chief Officer? No wonder you failed to accurately estimate wheat field yields and neglected to construct enough silos. Now so much wheat is being left exposed outdoors—what if it rains heavily and the wheat spoils? Will you be the one to compensate for the loss?"

Gaius was struck silent, too frightened to defend himself.

Vonus, emboldened, interjected, "Leader, the Finance Department's failure to accurately estimate the summer tax yield... partially lies with us at the Agricultural Department!"

Vonus glanced at the unyielding Maximus and continued apologetically, "Although this year's favorable weather ensured an excellent crop yield, we initially anticipated a bountiful harvest.

However... with the expansion of the tribe's territory, the population has grown substantially—from the previous 11,300 households and 47,000 people to over 52,900 households and 194,500 people. The number of fields has similarly surged, from close to 150,000 acres to more than 2.17 million acres. Both population and acreage have multiplied several times, yet the number of personnel in the Labor Department hasn't increased significantly.

Accurately predicting field yields requires staff to visit towns, villages, and individual fields to carefully observe and calculate accurate data.

But the Finance Department is woefully understaffed. Even just surveying Ophelia's fields proved difficult, while the wheat fields along the Kupa River had to rely on the few Agricultural Department staff posted there. The wheat field acreage along the Kupa River is substantial, making it impossible for them alone to carry out the extensive evaluation needed. As a result, their focus had to shift mostly to Todleduo, while they relied on last year's statistics for Snowdonia and Westeni.

This led us to realize post-harvest that the grain yield in these two towns had exceeded estimates. Their average yield per acre reached between 100 to 140 pounds—"

"That's at least 20 pounds more than last year's yield!" Maximus exclaimed with some astonishment.

Vonus felt a small relief and spoke with a bit more confidence, "The Agricultural Department sent personnel to investigate specifically and found that the increase in yield for these two towns' fields was due to improved farming techniques. Farmers plowed deeper, thoroughly cleared weeds and debris, fertilized adequately, and carefully selected fuller, healthier grains from last year's harvest for planting..."

"What about Ophelia's average yield per acre?" Maximus asked with interest.

"Yield here averaged about 100 pounds per acre," Vonus replied promptly. "That's 30 to 40 pounds more than their average yield from earlier years. The village chiefs were diligent in teaching agricultural techniques, and the reserve tribe members studied diligently. Moreover, with so much new land obtained, farmers worked extra hard on their fields..."

However, there remains a shortage of farming tools, draft oxen, and manure. I believe by next year, with improvements in these areas, the yield per acre can increase even further."

Maximus listened intently and nodded slightly, his expression softening.

Vonus seized the moment to add, "Leader, while estimating this year's field harvest, the Agricultural Department also made an error. The northern territories only stabilized completely about a month ago, at which time we were busy investigating Ophelia's fields and couldn't spare staff to survey the northern regions. I assumed that after the conflicts, many villages and settlements had suffered damage and believed there wouldn't be much harvest from their fields. Moreover, I thought it wouldn't be reasonable to demand taxes from the people in a newly acquired land so quickly.

But in reality, since the Yabod people invaded the northern territory primarily in search of grain, they avoided damaging the fields significantly. Although the northern territory is relatively small, its soil is fertile. Moreover, Chief Officer Sirinos of the northern administration managed to have the tribesmen pay taxes, yielding a surprising volume of grain...

In short, our Agricultural Department's oversight caused us to underestimate the taxes paid by the tribesmen, leaving the Finance Department unprepared."

Gaius glanced in surprise at the contrite Vonus, someone he frequently clashed with, who was now standing up for him.

Maximus pondered for a moment before saying sternly, "The personnel shortage isn't unique to your Agricultural Department; it applies to other departments as well. Last time, you raided the tribal school, recruiting so many students that even Kefisofon complained to me.

This time, don't even think about expanding your department. Even if I approve, there's no one available. The tribal school still needs time to train capable individuals. Regardless, you must find a way to manage responsibilities effectively—I don't want to see the same mistakes happening again!"

"Yes, Leader!" Vonus and Gaius replied in unison, bowing.

Gaius continued to explain, "Leader, we have obtained the approval of the Ophelia administrative officer, Sicropus, to temporarily store the surplus grain in empty courtyards in East Village, ensuring its safety.

