

Perish 526

Chapter 526: Meeting of the Two Heroes

In order to avoid such a terrible event from happening, in recent years, Maximus has been commissioning the Skodisqi Tribe to convey his intention to establish friendly relations with the King of Dacia.

During the conquest of the Boyi Tribe, he specifically ordered a fleet to use a conquered Boyi river port on the west bank of the Danube River as a base, patrolling the west bank daily.

Simultaneously, a camp was constructed on the west bank, with more than a legion stationed... These measures were all to guard against a sudden crossing attack by the Dacians.

However, since the Nix and the Boyi people engaged in battle, the King of Dacia has shown no response to Maximus' goodwill gestures, but there have also been no movements on the east bank of the Danube River, leading Maximus to believe that the Dacians didn't care at all about the situation on the west bank.

Unexpectedly, just as the Nibo War was reaching its final moments, the Dacians sent a message.

Were they trying to prevent the annihilation of the Boyi Tribe? Or did they want a share of the spoils? ... Although Maximus was annoyed, he wasn't too nervous, as he had discussed the possibility of Dacian involvement in the war with the Military Department several times and made some preparations.

However, the envoy from the Skodisqi Tribe reassured repeatedly: King Brebiusta harbors no ill intentions toward the Nix Tribe; he only wants to personally discuss the relations between Dacia and Nix, and peace for the entire Danube Plain, with Leader Maximus.

Maximus, skeptical yet curious, then dispatched Business Officer Pigeris to join the Skodisqi leader on a journey to Dacian lands to meet Brebiusta and find out the truth.

Pigeris' visit ultimately confirmed the words of the Skodisqi envoy, and subsequently, through multiple exchanges of visits between envoys, a date and location for the face-to-face meeting of the leaders of both sides were finalized.

On the first day of June, as the first ray of morning sunlight fell upon the surface of the Danube River, the narrowest part of the river between North and South quickly gathered a crowd of thousands along both banks.

After the sounding of a deeply resounding and enduring horn, a meticulously crafted wooden ship sailed to the river's center; then, heavy iron anchors tied with thick ropes on both prow and stern were dropped to the riverbed, making the wooden ship steadily poised in the middle of the river.

After confirming the safety of the wooden ship, the whistle sounded again.

Though considered the narrowest part of the Danube, the width of the river surface still exceeds two hundred and fifty meters, and Maximus could only vaguely see a person wearing a tall cylindrical hat, surrounded by people on the opposite bank, stepping onto a small boat.

Thus, he bid farewell to the officials and soldiers who came with him and, accompanied by an official from the Commerce Department fluent in Dacian, boarded the pavilion-like ship docked at the shore.

The Danube flowed smoothly, its water as clear as a great mirror, with plump fish occasionally seen swimming past the ship's bottom, and flocks of wild ducks joyfully playing on the river surface... A breeze blew over the river, creating rippling waves with shimmering golden lights scattered...

Maximus was not captivated by the beauty before him, as his mind was solely on the impending meeting.

Soon, they arrived at the meeting place in the middle of the river.

Maximus took a deep breath, calming his chaotic thoughts, and stepped firmly and powerfully onto the deck of the large wooden ship.

This large wooden ship was provided by the Nix Tribe, a new vessel made by their shipwrights over the years to enhance the capacity to transport soldiers and supplies, designed to sail steadily on the broader Danube River. Its ample hull could accommodate thirty soldiers, over five times the capacity of the original canoe ships.

The shipwrights performed modifications on the vessel, laying flat and thick deck boards, erecting a canopy to block the sunlight, fixing a wooden table at the ship's center, and equipping it with a few chairs... making it look more like a small pavilion standing in the middle of the river.

At that moment, two people were already standing by the wooden table on the boat, and Maximus walked over with steady steps.

Among them, a burly, rugged-looking middle-aged man scrutinized Maximus carefully and said in a loud voice, "I am Brebiusta! Are you Leader Maximus of the Nix Tribe?!"

After speaking, he looked towards the official from the Commerce Department accompanying Maximus, signaling for translation.

Unexpectedly, Maximus responded in slightly awkward Dacian, "I am Maximus! Pleased to meet you, King of Dacia!"

Brebiusta was suddenly surprised, "You can speak Dacian?!"

"My father was an Illyrian, and my mother was a Thracian, both were Roman slaves. I have spoken these two languages since childhood. I heard that Dacians are a branch of Thracians, and their languages are roughly the same, so I specifically practiced with this Dacian-speaking subordinate of mine recently. Although I haven't spoken Thracian for many years, my proficiency is not great, so I ask for your forgiveness."

Maximus, while explaining the reason, deliberately or unintentionally revealed a bit of his own background.

As expected, the lean, somewhat aged attendant beside Brebiusta immediately asked in surprise, "Leader Maximus, please allow me to be bold; with your parents being Roman slaves, how did you become the leader of the Nix Tribe?"

Maximus looked towards Brebiusta, "And who might this be?"

"He is Deqineu, our Dacian High Priest, the most respected person to me!" Brebiusta introduced.

Maximus showed a solemn expression and said earnestly, "I've long heard that High Priest Deqineu is a wise man among the Dacians; what a fortune to meet you today, indeed an honor for me!"

"That's just the clan members spreading stories; I merely assist my Great King with some minor tasks," Deqineu said modestly.

