

Perish 316

Chapter 316: Observations in the Nix Tribe (2) - Building a Wooden Bridge

Rochemnix walked up to a wooden board as tall as a person. The board was carved with numerous words, but unfortunately, he couldn't read a single one. Curious, he asked, "What is this?"

"This is where the laws and regulations of our tribe are carved, so that tribesmen can refer to them anytime, memorize them, and avoid punishment for breaking them."

"What if someone doesn't know how to read?"

"We'll have someone here in the future to explain them to interested tribesmen."

"Oh." Rochemnix reached out and touched the carvings on the board, feeling an even stronger desire to learn how to read.

The two walked one behind the other toward the eastern village gate.

After walking a few steps, Rochemnix suddenly stopped, pointing toward the north and asked, "What are they doing?"

It wasn't surprising for Rochemnix to be curious because he had been here before and knew the area by the Kupa River. Now, however, the place was filled with people more densely than ever before.

"They're building a bridge."

Rochemnix's eyes lit up: "Is it the kind of bridge where wooden boats are tied together and planks are laid on top to connect both sides of the river?"

"No, the bridge we're building isn't a simple pontoon bridge; it's a real wooden bridge!" Akegu said proudly.

"A real wooden bridge..." Rochemnix remembered the stories his mother told him as a child about Rome, and he excitedly exclaimed, "I want to take a look!" Saying this, he sprinted toward the river.

By the riverside, the people were all intensely focused on the water, allowing the boy to squeeze his way to the front.

Across the 70-meter-wide river stood two rows of wooden pillars stretching from one side of the riverbank to the other. These pillars were formed by two equally long pieces of wood placed side by side, nailed tightly together with intersecting shorter planks, and angled inward to penetrate the riverbed. Each pair of pillars was spaced about four or five meters apart, forming a wedge shape...

A large wooden raft sat in the center of the river, carrying an intricate wooden structure with a pointed roof as tall as six or seven meters. Hanging from its peak was a pulley system, with one end tied to a cylindrical iron block and the other held by several strong men. The iron block slid along a sloped groove and struck the wooden pillars below repeatedly, driving them deeper into the inclined angle of the riverbed bit by bit...

"A little higher, just a few more hits... Stop! One more hit..." The riverside crowd held their breath as only a middle-aged man's commanding voice rang out.

In front of him stood a wooden frame about waist-high, equipped with a variety of peculiar tools. He occasionally bent over to peer through it at the river and gave instructions. Finally, he bellowed, "Stop! Stop! That's enough! Check carefully now—make sure the pillars are firmly in place!"

A moment later, a signal of confirmation was given from the center of the river.

The middle-aged man turned toward the people gathered around him and, with a fervent tone, announced, "I proclaim that all the bridge's foundation pillars are now in place! Next, we'll embed crossbeams between each pair of pillars and lay down the planks on top..."

I estimate that it will only take two days! Within the next two days, we can complete the entire basic structure of this bridge! I urge everyone to put in your best effort during these two days, to make sure everything is done right. Afterward, I'll go to Leader Maximus and request credit on your behalf!"

The crowd erupted into cheers.

Amid the cheers, Akegu tugged Rochemnix away: "We need to hurry, or we'll miss lunch at Westeni."

Rochemnix's mind was filled with the image of the massive raft, the towering wooden pillars standing proudly in the river, and the words of that last man. Dazed, he murmured, "That man... that man said he could build a wooden bridge connecting the two sides of the Kupa River in just two days... Is that true?"

"Of course it's true! The hardest part of bridge-building is driving the foundation pillars deep into the riverbed, and you've already seen for yourself that it's done. The rest is like having the roof beam already raised—building the house becomes much easier from there."

Being of the same age, Akegu wasn't as astonished. He already understood the principles of bridge construction and therefore responded calmly, "And stop calling him 'that man, that man.' He's Spukala, the most skilled engineer in our tribe. He's highly respected by both Leader Maximus and the tribesmen!"

"Engineer?"

"An engineer is someone who possesses vast knowledge and uses it to create things like bridges, massive siege engines, hydrological hammers... all the 'miracle' things you talk about." Akegu explained with a hint of pride.

Although Rochemnix didn't understand some of the terms Akegu used, his eyes burned brightly: "Engineer... so incredible! I want to be one too!"

Akegu was momentarily stunned and reminded him, "You didn't quite catch what I said earlier. Becoming an engineer requires learning a lot of knowledge first—"

"I can learn! I'll work hard to learn!" Rochemnix said with great seriousness.