Capito has assigned additional manpower to the construction team, and within a month, two new large granaries will be built near Ophelia. Once completed, there will be more than enough space for storing the remaining grain."

Chapter 484: The New Spinning Wheel and Loom

Maximus looked at Capito.

Capito responded, "Actually, it won't even take a month. Yesterday, the construction supervisor Gaius told me that it would only take twenty days to complete the two granaries."

Maximus then said, "This is indeed a good remedial measure."

Gaius finally breathed a sigh of relief.

"Leader, the designs you drew last time have been crafted by Tetilipus and his team. When will you find time to take a look?" Capito asked again.

"Oh, the spinning wheels and weaving looms have been made!" Maximus, visibly pleased, immediately said, "I'll go check them out tomorrow. By the way, bring Sesret along too!"

.....

Sesret was a middle-aged woman with an unremarkable appearance and average weaving skills. She had previously been a female slave in a large estate in Campania. There were many in the Weaving Workshop more skilled than her, but the reason she became the head of the Weaving Workshop was that she, like Acronis, was among the first batch of female slaves to join the rebel army. Back then, her tailoring and sewing skills were the best among the female slaves, so Maximus appointed her to gather a team responsible for sewing inner linings and pouches for the soldiers.

Later, when the rebel army occupied Sarabia, they found that Sarabia City had a unique specialty—woolen clothing and woven rugs—due to the famous wool produced at Kargalum Cape in Italy. The city had several textile workshops, and the female slaves working in them were all absorbed into the rebel army.

However, Maximus did not replace Sesret with a more skilled female slave to lead the Weaving Team. Her prior dedication and loyalty had earned his trust, and her senior status within the rebel army commanded the respect of the newly incorporated female slaves.

In fact, even as the Weaving Team expanded and its numbers increased, it maintained order and consistently contributed, whether during the army's relocations or later at the Nix Tribe's Weaving Workshop. This success was inseparable from Sesret's efforts.

That said, whether during the time of the rebel army or now in the tribe, the Weaving Workshop was probably the department Maximus cared least about. Even the less conspicuous Furniture Workshop had received his attention multiple times, with him drawing new furniture designs.

This wasn't because Maximus overly trusted Sesret's abilities but rather because, during that time, the conditions didn't allow for much else. He believed that as long as the Weaving Workshop maintained its current output, it would suffice.

It was precisely Maximus's past indifference toward the Weaving Workshop that made Sesret, who had rarely been summoned directly by the leader, feel extremely nervous when she learned that he wanted to meet her in person.

Her direct superior, the Public Works Officer Capito, didn't reveal the reason for the meeting to Maximus, only mysteriously reassuring her, "This will be a huge benefit for your Weaving Workshop! Come on, hurry up and follow me. You'll see soon."

An anxious Sesret followed Capito to the Tribe Hall.

When Maximus saw her, he joked, "Sesret, you're finally here. It's really not easy to get a meeting with you."

Sesret grew more nervous and was about to explain.

Maximus waved his hand and said, "It's fine, you're here now. Follow me."

With that, he turned with a wave of his hand and walked out of the hall. The attendants guided Capito and Sesret to follow closely behind.

Unlike at Slodia, the main house in Ophelia is larger in scale and had been roughly divided into three sections by Maximus: one for the leader's administrative affairs, including the Tribe Hall, the Political Affairs Hall meeting room, the leader's office, and the Guard's lounge; one for Maximus, his three wives, and their children; and one ostensibly under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which, besides the kitchen and procurement managed by Acnes, also included the Intelligence Division, Archives Division, and Attendant Division of the Secretariat.

If the Guard's quarters adjacent to the main house were added, there would be four major sections.

Maximus headed toward the area managed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. After passing through a courtyard, he arrived at a building, pushed open its ajar door, and walked inside.

"Leader, you've arrived!" came a familiar voice that made Sesret even more nervous.

Without taking a closer look, she followed Capito into the room.

"Oh, Sesret, my dear sister!" Acronis ignored Capito, who had entered first, and embraced Sesret as she approached. "It's been over a year since we last met, hasn't it? I've missed you! What about you?"

"Uh... me too..." Sesret responded awkwardly, her attention completely drawn to two objects placed at the center of the room. She instinctively pushed away Acronis's hug and walked, almost subconsciously, toward the room's center.