"The High Priest indeed has greatly helped me; without him, there would be no Dacia of today!" Brebiusta loudly praised, without concealing his reliance on Deqineu.

"Leader Maximus, pardon me; was my earlier question somewhat too bold?" Deqineu redirected the topic, tenderly continuing the inquiry.

"Oh, there's no need to worry about boldness; nothing about my past is unspeakable," Maximus smiled openly, "My parents were Roman slaves, and naturally, so was I. But as I grew up, I couldn't endure the oppression of the Romans any longer, so I joined other slaves in escaping from the Roman estates and towns. Along the way, we fought the Romans several times, and later, we fled Italy and arrived here, where, with the help of my fellow Aldeans, established the Nix Tribe..."

Brebiusta and Deqineu exchanged glances.

Deqineu continued asking, "From what it seems, Leader Maximus, you must greatly resent the Romans?"

"Of course I do!" Maximus didn't hide his emotions, resolutely declaring, "I wish to lead an army to conquer Rome and turn all Romans into slaves! Not only do I hate the Romans, but the tribespeople who came with me here also hate them! Oh, I forgot to introduce you; this is our tribe's official in charge of foreign affairs — Medavratris. He too hails from Dacia and was once a Roman slave!"

Medavratris promptly saluted and said, "Honorable King of Dacia and High Priest, #&\$#!"

Medavratris specially said a Dacian slang phrase used for greetings, which made Brebiusta feel congenial, and he curiously asked, "Which tribe did you originally belong to?"

"To be precise, I am a Getae, and my original tribe was west of Histeria," answered Medavratris.

"The Getae are also a part of us Dacians, and now all of Dacia and the Getae have united into a strong tribal alliance!" Brebiusta replied without hesitation.

"Is that so? That's wonderful!" Medavratris exclaimed, aptly displaying a look of delight.

The Carpathian Mountains divide the mid-lower Danube Plain into two parts, simultaneously dividing the Dacian land into eastern and western parts. In the region of Eastern Dacia near the Yoke Star Sea, Getae, a branch of Dacians, was formed after a long conflict and amalgamation with nomadic tribes such as the Scythians migrating from the north.

Brebiusta didn't lie, and in recent years, he had incorporated the various Getae tribes into the Dacia Alliance through military conquest and political persuasion.

"I never thought, Leader Maximus, that both you and your subordinate have familial connections with us Dacians!" Deqineu exclaimed with a smile.

"Since we're not strangers, let's sit down and chat leisurely," Medavratris smiled, inviting everyone to sit, then picked up the water jug on the wooden table, pouring each a bowl of sour wine. Both the wooden ship and the cabin arrangements were provided by the Nix Tribe, and Medavratris proactively took the host's stance to serve everyone.

Maximus raised his wooden bowl and exclaimed loudly, "I am half Thracian; Medavratris is a Getae. We traveled from Italy to reach here, and meeting Great King Brebiusta and High Priest Deqineu today must be the arrangement of the Divine! How about we four regard this special moment, toasting with water instead of wine?!"

"Well said! Let's toast first!" Brebiusta enthusiastically raised his bowl for a toast.

After drinking a bowl of sweet sour water, seeing the atmosphere in the cabin becoming more harmonious, Maximus deliberately sighed and said, "Great King Brebiusta, I am somewhat dissatisfied with you. I had asked Ipodiles (leader of the Skodisqi Tribe) to convey my intentions of goodwill to your people long ago, yet there was no response from you, which prevented me from daring to send envoys directly to Dacia to pay a visit, causing years to pass before we met today."

"Well, this..." Brebiusta's expression turned a little awkward.

Deqineu quickly interjected, "Leader Maximus, when Ipodiles first delivered your message, our Great King was ready to send envoys to contact you, but I stopped him—I must apologize!"

Chapter 527: Persuasion

Deqineu spoke apologetically, but there wasn't a hint of apology on his face: "We Dacians have always been at odds with the tribes on the west bank of the Danube River. The Pannonians are bent on destroying our allies in the Skodisqi Tribe. The Boyi people and the Taolisi people have been continually invading eastward, occupying a significant portion of our Dacian territory on the east bank of the Danube River..."

When we first heard the name of the Nix Tribe, you had already taken over most of the Pannonian territories and reached the west bank of the Danube River. Soon, you completely annexed Pannonian lands and then went to war with the Boyi people. In just a few years, you had beaten the Boyi people until only a few sparse tribes remained in the north...

Although you have eliminated our Dacian enemies, the fearsome aggression of the Nix Tribe certainly worries us! That's why I advise the Great King to act cautiously."

Maximus glanced at Brebiusta, whose expression had turned serious, and then at Deqineu, who remained calm. After pondering, he said solemnly, "I believe you two won't just see the surface of the Nix Tribe defeating the Pannonians and the Boyi people, but you should also somewhat understand the reasons for our Nix Tribe's wars with these two tribes..."

The reason we were able to settle and establish the tribe here is that the Pannonians invaded the Alde Tribe and occupied their lands. The Aldeans hoped that we, the Nix, could fend off further Pannonian invasions and prevent their extinction.

We, the Nix, fulfilled our promise and expelled the Pannonians from Aldean territories. However, the Pannonians then saw the Nix as an enemy that must be annihilated, launching four attacks on us within three years, with each assault involving more than twenty thousand people, the largest reaching over sixty thousand.