Akegu looked at him. Though he wasn't convinced, he didn't want to pour cold water on his new friend's sudden enthusiasm. Going along with it, he said, "If you want to be an engineer, you'll have to start by learning to read and do arithmetic. Right now, we need to get to the school—"

"I understand! Let's hurry!" Rochemnix urged, quickening his pace to walk ahead of Akegu.

"This guy really has a fiery temperament," Akegu muttered, following closely.

As they left the village, Rochemnix stopped again, looking south and asking, "What are they doing there?"

"Cutting down trees."

"Why do they need such a long line of people to cut down trees?"

Rochemnix's confusion was justified. Nearby, the line of tribesmen from the Nix Tribe stretched out in a single file from the Snowdonia village gate, through the dirt road winding through the fields, to the mountain ridge in the south. The line was three to four miles long... This far surpassed Rochemnix's understanding of ordinary tree felling.

Akegu explained, "We're currently expanding our tribe, so we need a lot of wood. If we sent people up the mountain like before to cut trees and carry the logs back, it would take a lot of strength and time, and we wouldn't be able to fell many trees in a day.

Our leader came up with an idea. He had the strong tribesmen responsible for cutting the trees go to the mountain, while carpenters also went up to saw the logs into planks on-site, making them easier to transport. Then, other tribesmen formed a long line from the mountain to the village and passed the wood hand-to-hand. This saves both time and effort, and even the elderly and women can help.

You see those nearly bare little hills nearby? They used to be covered with dense trees. In just a few days, all the large trees on those hills have been felled. Otherwise, Spukala wouldn't dare announce that the wooden bridge would be roughly completed in just a few days. That's because the vast amounts of wood needed for the bridge are already taken care of."

"That's a great method. Your leader is impressive!" Rochemnix thought for a moment and genuinely praised him.

"The leader is certainly impressive. Even some of the ideas for building the wooden bridge were his suggestions to Spukala!"

"Really?"

"Of course! I wouldn't lie to you. Spukala often goes to the main hall to discuss matters with the leader. Since we work around the leader, we know these things very well."

"I envy you for being able to learn directly from Leader Maximus."

"Since you joined the secretary's department, you'll definitely have the chance too."

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As the two chatted while walking, there was a sound of hoofbeats from behind them, followed by a voice: "Hey Akegu, where are you headed?"

Rochemnix turned around and saw a double-donkey carriage approaching. An older man sat on the carriage, smiling at the two.

"Uncle Xibarita, we're heading to Westeni's school." Akegu answered while glancing at the contents of the carriage. "Are you delivering wood to Westeni?"

"Yes, after two more trips today, there won't be any need to deliver more for now." Xibarita replied, looking at Rochemnix. "Who's this young fellow? I don't recall seeing him before."

"This is Rochemnix, son of Leader Karsipenpas. He just arrived in our tribe and has been assigned to the secretary department to assist Leader Maximus." Akegu introduced.

Rochemnix quickly chimed in politely, "Hello, Uncle Xibarita!"

"What a polite youngster, and you even know Latin! Your father is truly a benefactor to our Nix Tribe. Without his help, we would never have settled here... A warm welcome to our tribe!"

Xibarita's heartfelt words filled Rochemnix with pride for his father.

Xibarita continued, "It's the same direction anyway; hop on and I'll give you both a ride."

"Thank you for your kind offer, Uncle! But we'd rather walk. Westeni isn't far, and we wouldn't want to tire out your donkeys."

Xibarita widened his eyes and said, "You're being too modest! Hurry up and get on! Those donkeys are tough and healthy—they can handle it." He then patted one of the donkeys, which immediately responded with a cheerful bray, as if in agreement.

Akegu didn't argue further and climbed onto the carriage with Rochemnix, sitting atop the pile of wood.

Xibarita patted the donkeys again and said, "No slacking! With young passengers aboard, you two better trot, or you'll get teased for being slower than walkers."

The donkeys seemed to understand as they broke into a steady trot.

The carriage began to jostle noticeably, but Rochemnix didn't feel uncomfortable. Instead, he found the rhythmic bouncing quite amusing.

Chapter 317: Nix Tribe Sightseeing (3) — School

Xibarita sighed, "This road built by the Segestica people is really awful. After running back and forth a few times today, I reckon this cart needs to be repaired again. Akegu, when will our construction team properly fix this road?"

"It'll probably take a while. Right now, the Public Works Department is focused on building wooden bridges and expanding the settlement, so they don't have the manpower to fix the road yet."

"Oh..." The old man responded, sounding a little disappointed.

Akegu changed the subject: "Uncle Xibarita, I noticed that a couple of days ago your transport team was mostly using ox carts to haul timber, and those carts carry a lot. How come you've switched to donkey carts recently?"