At the center of the room stood a peculiar piece of machinery. Its main structure consisted of a sturdy base, with one end supporting a solid vertical axis. Attached to the axis was a large wooden circular wheel about a meter in diameter. Above the wheel were three spindles, each supported by a slender rod. On the other end of the base stood a C-shaped support, which carried a foot-operated treadle. The support divided the treadle into a roughly 4:6 ratio, with the long end extending into the wooden wheel...

A maid from the Ministry of Internal Affairs sat nearby, next to a large wooden rack loaded with six bundles of thin, thread-like material—flax fibers, processed through drying, peeling, soaking, boiling, and combing after being harvested earlier this year.

The maid took two bundles of flax fibers and loaded them onto a spindle. Once all three spindles were loaded, she placed her feet on both ends of the treadle, rocking it back and forth like a seesaw.

The long end of the treadle drove the axle, causing the wooden wheel to spin continuously. Grooves carved into the edge of the wheel created friction as it rotated, driving the three adjacent spindles to spin together. As the spindles rotated, the flax fibers were drawn, twisted, and wound onto them, gradually forming thin threads...

During this process, the maid's main tasks, apart from rocking the wheel with her feet, were monitoring the supply of flax fibers and replenishing them from a wooden basin nearby whenever needed...

In this manner, after a period of time, the three spindles were filled with fine threads, forming thick, spindle-shaped bundles.

Sesret's eyes widened as she watched the scene unfold, her face etched with astonishment.

The spinning conducted at the Weaving Workshop also involved spinning wheels, consisting of a rotating wooden wheel and a fixed spindle. One end held a bunch of flax fibers, and as the wheel spun, the fibers twisted into threads and wound onto the spindle... This method bore some resemblance to what she was observing now.

However, because the traditional spinning wheel required manual operation of the rotating wheel, it frequently had to be stopped to replenish the flax fibers. This stop-and-go process meant that completing a single spindle took considerable time, let alone three. It often took half a day to finish three spindles. Yet, this new spinning device could achieve high efficiency in such a short amount of time with minimal effort!

Though astonished, Sesret didn't speak, for her gaze had already shifted to another device beside the new spinning wheel.

It was a loom! But much like the spinning wheel, this loom was vastly different from the ones in the Weaving Workshop.

The looms in the Weaving Workshop consisted of two upright posts supporting a horizontal cloth beam. Warp threads were fixed to the beam and tensioned from below using weights. In the middle, a horizontal rod separated odd-numbered and even-numbered threads to form a natural shed. The warp threads in the back could be raised to create an artificial shed. The weft carried on a shuttle passed through these sheds alternately, weaving cloth...

Because such looms were wide and upright, women in the workshop had to weave standing up, moving back and forth around the loom to guide the weft shuttle through the warp threads. Such a setup typically required two or three women working together, and creating a single one-meter-long, one-meter-wide piece of fabric often took about half a day.

At the end of a workday, the women were left with sore backs and aching muscles due to prolonged standing and movement. Yet, there was no alternative; whether in Rome, Greece, Egypt, or Little Asia, this was how looms operated.

But this loom before Sesret was unlike anything she had ever seen: Its frame was more upright, with a warp beam positioned at the top that unrolled threads downward. A finer rod divided the warp threads into odd and even layers, each layer controlled by heddles attached to upper and lower rods. On either side of the loom, there were horsehead-shaped hanging heddle rods. At the base of the loom were two foot pedals: a longer one on the left connected by linkage to the rear heddle rod, and a shorter one on the right connected by linkage to the horsehead, which in turn moved the front heddle rod.

Stepping on the shorter pedal caused the horsehead to tilt upward, pulling the front heddle forward and creating a shed; stepping on the longer pedal pulled the rear heddle backward, allowing the layers to switch and form a new shed...

Sesret watched as a maid seated at the loom deftly pressed the pedals with her feet, moving the horsehead up and down, alternately opening and closing the sheds. She guided the shuttle through the warp threads, then beat the weft into place with the reed...

Sesret stared without blinking. No one else in the room spoke either, though it wasn't quiet. The machine's parts creaked as they moved, the shuttle swished back and forth, and the warp and weft threads vibrated slightly as they intertwined... Together, these sounds created a somewhat noisy atmosphere.

Yet, none of the onlookers seemed bothered. They quietly observed as the maid skillfully maneuvered the loom...