The Nix is a newly established tribe with little land and few people. We couldn't afford a prolonged defense against Pannonian attacks, so we had to go on the offensive, occupying Pannonian territories to weaken their strength and ensure the tribe's survival. However, in doing so, our hatred with the Pannonians became irreconcilable. One side must completely fall for the war to end..."

At this point, Maximus shrugged helplessly: "As for the conflict with the Boyi people, that was also because they first invaded the Pannonian tribe south of the Delaware River. When the Pannonians were defeated, they preferred to join us, the Nix. So I sent an envoy and even invited the Noric Druids to visit the Boyi Tribe, trying to persuade them to cease hostilities.

But not only did the Boyi people refuse, they even sent troops to pursue the Pannonian people fleeing to our territories. To protect these Pannonian people who had sworn allegiance to the Nix, we had no choice but to deploy forces to defeat the Boyi army rampaging south of the Delaware River.

After that, we controlled the Delaware River due to our advantage on the water, but the Boyi people were unwilling to accept defeat, repeatedly sending troops to attempt crossing the river to attack Nix territories. Eventually, we could no longer endure it and gathered a large force to launch an attack on the Boyi people...

This is not a defense of Nix. You can send people to inquire with surrounding tribes. What I've said are facts. We, the Nix Tribe, do not delight in invasions, and each war was not initiated by us. However, once war arises, for the long-term security of the tribe, we often give our all in counterattacks!"

Maximus slightly heightened his tone with his final words, subtly reminding the opposite side. Then he said in a soothing voice, "Actually, during these years of war with the Boyi people, I've always wondered, you Dacians also hold grudges against the Boyi, right? Why didn't you join this war?"

The question was somewhat direct, but Brebiusta did not evade it and replied straight, "The land on the east bank of the Danube River originally belonged to us Dacians, so we drove away the Boyi people to reclaim our land.

However, we don't covet the land on the west bank of the Danube. The various Celtic tribes have lived there for hundreds of years, and their lifestyle, language, and traditions are entirely different from ours Dacians.

If I rashly led an army across the Danube to seize the Boyi territories, I might get mired in war with the Celtic people, so I won't waste time on such a risky endeavor. Currently, consolidating our recently established Dacia Alliance and making all Dacian tribes more united is of utmost importance to me!"

"You are a wise person! With a king like you, Dacia will surely become much stronger!" Maximus sincerely praised.

"Leader Maximus, after you eliminate the Boyi people, what plans do you have next for yourself and your Nix Tribe?" Deqineu gazed at Maximus.

Maximus answered without hesitation, "Once we have eliminated the Boyi people, as long as the Taolisi people, who have supported the Boyi against us, are willing to negotiate peace, we, the Nix, are also willing to live peacefully with them.

If today, I and Great King Brebiusta could reach an agreement, so that your two tribes could maintain long-standing friendship, along with our friendly relations with the Noric, the Yapode, the Skodisqi, and the Aldeans... With such a peaceful and stable environment, the Nix can develop in peace and contribute to the prosperity of the entire Danube Plain! —"

Medavratis whispered a few words to Maximus.

"Oh, that's right." Maximus corrected himself: "North of the Boyi territories and beyond the Danube Plain are the Germanic people. They are barbaric and fierce, occasionally invading southward and massacring the Danube Plain's populace and pillaging their wealth. I'll organize an army to strike against them, so they dare not disturb us again!

But I won't send troops northward to invade their lands because I've heard that place is forested everywhere, with towering trees that completely overshadow the sunlight, making it extremely cold and eerie, not fit for human habitation... Besides that, there won't be any concerns for the safety of the Nix Tribe.

In the upcoming time, I will do my utmost to make the Nix Tribe more prosperous and powerful, as I have always held an enemy in my heart, and I will eventually lead the Nix Tribe in a life-and-death battle against it!"

Maximus' eyes shone with determination as he looked at Brebiusta and Deqineu, not waiting for their inquiry, he declared each word with a firm voice: "That enemy is Rome!"

Both Brebiusta and Deqineu were astonished, as was Medavratris since he'd never heard his leader publicly speak of "waging war with Rome" in the future.

This time, Brebiusta didn't let Deqineu ask the question but took the initiative, asking, "Leader Maximus, are you truly prepared to wage war against Rome?! Rome is the most powerful state in the Mediterranean, and no force dares to provoke it!"

Maximus smiled meaningfully, "I heard you, Brebiusta, not only dared to provoke Rome, but you also defeated Roman armies several times. Compared to you, I am far less capable."

Brebiusta shook his head, saying, "Our war with the Romans was forced upon us. To the south of Dacia lies the Odryssian Kingdom, where the people are ethnic Thracians like us. The current Odryssia is largely controlled by the Romans, and they even incite invasions into our Dacian lands, attempting to probe our weaknesses.

I've led troops to repel them several times, but they were primarily Odryssian, with few actual Roman soldiers engaging us."

"It seems the Romans have their eyes on Dacia," noted Maximus. The news of past conflicts between Dacia and the Romans came to him via Onomabatis during trade at the Tarentum port, but not as detailed as Brebiusta's account.

With deep eyes, Maximus asked sternly, "Why would the Romans incite the Odryssian to invade Dacia?"