"Isn't it obvious? Ox carts, though slower, can carry more and are steady and reliable... But it's all that old Volenus's fault. He went to our captain and said, according to the Political Affairs Hall meeting, that the oxen will soon be allocated to the Labor Department. They want to use them to plow fields, so they must be well-fed and can't be overworked..." Xibarita complained.

Akegu didn't join in the grumbling but instead gently advised, "Uncle Volenus isn't wrong. Cultivating the land is the most important task for our tribe..."

"Of course, we know farming is crucial, so everyone agreed to switch to donkey carts, and we've even assigned people to feed those oxen properly, preparing to hand them over to the Agricultural Department when the time comes. It's just that we've spent so much time with those oxen that we can't help but feel a little attached..." Xibarita sighed again.

Akegu's eyes darted around before he suggested, "Uncle, if you love oxen so much, why not keep a few at home in the future?"

"Of course, I'll raise cattle in the future! And not just cattle—I'll raise donkeys, horses too! I have fifty or sixty acres of land; I can totally afford it!" Xibarita declared confidently.

"Right, right," Akegu quickly echoed in agreement.

Suddenly, Xibarita let out a "Huh," raised his donkey whip, and pointed to the roadside. "Speaking of Volenus, there he is!"

By the roadside fields, quite a few people were scattered about: some inserting wooden stakes, some pulling ropes, some measuring distances, and others bent over recording... Although their tasks were different from what the villagers typically did, their focus and hard work were the same.

Xibarita clearly noticed this and, instead of calling out to Volenus, excitedly remarked to Akegu, "Volenus and his team are working pretty well—it's only been a few days, and they've already reached here. Looks like they'll finish soon, and by then we can—"

Akegu interrupted him, "Don't forget the lands on the north bank."

"Oh, dammit!"

As they spoke, Rochemnix also watched the fields, which were dotted with wooden stakes. Seeing many peers among the busy crowd, he curiously asked, "What are they doing?"

Akegu explained, "They're assisting the adults in surveying the lands, mapping out every inch of our tribe's territory. Once complete, the land will be divided among all the tribesmen..."

"That sounds complicated. In our tribe, nobody divides the land—whoever wants to farm just farms. But we've only got mountains, no flatlands and rivers like this..." Rochemnix muttered.

Xibarita chuckled, "Little one, let me tell you, the land must be carefully surveyed, no room for errors. If, during land division, someone gets a bit more or a bit less, the tribesmen will be upset, and that could lead to big trouble!"

Rochemnix stuck out his tongue, glanced at the vast fields, and remarked, "Surveying such a big area must be really hard, right?"

Akegu replied, "Once you learn the method, it's not hard at all. When you start school, you'll study this, and you'll understand by then."

Hearing this, Rochemnix grew even more eager to attend Nix School.

The donkey cart eventually arrived at Westeni, where a scene opposite to Snowdonia unfolded. Here, instead of dismantling the settlement's wooden walls, people were repairing and reinforcing them. Many were also digging trenches and setting up caltrops... Once again, it was a bustling spectacle of labor.

Akegu led Rochemnix off the cart, thanked Xibarita, and walked towards the settlement gate.

At the gate, fully armed soldiers stood guard. Recognizing Akegu, they didn't question him and let the two pass freely.

Rochemnix glanced back repeatedly and remarked enviously, "Look at that armor—how majestic!"

"If you join our tribe and come of age, you might get the chance to wear that armor and become a grand Heavy Armor Infantry soldier," Akegu said. Having spent so much time with Maximus, he had some inkling of his leader's aspirations. Though it sounded like a joke, it was actually a probe.

Rochemnix shook his head, his mood dampening. "My father and my tribe's people would never allow it."

Alright, this would take time... Akegu made a mental note to himself, steering the conversation away. He guided Rochemnix to the settlement's central area and into a noble's residence.

Kefisofon happened to be teaching in the courtyard. Hearing that Akegu needed him, he stepped forward to greet them.

Kefisofon had not only been one of Akegu's teachers but also adhered to Maximus's directive that Secretariat members return to school for further studies when off-duty. Akegu respectfully saluted and said, "Teacher Kefisofon, this is Rochemnix, son of Karsipengpas, the leader. He just arrived in our tribe and has been assigned to the Secretariat. However, he can neither read nor do math, so the leader instructed him to begin school first."

The son of Karsipengpas... Kefisofon glanced at the curious, wide-eyed Rochemnix and fell into thought. After a brief pause, he said, "Understood. I'll make arrangements for him. By the way, how's the wooden bridge construction in Slodia coming along?"

"When I left, all the bridge piles were in place. The next step is laying the deck... Engineer Spukala mentioned that the framework of the entire bridge would be roughly finished within two days."