It was unclear how much time had passed before Maximus finally spoke: "That will do."

Chapter 485: The Significance of Promoting the Great Development of the Textile Industry

The maid immediately stopped stepping on the board, and the other maid who had been spinning yarn walked over and cut the finished fabric from the loom with scissors.

The maid carefully pulled out the fabric and was about to hand it to Maximus when Sesret, usually calm, unexpectedly snatched it first, saying, "Let me see."

This linen was one meter wide and about two meters long, with even textures and very orderly and dense yarns with no twists or tangles horizontally or vertically...

"It's really good fabric! Such good fabric!" Sesret gently stroked the fabric surface, exclaiming in admiration, then she looked at Maximus, her eyes seemingly burning with intense fire, and spoke loudly and eagerly, "Leader, this spinning wheel! And this loom—"

"This is called the pedal spinning wheel! This is called the pedal vertical loom! Both were taught by the Goddess Danu in my dreams, and I had the craftsmen of the Public Works Department make them after repeated attempts," Maximus said with a calm expression.

"I specifically brought you, the supervisor of the Weaving Workshop, here today because I wanted you to give an evaluation after seeing these two weaving machines—how do you find them?"

"These ingenious designs truly come from the great Goddess Danu's enlightenment to our leader! Ordinary people couldn't have conceived of such designs," Sesret exclaimed without a hint of doubt towards Maximus's words, because over the past two years, the Goddess Danu had indeed enabled Maximus to invent extraordinary machines, significantly enhancing the tribe's power. On the contrary, she was overwhelmingly excited: "This time, the divine light of the Goddess Danu has finally shone on the Weaving Workshop. I'm sure it won't take long for some of the people in the workshop to achieve merits and advance!"

"Leader, our Weaving Workshop, to weave a piece of fabric like this—" Sesret praised seriously while holding the freshly woven cloth in her hands, "From spinning the thread to completely weaving it, if it involves four people doing the job, it takes about two days to complete. If the number of people is halved, the time doubles. However, using these two machines, only two people can accomplish it in less than half a day!

If our Weaving Workshop continuously uses these new spinning wheels and looms in the future, not only can we produce more fabric in a short amount of time, but we can also decrease the number of people to keep the workshop from being too bloated—"

"No, the Weaving Workshop cannot reduce its workforce!" Maximus reminded solemnly, "Since we settled down here, with everyone's efforts, every member of the Nix community has had fertile land, comfortable housing, and enough food, but one thing has not changed significantly—what we wear.

"On one hand, we previously lacked sufficient raw materials, on the other hand, spinning and weaving take too much time and manpower, so until now, we've woven very little fabric and made even fewer clothes. Many of my people who have risked their lives with me still wear clothes obtained in Italy, now washed and worn repeatedly, they are becoming ragged..."

Maximus's face was full of self-blame: "Every time I see Volenus, Gaius, and Capito wearing faded and tattered clothes to the Political Affairs Hall meetings, I feel ashamed. The better life I promised everyone should not be like this! So, I devoutly prayed to the Goddess Danu, and she answered me!

Now, with these two machines made, you see they are much better than the existing spinning wheels and looms, so next, I will have the craftsmen of the Furniture Workshop manufacture more of these spinning wheels and looms to give to the Weaving Workshop. As for you—"

Maximus emphasized, "Sesret, you must organize all the skilled weavers in the workshop to quickly familiarize and operate these two new machines, to produce more and better textiles as soon as possible, to meet the needs of the tribe for clothing urgently, and maybe in the future, trade fabrics with other tribes, bringing more resources that our tribe urgently needs!"

Sesret hearing this, excited about the Weaving Workshop beginning to receive the leader's attention, yet feeling the pressure, couldn't help but interject, "Leader, to meet your requirements, the existing staff might not be enough."

"The Weaving Workshop can recruit more people, looking for members of the tribe skilled in weaving, especially women! Women have less strength than men for farming, but their agile hands make them more adept at weaving. They can use the wages they earn from the Weaving Workshop to pay for hiring foreign auxiliaries or other tribespeople to do the farming," Maximus advised.

"If people are insufficient, the workshop needs expansion... For these issues, you can directly seek your superior Capito for help. Should there be any shortcomings you find in these new machines during usage, you can relay feedback to Capito for the craftsmen to help improve and perfect these machines...