Without waiting for a response, he emphasized, "I think it's because the Romans want to destroy Dacia! It's not surprising, as you look at today's Mediterranean World—"

Speaking, Maximus dipped his finger in pulp water and swiftly drew a map of Mediterranean powers on the wooden table.

Brebiusta and Dequineu marveled at Maximus' outstanding drawing skills, but they were more astonished by what he said, carefully listening without interruption.

"The Iberian Peninsula in the west of the Mediterranean became a Roman province over a hundred years ago. Although some mountain tribes refuse to submit, they pose no threat to Roman rule.

The western part of Mauretania and Numidia in the south are Roman dependents; their Kings must even get approval from the Roman Senate to inherit the throne.

The central southern region became another Roman province after Rome defeated Carthage a hundred years ago, and the eastern southern region of Egypt also succumbed to Rome.

Let's take a look at the east. It was only a few years ago that the Roman Governor Pompey successively conquered all of Little Asia, Syria, and the Jewish Kingdom.

Then there's our location, the northern Mediterranean. Italy is the Romans' base, Western France, Northern Italy, Illyria, Greece, Macedonia... these are all Roman provinces.

You see, the Romans have already controlled the entire Mediterranean, but will they stop expanding?

No! Because the highest authority in Rome is the Governor, elected every year. For Roman nobles to be elected as governors, they mainly rely on military achievements and wealth, both of which can be acquired by waging wars, so the Roman provincial governors always spare no effort in instigating wars!"

Chapter 528: Anti-Roman Military Alliance

"But there are not many regions left for the Romans to conquer now. To the west of the Iberian Peninsula is the sea, to the south of the Mediterranean is a vast desert, and to the east of it is largely desert as well, leaving only Armenia and the Parthian Kingdom.

However, the Parthian Kingdom is very powerful, and if the Romans want to conquer it, they must first consolidate their newly acquired territories in Little Asia and Syria. Only after meticulous preparations might they dare to launch an attack, which will take quite some time..."

"Let's take a look north of the Mediterranean!" Maximus's finger forcefully pointed on the wooden table: "To the west and in the central region, there are vast lands inhabited by Celts and their branch, the Gaul. To the east live us Illyrians and you Dacians, and further north are the Germanic tribes..."

Such an expanse of land has not yet been conquered by the Romans. Do you think the Romans won't be greedy?! Won't they wage wars against us to gain achievements and wealth?!—"

Maximus pounded the table, startling Brebishta and Dequineu. He said with an angry and stern voice, "Of course the greedy Romans will do this! And they've already started! Ulysses Caesar was a former governor of Rome; a few years ago, he became the governor of the three provinces of Western France, Northern Italy, and Illyria. He brazenly launched an invasion against the Gauls, and within a few years, he conquered most of the Gaul tribes, turning countless Gaul warriors into Roman slaves, and many Gaul tribes were forced to surrender their accumulated wealth over the years..."

That Caesar was not satisfied with conquering Gaul, he even led his army into the land of the Germanic tribes! Once he conquers the entire west, the Roman swords will surely be pointed east at us! This may happen in the next few years, or it might be in the next few decades!...

But I do not wish to live on with a fluke, living in humiliation with my tribesmen until the day of destruction comes! To prevent our tribe from being destroyed, and our tribesmen kneeling like cattle and sheep before the Romans, enslaved by them until death! I must prepare the tribe now for a decisive battle against the Romans; we Nix people would rather die in battle than become slaves of Rome!"

"We Dacians are no different!" Brebishta, fired up by Maximus's words, couldn't help but roar in anger.

Dequineu coughed a few times, saying solemnly, "Though we Dacians are inland, we occasionally have Greek merchants coming to trade, so we know about a few years ago when that Roman General named Pompey conquered many powers in the east, and we also know the Romans are currently fighting against the Gauls..."

In reality, the Romans not only incited the Odryssians to harass our territory but after defeating the Paphlagonia Kingdom, they also occupied most of the coastal areas of the Yoke Star Sea, which is very close to our territory and poses a significant threat to us!...

However, as you said earlier, Rome controls the entire Mediterranean and is so powerful—if we rush to war with Rome, we could be wiped out in a moment!"

Maximus gave Deqineu a deep look, pressed lightly on the map he had drawn, and said confidently, "The Romans are indeed powerful, but they are not without flaws. Although they control vast territories, the truly loyal Romans are only those in Rome and the Roman citizens confined to the colonized towns they established around the Mediterranean.

There are about two to three million of these Romans, although they are more than us Nix people, they are far from being comparable to the population of all the different races around the Mediterranean.

And Rome cannot effectively govern the provinces it controls because they only know how to extract wealth from the provincial people and force them to fight for them. The provincials have long harbored resentment against Rome, merely feigning compliance out of fear of the might of the Roman Army.

You should know... Even among those Italians who were conquered by Rome early and are closest to Rome, there are some ethnic groups discontent with the Romans, like the Samnites and Marsi... Once given the opportunity, they would certainly cause trouble for the Romans.

So if the Romans were to suffer a significant defeat and their military strength greatly weakened, then I believe those provincials and Rome's controlled subordinate forces would all rebel, causing fires of war everywhere around the Mediterranean, leading to the fragmentation of Rome's provinces, and its power would naturally cease to exist.