"I've heard it said before—the Romans have the best bridge-building techniques in the Mediterranean. When they come here to build bridges, I must find time to observe carefully," Kefisofon said with anticipation.

The reason Kefisofon was so interested was that the Cultivation Department had temporarily relocated to Westeni. With the Nix Tribe's major construction efforts underway, he realized the department's primary contribution lay in establishing and maintaining the school for educating the children. As the temporary school was in Westeni, the Cultivation Department moved there for convenience. Kefisofon would return to Snowdonia for any Political Affairs Hall meetings.

Maximus had agreed to this, making the Cultivation Department the only one among the Nix Tribe's nine departments to operate outside Snowdonia.

As Kefisofon and Akegu talked, Rochemnix became entranced by the children studying in the courtyard. Over forty children sat on the ground, facing a black-painted wooden board filled with white writing. In front of each child lay a square wooden frame filled with fine sand. The children, holding thin wooden sticks, were diligently replicating the white words from the board onto the sand...

So this is the school Ak Country spoke of? It looks so interesting! Rochemnix's eyes gleamed with excitement, practically itching to try.

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While Rochemnix traveled towards Westeni by donkey cart, there was another group he didn't encounter in the Nix Tribe.

At the midpoint where the Kupa River flows from Snowdonia to Westeni, the river makes a sharp 90-degree northward turn. At this northern riverside bend, Capito, along with craftsmen, had spent days surveying and selecting the Public Works Department's workshop site, which Maximus had approved.

Today, over twenty conical mounds appeared on this flat riverside land, with Sistos and the other blacksmiths preparing the next one.

They inserted a thick, long stick upright into the soil, then used it as the center to lean numerous wooden pieces of varying lengths and widths around it, forming a conical structure. Dried branches and hay were then layered outside, filling in gaps beneath the wood. Afterward, the team fetched mud from the river and smeared it onto the branches, layer by layer, sealing the structure completely airtight, eventually crafting another conical earthen mound...

"We're supposed to be blacksmiths, yet here we are playing with mud. If our peers found out, they'd die laughing," one blacksmith grumbled.

"This isn't just playing with mud—we're making charcoal. Without charcoal, we can't smith iron," another blacksmith consoled him.

"It's not just the lack of charcoal—we don't even have stone bricks. Without them, we can't build furnaces and definitely can't smith iron!"

"I heard that at the tribal meeting, Capito made a mistake. He forgot to bring up the stone brick production until later when he consulted with us, then ran off to confess to the leader—"

"No wonder he's been looking gloomy these past few days, always hovering around the brick pits, supervising the work. Killerbus and the bricklayers seem even more exhausted than us. Unlike us, who just 'play with mud,' they've really got it tough. Sefaroyis and his crew, though—they're usually as slippery as eels but came up with such a clever method for making charcoal."

"Sefaroyis and his crew have been making charcoal for decades, so they've got their own tricks. Killerbus and the other bricklayers are quite experienced too. But unfortunately, brick-making isn't as straightforward as charcoal making; no matter what, it takes one to two months to produce stone bricks."

"Yeah, I get that, but it takes so long. By the time the bricks are ready, the bridge will be finished, and people will be praising the carpenters. Meanwhile, they'll think we blacksmiths are useless, unable to produce anything in all that time."

Chapter 318: Making Charcoal and Firing Bricks

"There's nothing we can do about it. Right now, we can't build the blast furnace, and we can't build the Water Hammer either (since all the carpenters have been drafted to build the bridge). We don't even have a source for iron ore... Without these things, we can't do anything but help others with their work. It's not like the carpenters who can work as long as there are trees.

But we don't need to worry. The leader and Capito value the Iron Workshop highly, and they're anxious too. I believe it won't be long before we can happily forge like we did in Sarabia."

"Forging happily in Sarabia?! I don't think so. That heartless guy paid poorly, the living conditions were bad, the food wasn't good, and he urged us to work more every day... It's not like here, where the tribe allocates land and houses, even distributes wives, has people to help farm, and we get paid for forging. If we do well, we could become Nobles in the future. The Nix Tribe is practically an Elysian Paradise for us blacksmiths!"

"Absolutely right!" everyone loudly agreed, except for one person who stood there in a daze.

"Sistos?"

"Sistis!"

"Hmm?"

"What are you thinking about? Was it that your young wife from last night made you exhaust your energy, and now you can't focus on work and just want to sleep?"

"Hahaha..." Everyone burst into laughter.

Sistos ignored him.

The blacksmith continued to ask, "Sistos, am I right, is the Nix Tribe an Elysian Paradise for us blacksmiths?"