After the cloth is woven, it's up to you to think of a way for dyes. If your Weaving Workshop can find new good dyes that make our clothes more brilliant and lessen fading during washing, the tribe will greatly reward your workshop!"

Maximus was able to draw diagrams for the spinning and weaving machines because in his past life, he had been involved in graphic design for a civilization strategy game, which included textile elements, and he made a point to research them extensively to ensure he could accurately draw ancient spinning and weaving devices.

But as for dyes, he couldn't offer much help, as the dyes at that time were mainly derived from natural plants and minerals. Each region had different resources, like the famous Tyrian Purple, discovered by the residents of Tyre City on the eastern Mediterranean coast, from a type of shellfish that could extract a liquid dyeing cloth a striking purple, thus becoming an extremely costly dye. The people who discovered it were then known throughout the Mediterranean as the Phoenicians.

In fact, after the Nix settled here, the Weaving Workshop and Pottery Workshop had already discovered several plant and mineral dyes through the Reserve Tribe Members, but those were accumulated by the Segestica people, the Aldeans, and the Skodisqi in their long-term labor practice here. Maximus hoped to motivate the female weavers to actively seek out more and better dyes through merit advancements.

Indeed, Sesret enthusiastically said, "Leader, the Goddess Danu has favored our Weaving Workshop so! With your tremendous help, I will not let you down and will certainly do my best to lead everyone in our workshop to weave more fabric and dye more colorful and beautiful cloth!"

"Good, I look forward to you leading the Weaving Workshop to bring greater contributions to our tribe!" Maximus encouraged with a smile.

The reason why Maximus introduced the new spinning and weaving machines at this time was not only that the tribe had enough linen materials, but more importantly, the Nix tribe's paper money would be released by the end of the year. To ensure the currency's value remained stable and provided tribesmen more products to purchase, he had to focus more on "clothing," one of the four human basic needs—food, clothing, housing, and transportation.

As long as the raw materials and manpower were sufficient, and production efficiency improved, the textile industry could easily achieve economies of scale, generating immense wealth. In turn, it would not only meet the tribe's demand but also allow for sales to surrounding tribes, thus accumulating their wealth and strengthening the tribe's power.

Unaware of the heavy responsibility on her shoulders, Sesret eagerly requested Maximus to immediately try operating the spinning wheel and loom herself.

After Maximus nodded in agreement, Sesret, under the guidance of the maid, enthusiastically began operating the loom.

At this moment, the Attendant came over and whispered a few words to Maximus.

"Capito, the Weaving Workshop is what you should focus on next. Help Sesret with any issues she might encounter. I hope before the end of the year to see this new spinning and weaving machinery widely implemented in the workshop, producing a large amount of fabric!" Maximus once again solemnly stated.

"As you wish, leader." Capito bowed in response.

Maximus nodded, turned, and left the Ministry of Internal Affairs, heading to his office in the front courtyard, where Military Intelligence Bureau Chief Glicus was waiting outside.

"Leader!" Glicus greeted respectfully.

Maximus entered the room, gesturing for Glicus to follow, "What important intelligence do you have now?"

"Leader, the alliance army made up of Dacians and Boyi people has already seen the outcome of their war. This is intelligence sent back by our agents in Brochi," Glicus said, handing over a secret report.

Maximus took it and opened it, clearly reading: On September 3rd, the Panoni Alliance Army, having crossed the Danube River and camped on the east bank, attacked the Dacian territory along the north bank of the Danube as directed by the Boyi instructions. On the way, they encountered the main force of the Dacians. After fighting, the Pannonians were defeated and quickly retreated to their territory on the west bank of the Danube. Two days later, they learned that the Boyi army was also defeated by the Dacians. The Panoni Alliance Army took this opportunity to disband and return home. According to current intelligence, the Panoni Alliance Army suffered minimal loss, with only seven or eight hundred casualties in Brochi.

.....

At the end of 71 BC, after suppressing Spartacus' rebellion army and quelling the Spanish rebellion, Crassus and Pompey jointly ran for the office of Roman Governor. Through their brilliant battle merits and outstanding prestige, they smoothly became the Roman Governors of the following year.

Pompey, being a general with remarkable battle achievements, habitually brought his battlefield valor into politics after becoming the Governor.