But how can we make the militarily strong Romans suffer a major defeat?—"

Maximus deliberately paused, sweeping a glance at the three people listening intently, and then slowing his speech with a clearer tone, "Actually, there is a significant defect in Rome that has existed since it was still a small city-state and has now become a tremendous threat to the whole nation—that is the conflict between the nobles and the plebeians!

For a long time, the Roman nobles have held most of the power and wealth, while the plebeians, who are the main force of the army, have long been fighting and shedding blood and sweat, but receiving very little in return, so they are very dissatisfied with the nobles.

You should know that Rome does not have a king now; its highest authority is the Senate, where hundreds of elders debate and make laws for Rome, most of whom are of noble birth, hence the demands of the plebeians are often not passed.

A long time ago, plebeians forced the nobles to yield by collectively leaving Rome and refusing to fight for Rome to meet their demands. But this method no longer works because the land Rome controls keeps expanding, its population keeps growing, and Rome is getting wealthier. The nobles can use their wealth to hire vagrants with no land or home as soldiers to fight for Rome, eliminating the need to concede to plebeians. They even publicly kill those officials who dare to speak up for the plebeians...

Of course, the plebeians would not resign themselves to being oppressed by the nobles. As Romans, they still have the right to elect and recommend officials at various levels in Rome, which is why those Roman Generals who excel in war and are not from traditional noble backgrounds have become the favorites of the plebeians.

The plebeians promote these generals to key positions in Roman politics, and these generals, in return, use their power to seek benefits for the plebeians.

But the nobles will not share their acquired benefits with the plebeians; both sides refuse to yield, ultimately leading only to resolving their conflict through war. So a few decades ago, a civil war broke out in Rome, killing many, and the nobles emerged victorious.

But the plebeians have not yielded. This time they have chosen a new leader to fight for their rights, and that person is Caesar!—"

"The same Caesar fighting against the Gauls?!" Brebishta asked in surprise.

"Yes, him! During Rome's previous civil war, the two generals supported by the plebeians were his uncle and father-in-law. Because of this, he was persecuted by the nobles in his youth and had to flee to the East. Even when he returned to Rome later, he never changed his preference for the plebeians.

The Roman nobles fear him greatly, but because he allied with the most powerful men in Rome—Pompey and Crassus—they can do nothing about him. So they eventually allowed him to become the governor of the three provinces in Northern Italy. Now he has waged war against the Gauls and by making use of this war, is desperately expanding his army, which probably fills the Roman nobles with even more fear because it threatens their control over Rome.

They will certainly devise various ways to strip Caesar of his rights and dismantle his army. But Caesar, who has struggled to get where he is, will not comply easily, so the tension and conflict between the two sides will only intensify!—"

Maximus suddenly raised his voice by an octave, forcefully swung his right fist to demonstrate his confidence: "I can predict that within ten years, Rome will undergo another civil war, more brutal than the last! The Roman civil war will certainly deplete Rome's power immensely. I will seize this advantageous timing to lead an army to launch an attack on Rome!—"

Maximus gazed intently at Brebishta, extending his hand with a sincere and infectious tone, "Today I have come here mainly to form a military alliance with you—the great King Brebishta of Dacia—so that when the time comes, we can deliver a fatal blow to Rome, thereby completely eliminating the threat Rome poses to our respective tribes, allowing our descendants to live freely and comfortably on this land!"

"Leader Maximus—" Deqineu attempted to speak again but was stopped by Brebishta's outstretched hand.

This Dacian king seemed to have flames burning in his eyes, his expression resolute, his voice like a bell, "Leader Maximus, you have the courage to fight against the Romans; I, Brebishta, am not a coward. I am willing for Dacia to ally with the Nix against Rome and together smash Rome to pieces!"

"Great! With your support from Dacia, I am even more confident of defeating Rome!" Maximus said with visible delight, then seized the opportunity to add, "Then from today, Nix and Dacia will form a military alliance, using this segment of the Danube River flowing from north to south as the boundary, with the east belonging to you Dacians and the west to us Nix. The two tribes will live in harmony, strengthen exchanges, develop together, and enhance military strength... When the time comes, we will join forces to attack the Romans. What do you think?!"

"Good, I agree!" Brebishta blurted out, but he then thought of something and amended, "But I have another proposal. If the Taurisci continue to aid the Boyi in opposing you Nix, I support Nix in eliminating

the Taurisci and incorporating their land into the Nix tribe. We Dacians are also willing to send troops to assist."

Chapter 529: Claudius, the Top Roman Noble

Maximus was surprised by Brebiusta's proposal because the territory of the Taulisians was not on the west bank of the Danube River, but on the east bank, located at the northern end of the Danube Plain, encircled by the foothills at the western end of the Carpathian Mountains, with the Danube River as a barrier to the west. The land was not small and fertile, so the Taulisians were not weak.

Brebiusta, seeing Maximus's slight confusion, explained frankly: "The Taulisians have frequently harassed our Dacian tribes on the east bank of the Danube in the past; they are accomplices of the Boyi people! I have twice attempted to lead an army to take revenge on the Taulisians, but they rely on mountainous defenses, which ultimately led to my fruitless return.

Your Nix has a large fleet, having successfully crossed the Delaware River and defeated the Boyi people, which shows you are also experienced in amphibious operations. I believe that attacking the Taulisians from the riverbank would be more successful for you.