These days, their companions often teased Sistos, and he had gotten used to it and was too lazy to respond. Changing the topic, he said, "You're all busy chatting, but this side of the dirt mound hasn't been dug out yet."

With that, he squatted down and scooped out a piece of earth from below the dirt mound, revealing a palm-sized hole connecting to the wood inside. Then he turned back and shouted, "Sefaroyis, this dirt mound is ready!"

Sefaroyis, thin and dark-skinned, ran over, walked around the dirt mound, nodded, and said, "Not bad." Then he brought a handful of dry grass, stuffed it into the open round hole at the top of the dirt mound, lit it, and lay on the ground to check the situation inside through the small hole below.

Sistos and the other blacksmiths, as craftsmen, quickly learned to make these dirt mounds following Sefaroyis, but determining when to seal the hole after the wood inside was ignited wasn't something they, as outsiders, could accurately judge because sealing it too early or too late would result in less charcoal production.

Experienced Sefaroyis lay on the ground, intensely focused on looking inside, not blinking even when a flame fluttered out of the hole.

After a while, he said, "It's ready."

The blacksmiths immediately used river mud to seal all the holes at the bottom of the dirt mound and finally sealed the round hole at the top. Then they carefully checked the entire mound, covering even the slightest smoking spots with a thick layer of river mud.

Sefaroyis inspected it again and then pointed to the back, saying, "That mound over there can be opened."

Everyone rushed over and broke open the hardened clay from the fire, revealing the wood that had been stacked inside. Now, not only had all the wood turned black, but most had also broken into pieces...

Sefaroyis squatted down, flipped through the wood, occasionally picking up a few pieces to tap, and then said, "It's alright, about ninety percent of the wood has turned into charcoal."

The blacksmiths all showed delighted expressions.

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On the other side, Pessianaxis and Pasipidas were working with other craftsmen on making mud bricks.

The raw material was clay dug out from five or six meters underground. After removing the impurities, it was kneaded and pounded repeatedly like dough. Then these clay balls were packed tightly into wooden brick moulds, the excess clay scraped off with a scraper, and a layer of river sand applied to prevent sticking, allowing the bricks to be turned out onto a leveled ground nearby to be sun-dried...

Not far from the brick drying area, a large wooden canopy had been erected, with a large round pit dug into the ground beneath it, six meters deep.

Some craftsmen were compacting and leveling the bottom of the pit, while others were digging a deep tunnel beside the round pit. The end of the tunnel had a square window, connecting it to the round pit. This would later be the channel for stuffing straw, dried grass, and kindling into the round pit for firing bricks.

Capito stood by the round pit, watching the busy people, and asked, "How long do those mud bricks need to dry before they can be placed into the pit for firing?"

Killerbus, a bricklayer from Sarabia, held a low and looked-down-upon status in the commercial town. But now in the Nix Tribe, he was a Second-class Tribe Member, with 60 acres of land and a thatched house, and had been appointed as the overseer of the tribal brick kiln. He cherished all this greatly, tirelessly overseeing everything.

At this moment, he waited beside his superior and respectfully replied, "About two months."

"Two months!" Capito frowned and said discontentedly, "Too long!"

Killerbus quickly said, "I'll find a way, find a way to shorten the time, hopefully controlling it to... thirty... uh, no, about forty days."

"Forty days... is still a bit long."

"It can't be any shorter. If it's shorter, the bricks won't dry enough and would easily warp and crack in the fire. These bricks are meant to build kilns, so they must be of good quality." Killerbus gently persuaded.

Capito sighed, "Seems like we haven't timed this well. If we made the bricks in summer, when the weather's hot, we could shorten the time some more."

"It's not like that." Killerbus quickly explained, "Summer temperatures are too high, and the mud bricks would dry out and crack. I've heard it often winds and rains in summer here, which would harm the drying process. On the contrary, the temperature is okay this season, with fewer winds and less rain; it's just the right time to dry bricks."

"Oh, then we've lucked out." Capito's face relaxed a bit and pointed at the pit, asking, "How many bricks can we fire in this pit at one time? How long will it take?"

"About half a month." Killerbus had already considered this matter: "Since we're making thick mud bricks, this kiln can produce about 3... 3000 bricks."

"3000 bricks, is that enough?"

"...Enough to build two kilns." Killerbus calculated on his fingers, "One for the pottery workshop, one for the Iron Workshop. They're both hounding us."

Capito let out a cold laugh, "From making bricks to firing them, you need two months, firing only 3000 bricks at a time, six times a year, totaling less than 20,000 bricks. With so many places in the tribe needing bricks, you say it's enough?! Far from it! Build more brick kilns, hire more hands, and make bricks and fire them every day to meet the entire tribe's needs!"

"Ah?" Killerbus was stunned.

"Ah, what? Just do as I say, and if there are any difficulties, come to me directly. I'll find the leader to help you solve them, but you must guarantee to produce at least 100,000 bricks a year! Can you do it? If not, I'll find someone else!" Capito demanded loudly without a doubt.

"I can... I can!" Killerbus answered nervously yet excitedly. Back when he was laboring tirelessly under the sun in Sarabia for others, he never imagined he could one day be in charge of a kiln with an annual output of 100,000 bricks and dozens of subordinates.

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In the Segestica Main Camp, Pulikas stepped into the tribal council hall, and every time he saw the empty main seat, it caused him distress.

He quickly shifted his gaze to the seat beside the main one, where he met eyes with Cabdes, and his expression immediately turned grave.

Cabdes stood up amicably and said, "Pulikas, you're here. Come, have a seat and a cup of water first."

Pulikas didn't do as suggested. Instead, he sat assertively across from Cabdes and mockingly said, "Congratulations, Cabdes, you're the Great Chief now!"

Cabdes's face changed, and he solemnly said loudly, "Don't talk nonsense. The Great Chief of Segestica remains one - my brave nephew, Andres!"

"Oh - is that what you really think?" Pulikas glanced at him with disbelief.

"Pulikas, do you think I'm willing to temporarily take over managing the entire tribe in Andres's place?! You know the situation within the tribe now. Those families who've lost their husbands and children gather and cry at this main house's door every day;

Those tribal leaders and Nobles who've escaped from the Mercenaries are in conflict because their territory's inheritance rights have been taken by relatives, even demanding Andres take responsibility for it;

We conducted two major battles against the Mercenaries, collecting substantial resources from the tribesmen. Now some tribesmen come here to complain, saying their lives are difficult and hoping for some compensation;

Furthermore, since our retreat, that group of Skodisqi bandits have re-emerged, creating disturbances in the north. The northern tribal leaders are coming here one after another to complain, hoping we'll send reinforcements immediately to wipe out these bandits..."

Cabdes lamented, "None of these troublesome matters are easy to resolve, let alone dealing with so many at once. I'm so busy with these every day, I can't even find time for my favorite fishing. Do you think I want to be some damn acting Great Chief? If not for those old guys pleading, saying 'If I don't accept, the Segestica Tribe will be doomed...' uttering nonsense like that!"

The more Cabdes spoke, the more he got angry, pointing at Pulikas, "And you! During the last tribal meeting's election, why did you abstain instead of opposing! If you'd opposed, you might have swayed a minority with you, giving me a reason to refuse. But no, you abstained, which was like agreeing, causing me to have to stay here every day and handle these troublesome affairs! But since you agreed, stop making these sarcastic remarks from now on—"

Chapter 319: Segestica Seeks Peace

"How is the Great Chief doing now?" Pulikas interrupted him, asking with concern.

"Don't you visit him every day? You should know better than me how he is!" Cabdes showed a sad expression, speaking heavily, "Andres is not only still unconscious, but his chest, trampled by a horse, hasn't improved at all. We've tried all kinds of herbs. Hemijias prays at the Holy Stone every day for him. Now we can only see if the Divine will protect him."

"If... I mean if the Great Chief passes away, who will you have succeed him?" Pulikas looked directly at him, asking in a deep voice.

"Of course, it's Andres' son, my grandnephew Ankasus!" Cabdes answered without hesitation, then reminded, "But he's still young now, and I'm afraid the other elders and tribal leaders might not agree. You and I will have to take the time to persuade them."

Pulikas's expression slightly eased, and he asked in a gentle tone, "Don't worry, as long as you firmly support Ankasus, I will definitely help you convince the others! By the way, why did you call me here today?"

Cabdes observed him and felt a bit relieved in his heart. He still spoke carefully, "Leader Anrotas has been sending messengers these past few days. They say the mercenaries have left their camp and are now occupying Wallis and my former territory. They're sending cavalry daily to probe his territory, making him very nervous. He hopes we can send reinforcements to his village to defend against any imminent attack from the enemy... What do you think of his request?"

Anrotas' messenger came to the Main Camp to plead for reinforcements. Since Great Chief Andres could not handle affairs, he did not only seek out Cabdes but also visited the other elders in the city. Pulikas was aware of this and said with a worried look, "Anrotas' village is in danger. We should send troops to support them, or else if Anrotas' territory is occupied, they could directly threaten our lands on the Sava River next. It's just that..."