Moreover, the Taulisians are also a branch of the Celtics and are incompatible with us Dacians, whereas your Nix has past experience in conquering Celtics. Therefore, it is most appropriate for Nix to handle the Taulisians. This way, we can avoid the Taulisians causing trouble behind us when we go to war with Rome in the future."

Maximus looked at the Mediterranean map on the table, roughly outlined in brine, which did not depict the Taulisians nor the forces north of the Taulisians' territory. However, he had already investigated clearly that, like the Boyi people, the Taulisians bordered the fierce Germanic tribes—the Quadi and Oxi people—to the north, having frequent skirmishes. So Brebiusta's proposal had his own motives...

Nevertheless, Maximus did not intend to expose this. With a smile, he said, "Thank you for your generosity! Since that's the case, after defeating the Boyi people, Nix will consider eliminating the Taulisians to ensure peace throughout the Danube Plain."

"Good, then let's sign the alliance now!" Brebiusta said decisively.

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After forming the alliance, both sides returned to the shore.

On the way, Deqineu involuntarily sighed.

"What? Are you still worried about our impending war with the Romans?" Brebiusta comforted, "Just now, Chief Maximus and I have agreed that the fight against Rome should not involve only Nix and us Dacians. When the time is right, Maximus will send people to unite the Gaul and the Germanic tribes, and we will also find ways to persuade the Parthian Kingdom and the wandering Pontic Nobles...

We will try to unite all forces that hate Rome, and by then, with the Romans entangled in civil war, we are more likely to achieve victory!"

"I am somewhat concerned about the future confrontation with the Romans, but to avoid being enslaved by the Romans later, we must do this, I understand that," Deqineu lamented, "I am just amazed by Chief Maximus of Nix. He is merely of slave origin, yet he knows so much about the entire Mediterranean situation and the internal affairs of Rome, it's truly... truly alarming!"

"No matter what, now that Nix and Dacia are allies, to defeat the powerful Romans, our two tribes must rely on each other and unite as one!"

Brebiusta said in a deep voice, "Moreover, according to the agreement I made with Maximus, once a civil war breaks out in Rome, the Nix army will cross the mountains westward into Italy, while we will march directly southwards from the east, first striking into Odryssia, then directly threatening Rome's Macedonia Province...

Italy is the Romans' stronghold; the enemies that the Nix army will encounter will undoubtedly be powerful, whereas on our side, it will be much easier because we will be facing the loose Odryssian tribes.

We can take this opportunity to execute our planned strategy, merging all the Thracians who speak the same language and share similar traditions into our tribal alliance. Our strength will certainly be greatly enhanced, and I have confidence in defeating the Roman provincial army!"

Deqineu was silent for a moment, then nodded and said, "Maybe you're right; allying with the Nix and giving up the territory of the Taulisians, allowing the Nix to become a barrier, blocking the northern Germanic tribes for us, leaves us without worries.

Once the Roman civil war truly breaks out, we can devote all our strength, first conquering Odryssia... No matter the ultimate outcome of the war with Rome, Dacia will become the most powerful force in the north of Greece, and by then, we will fear no country, including the Nix."

"That's right, exactly!" Brebiusta looked back at the small boat carrying Maximus heading to the opposite shore, a surge of heroic spirit rising in his heart.

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Caesar was advancing victoriously on the Gaul battlefield, with reports of victory coming frequently. However, during these years of his absence from Rome, the Roman political arena was in constant turmoil and undercurrents.

Publius Claudius Pulcher was born into one of the greatest noble families in Rome, the Claudius family. For centuries, members of this family have remained at the core of the republic, producing many governors and notable politicians, although there were also some fools ridiculed by the public.

For example, an ancestor with the same name commanded a Roman fleet during the First Punic War. Before the battle, he performed the traditional chicken divination, but the chickens did not cooperate. In anger, Publius threw the chickens into the sea and declared, "If they won't eat, let them drink", resulting in a major defeat for the Roman fleet.

A few years later, Publius's sister was being carried through the streets of Rome when the crowd blocked her way. She loudly wished her brother could drown some of the poor people, showing the arrogance and tyranny of the Claudius family in Rome.

This generation of the Claudius family consisted of six siblings, all of whom were known in Rome for their capriciousness and wanton behavior. Claudius, the youngest, was the most outrageous.

Lucullus was his brother-in-law. While serving under Lucullus in Little Asia, Claudius incited the soldiers to mutiny against his brother-in-law, earning Lucullus's deep hatred.

Upon returning to Rome, he also cuckolded Caesar during the festival of the Good Goddess.

Besides Caesar's wife, he also had affairs with many married women, but it was widely rumored in Rome that he had incestuous relations with his three sisters.

One of his brothers-in-law, Lucullus, could no longer endure this, ultimately divorcing his wife and publicly proclaiming her incest with her brother Claudius.

Claudius felt no shame. Next, he did something that shocked the noble families. To gain power, under the arrangements of Pompey and Caesar, he changed his status from a noble to a commoner and was elected as the Roman People's Guardian in 58 BC.

After taking office, he first did some practical things for the people, such as ensuring that the poor received regular free grain supplies... After gaining their favor, he began to show his strength.

He criticized Cicero, asserting that Cicero violated Roman tradition by executing the Catiline Conspirators, and even called for a public assembly by the Senate to re-discuss the issue.

The Claudius family, with its centuries of accumulated connections and a wide network of clients across Rome, led many important senators, originally close to Cicero, to refrain from offending Claudius by helping a "newcomer." Consequently, Cicero had to flee Rome, beginning his exile.