Pulikas paused for a moment, his tone becoming less assured, "We've suffered defeats several times in battle, losing too many warriors. All the tribes now face many difficulties. It is really hard to form a sufficiently large force to repel the fierce mercenaries... I think we should seek help again from the tribal alliance, asking them to send reinforcements."

Surprisingly, Pulikas, who was always tough externally, showed hesitation, but this was expected by Cabdes.

Cabdes felt a slight joy in his heart, shaking his head as he said, "A few days ago, I specifically sent someone to the Maziyi Main Camp to learn about the situation from Great Chief Maitilis."

This time, the major tribes sent reinforcements to Andizeti, although they repelled the invading Skodisqi and Dacian Alliance Army, the losses were not small, and the Dacians have not completely left the Skodisqi lands. Those damned Skodisqi are still posing as if they're ready to invade at any time, which means the reinforcements of the tribal alliance dare not withdraw lightly. Both sides are still in a standoff, with no strength left to help us... This was Maitilis' exact words."

"What about Great Chiefs Temagis and Bricks? Can't they send reinforcements either?" Pulikas asked, unwilling to accept it.

"What you thought of, I certainly thought of too," Cabdes sighed, "The Desitia Tribe has long been under pressure from the Boyi people. It was only because Great Chief Temagis had a good relationship with our Great Chief that they sent reinforcements last time, but it was the smallest of the three reinforcements, and they lost nearly half of their troops. So this time, the elders in their tribe strongly opposed sending reinforcements again, and Great Chief Temagis can't do much about it.

As for Great Chief Bricks, he clearly stated he wouldn't send reinforcements again because last time he sent reinforcements, it left the Brochi Territory poorly defended. A team of mercenaries infiltrated the territory and looted it extensively, causing a significant loss, and a large number of slaves escaped, so he wouldn't make the same mistake again."

"Doesn't he want to seek revenge on those mercenaries?!" Pulikas pursued.

Cabdes shrugged, "You and I both know what kind of person Great Chief Bricks is. Honestly, I was surprised that he sent reinforcements last time."

"Without support from other major tribes, we can't confront those mercenaries with just our current strength." Pulikas showed a conflicted expression, clenching and unclenching his fists, then suddenly slammed his thigh with force, "If it doesn't work, we'll execute the most urgent mobilization and gather all the fighting men from the tribes to battle those mercenaries!"

"The most urgent mobilization? That requires the consent of most tribal leaders, and now some leaders might not agree." Cabdes gently reminded.

Pulikas knew Cabdes was stating the fact: When Andres proposed attacking the Aldeans back then, some tribal leaders opposed it. Andres pushed it through with his prestige, and later, after achieving victory, he didn't allow those opposing tribal leaders to share the benefits.

Now that Andres is severely injured and unconscious, some tribal leaders openly made sarcastic remarks, saying things like 'I firmly opposed warring with the Aldeans back then, but the Great Chief wouldn't listen, and now look, not only is he severely injured, but the tribesmen also suffered...'. As long

as the mercenaries don't invade their territories, they're unlikely to agree to send reinforcements to rescue the tribes by the Kupa River.

While he was silent, Cabdes said in a low voice, "Previously when we lost the battle against the mercenaries and I was captured by them, then later released, the mercenary leader asked me to deliver a message to the Great Chief, expressing hope for a ceasefire and peace. Unfortunately, the Great Chief did not agree. Otherwise, our current situation wouldn't be so difficult..."

Pulikas' face darkened, "What are you trying to say?"

Cabdes understood Pulikas, and seeing that he was not being harshly stopped, felt there was hope for the matter. He gathered his spirits and earnestly persuaded, "Since we are in a tough spot now and have no other solutions, we might as well agree to the mercenary leader's earlier proposal for both sides to cease hostilities..."

This way, we wouldn't have to worry about the mercenaries' invasions. We could focus on our internal affairs, comfort the families of the warriors, aid the struggling tribesmen, and suppress the Skodisqi rebels... After surviving this difficult period, hopefully, the Great Chief might regain consciousness, and by then, the major eastern tribes would have resolved the Dacian issue and might be able to help us... Oh, by the way, during negotiations with the mercenaries, we could also request the release of our captured warriors..."

Initially hearing Cabdes propose negotiating a ceasefire with the mercenaries, Pulikas looked displeased, but by the end, he had slowly relaxed his expression, pondering, then worriedly asked, "Will those mercenaries agree? Our situation isn't what it used to be."

"Indeed, our situation in Segestica is quite dire, but we still have the backing of other Pannonian Tribes. That mercenary leader, if he's wise, should know that with their strength, they can't wipe out our Segestica... Whatever the case, for the sake of the tribe, we should at least try!"

Pulikas was silent for a moment, then nodded.