Later, Claudius passed a bill formally exiling Cicero and confiscating his property.

Claudius then instructed his supporters to burn Cicero's residence, erecting a sanctuary for Lady Liberty on the original site.

Claudius's ruthless tactics frightened the senators.

He then, with clever maneuvers, marginalized Cato, sending him to oversee the annexation of Cyprus, as Cyprus was a wealthy kingdom. Conquering it could fill the Roman treasury, providing funds for the newly passed law of "free grain supply for Roman citizens."

With Cicero's exile and Cato's reassignment, two key figures of the conservative faction departed from the Roman political arena, seemingly evidencing Claudius's alignment with the triumvirate.

But subsequent events disproved this view; Claudius did everything solely for himself.

First, the annexation of Cyprus insulted Pompey, as it altered his previous plans for the East.

Then, the Armenian prince, who was a hostage under house arrest in Pompey's home, was secretly released by Claudius.

He further directed his thugs to beat up the governor Gabinius, breaking his fasces, embarrassing him simply because Gabinius was supported by Pompey and tried to hold Claudius accountable for the Armenian prince's escape.

Claudius even had one of his slaves deliberately drop a dagger at a public assembly, and under interrogation, the slave claimed to have been sent to assassinate Pompey.

Though Pompey was brave on the battlefield, he was terrified of assassinations due to past experiences in his youth, and this cast a shadow over his heart. Consequently, Pompey shut himself indoors, avoiding visitors for months.

Moreover, Claudius openly questioned the legality of decrees made during Caesar's term as governor, summoning Bibulus at a public gathering to testify against his former colleague.

After Claudius stepped down as People's Guardian, the senators breathed a sigh of relief.

But they rejoiced too soon. Claudius still controlled a large number of supporter-thugs based on trade associations, often using these henchmen to threaten political opponents or disrupt gatherings.

Chapter 530: The New Agreement of the Three-Headed Alliance

Claudius was originally a top noble in Rome. When he ignored traditional rules and acted as a ruffian leader, using violence to disrupt the political arena, the Senate found him unmanageable.

Only Pompey, who harbored enmity against Claudius, supported the newly appointed People's Guardian in forming his own gang of thugs, combating Claudius' men through violent means.

The two factions frequently engaged in large-scale brawls within Rome, causing considerable casualties and throwing the entire city into chaos, even threatening the safety of the Senate and nobles.

Thus, the Senate passed a bill to recall Cicero to Rome, during which Pompey was notably proactive.

As a return, Cicero proposed to the Senate to grant Pompey special command to better solve Italy's grain import issues.

Many conservative senators expressed support.

Thus, Pompey, who had been idle for several years, once again wielded power.

However, not long after, Claudius was also elected as a Municipal Officer, and he quickly accused the former People's Guardian Milo (who had formed a gang to counter Claudius' men with Pompey's support) of political violence. Pompey and Cicero defended him, clashing fiercely at rallies and even resorting to mutual threats and intimidation.

The deepening hatred between Pompey and Claudius also increasingly affected his relationship with Crassus because, despite Crassus maintaining a low profile in politics over the years, many knew he was secretly supporting Claudius.

Pompey thus felt that Crassus was deliberately targeting him, compounded by the goodwill shown by conservative senators led by Cicero, making him reconsider the worth of continuing the Triumvirate.

Cicero and others keenly noticed this change, prompting a proposal in the Senate: since Caesar had successfully conquered Gaul, there was no need for him to remain there for the full five years; he could be recalled early.

Another senator, Domitius, who was hopeful to become Governor the next year (his ancestors having once conquered Outer Gaul riding on elephants, with his family having significant ties with Gaul), publicly stated his hope to replace Caesar as Governor of Gaul after his term.

Pompey didn't entirely oppose this proposal, while Crassus remained silent.

The Triumvirate was on the verge of collapse.

In the north, Caesar, closely monitoring Rome's political situation, immediately took action after noticing the developments, inviting Pompey and Crassus for discussions in Lucca City, within his province. Through his exceptional negotiation and strategic skills, the three reached a new agreement.

In this new agreement: Pompey and Crassus once again joined forces to run for Governor the following year (55 BC), to prevent the election of Caesar's arch-enemy, Domitius. After their terms as Governors, Pompey would serve as the Governor of Spain for five years, Crassus as the Governor of Syria for five years, and Caesar would renew his term as Governor of Gaul for another five years.

It's safe to say that this agreement satisfied all three, especially Crassus.

Originally, Pompey's conquest of the East yielded massive wealth surpassing that of Crassus, and later, Caesar's military achievements in Gaul overshadowed him, making him the least notable in the Triumvirate, causing some internal imbalance.

Now, the agreement granted him military command and formal governance rights for the coming years, ambitiously setting his sights on the Parthia to the east of Syria. Conquering this ancient eastern empire would overshadow Caesar's achievements, earning him vast wealth from these prosperous lands.

The Triumvirate was once again stabilized.

The news caused a stir in the Senate, but Cicero quickly accepted the reality, possibly learning from his prior exile, choosing to compromise in the face of the powerful triumvir's force.

Thus, he delivered a speech in the Senate, opposing Caesar's political rivals' proposal (to relieve Caesar of his position as Governor of Gaul), while also praising his victories in Gaul.

With the joint support of him, Pompey, and Crassus, Caesar's command in Gaul was confirmed, and the treasury agreed to pay for the additional legions recruited by Caesar himself.

However, regarding the election for the next year's Governor, the conservatives were unwilling to compromise, and even Pompey and Crassus's eligibility to run was fraught with difficulties.

Before the election day, Caesar specifically had a large number of his men return to Rome to vote, including Crassus's son, Publius.

On the election day, fierce violence broke out, resulting in the injury of one candidate, Amityus, and the death of one of his attendants, with Pompey and Crassus emerging as victors.

Following this, the forces of the Triumvirate also intimidated Little Cato, preventing him from being elected as the Legal Officer.

Meanwhile, during the Municipal Officer elections, there was such intense brawling that even Pompey was splattered with someone else's blood, and when he returned home, his pregnant wife, You Niya, was so shocked at the sight of the blood that she miscarried.

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In the first half of this year, most of the tribes in Gaul submitted to Caesar and sent hostages to him, and the entire Gaul region seemed to have returned to peace.

Caesar had already begun to turn his attention eastward, considering the possibility of advancing into Nix and Dacia, but subsequent changes in Rome's political arena compelled him to urgently invite Pompey and Crassus to Lucca for talks.

After the new agreement was reached, the Gaul region encountered new troubles.

The Vineti and other coastal tribes detained Roman officers sent to procure military grain from these tribes, demanding the return of their hostages in exchange for the release of these officers.

Caesar, of course, disagreed, thus sparking a new conflict.

Ultimately, after defeating the Vineti people, Caesar exacted severe punishment on them, not only massacring their entire council but also selling the captured and surrendered tribesmen into slavery—he intended to warn other Gaul tribes against betrayal through such brutal measures.

During the war, Caesar discovered that the Gaul coastal tribes opposed to him had previously received military support from the Brittanian tribes, prompting him to resolve to launch a maritime expedition to Brittainia.

Launching a cross-sea attack on a completely unfamiliar area was undoubtedly difficult, and the first attack did not achieve significant results, but it allowed Caesar to gather more intelligence on Brittainia.

Soon, he planned a second expedition, this time with more thorough preparations.

Yet while he was winning more glory and amassing more wealth in Brittania, in August of 50 BC, Caesar's only child, Pompey's wife, You Niya, died due to childbirth complications, and his mother, Aurelia, also passed away that year.

Within a year, Caesar lost two of his closest family members.

Although he was deeply saddened, a pressing issue required his swift resolution—the death of Julia had dissolved the closest bond between Pompey and Caesar.

He proposed that Pompey marry his grand-niece, Octavia, while he would marry Pompey's daughter, Pompeia, which would require Caesar, Octavia, and Pompeia to all divorce their current spouses.

Pompey refused the proposal, not contemplating remarriage for a time, likely as a tribute to his late wife, Julia. Although their initial union was politically motivated, the older man and young wife were quite fond of each other, often criticized for enjoying time together in the estate rather than attending to Republican affairs, and he never strayed during the marriage.

In fact, since stepping down as Governor that year, Pompey was expected to go to Spain to assume the position of Governor, but at fifty-one, he had no intention of returning to the battlefield, instead staying at an estate outside Rome to care for his pregnant wife, Julia, delegating a Legion Commander to manage the Spain Province and command the Roman Army there.

Pompey's action was unprecedented, no Roman Governor had done such a thing before, but as someone who always liked to break Roman traditions, the Senate didn't censure him for it.

Meanwhile, nearing sixty, Crassus was eager to assume the post of Governor of Syria. His ambition to conquer Parthia had been known even while serving as Governor, which led to public protests by some senators who believed he would drag Rome into a meaningless and unjust war.

As soon as his governorship ended, Crassus hurriedly set off for the East with a massive entourage.

In his youth, he had bravely fought for Sulla but felt unrecognized; during Spartacus's rebellion, he turned the tide, but after the war, the public forgot the danger and viewed it merely as the suppression of a slave revolt; so this time, he intended to fully display his military talents in the conquest of Parthia, to make the Roman populace cheer for his great achievements.

From this year onwards, the Triumvirate's members were no longer in Rome (Pompey, as Provincial Governor, was not allowed to enter Rome, so he stayed in the suburbs outside the city), while the new Governors were Caesar's enemy Domitius, and Appius, Claudius's uncontrollable brother, with Cato becoming the Legal Officer.

However, the Triumvirate's proxies were highly active within Rome, allowing them to still control the political arena, with conservative senators finding it difficult to take any action detrimental to the Triumvirate.

Even Appius had to travel north to Ravenna to visit Caesar to secure a People's Guardian position for one of his guests.

Although Caesar continuously watched over Rome's political sphere, during this year most of his energy was dedicated to battles, leaving little time for leisure.

After returning from Brittania, he didn't even have time to hold funeral rites, hurriedly summoning a meeting with the tribal leaders of Gaul.

The reason was that the agricultural harvest in Gaul that year was poor; the tribal leaders explained it was due to an exceptionally dry summer. However, in reality, Caesar's campaigns over the years had extensively disrupted the agricultural activities of the Gaul tribes. Moreover, during his expedition to Brittania, he had levied labor and collected supplies from the Gauls to meet the logistical needs of the army, undoubtedly increasing the burden on the Gaul tribes.