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The messenger sent by Segestica was detained upon arrival in Westeni, and the news quickly reached Snowdonia. Maximus immediately convened a Political Affairs Hall meeting. After discussion, everyone unanimously agreed: Nix should negotiate a ceasefire with Segestica.

To prevent the Segestica envoy from discovering Snowdonia's extensive construction, Pigeris led Commerce Department subordinates to Westeni to negotiate with the Segestica envoy there.

While the two sides engaged in intense negotiations, Budocaribas and Ciciliotes led several Alde Tribe leaders to Snowdonia.

Maximus warmly welcomed them into the main hall of the main house, seated them, and then apologized, saying, "I'm truly sorry! Our tribe is currently short on supplies, and we have nothing good to offer. We can only provide you with some water to quench your thirst."

"It's alright, I understand. You've just settled down, and everything is lacking. Pigeris already told me that you're hoping we can regularly sell you some iron ore and also some grain, to help your tribe sustain until next year's autumn harvest..."

After discussing with the other tribal leaders, everyone believes that since we are allies, we should help each other. So, for the requests you made, we will do our best to assist you!" Budocaribas said earnestly.

"That's so grateful!" Maximus said with a look of gratitude.

"But we also have a request, and we hope Leader Maximus can agree." A leader beside him interjected.

"Please go ahead," Maximus smiled, recalling Budocaribas' earlier introduction, "Leader Tenodolitis."

Tenodolitis did not immediately state his request. He glanced around the entire hall, then tapped the ground with his foot, the nerves making him feel complex and melancholic: "Leader Maximus, did you know this place once belonged to our tribe? The Pannonians took it from us... When we came in just now, I saw your tribesmen chopping wood and building houses. The whole village has completely changed, only this... this hall remains much the same as before!"

Maximus raised his eyebrows slightly, his internal alarm going off.

Chapter 320: Establishing a Pledge

Tenodolotis looked at him and said with a bitter smile, "Leader Maximus, don't misunderstand me. I'm just a bit emotional and have no intention of asking for this land! We lost this land because we couldn't defeat the Segestica people; it was our failure as leaders!

Previously, you signed a pact with Great Chief Acoupaigos, which included a clause stating, 'If you seize the land occupied by the Pannonians, then that land will belong to you and your team.'

At the time, we all took it as a joke, many of us including myself believed that once you waged war with the Pannonians, you would quickly be wiped out by them, making the pact meaningless and even possibly dragging our entire Aldean tribe into the conflict.

The truth proved that we were the ones to be laughed at; real heroes can create miracles! Leader Maximus, you defeated the great Pannonian army multiple times with a team of fewer than 20,000 people, which included many elderly, women, and children. You avoided the risk of our tribe being exterminated; you are a great benefactor to our tribe!"

"You're too kind, you're too kind!" Maximus replied humbly, though he was still cautious at heart, "May I ask what your request is?"

"The place where our tribe originally lived is now what you call the Westeni village." Another leader named Cleonidas took over the conversation, looking troubled, "Having lost the land, I led my tribesmen to retreat west of the Codona River, initially temporarily residing on the land of another tribe, but the Great Chief couldn't lead an army to defeat the Pannonians to allow us to return home.

Over time, my tribesmen had more and more conflicts with the tribesmen of the land we borrowed, and in the end, we had to move to the uninhabited mountains, where many tribesmen fell ill and died, and to this day, my tribe still leads a difficult life...

I'm sorry to have complained so much to you; what I wanted to say is that we Aldeans have always kept our promises and will never ask you for the lost land, but we hear that you once told the Great Chief, 'You would march east and conquer the Pannonians.' At that time, many in our tribe thought you were boasting, but you showed us with actions that you are fully capable of doing so.

When you next attack the Segestica people, some of us want to lead our warriors to join your ranks and avenge the Pannonians together...

Once we achieve a great victory, we hope you could generously allocate a few small plots of the newly conquered land to our tribes so we can escape our current hardships. Then Leader Maximus, you and your Nix Tribe will be our greatest benefactors, and anything you require in the future, our tribes will do our utmost to assist!"

They indeed came to ask for land, but this way of asking was unexpected, yet a... good thing... Maximus had countless thoughts spinning in his mind, and facing the expectant eyes of a few, he didn't immediately respond, instead, he asked, "Leader Budocaribas, Leader Ciciliotes, do you share their viewpoint?"

"Of course!" Ciciliotes answered straightforwardly.

Budocaribas sighed, "My tribe's situation isn't much better than theirs; before you arrived, my tribe was stationed in that narrow place as the first line of defense against the Segestica people, enduring significant casualties over a year and more, and the tribesmen lived in constant fear. Now, thanks to you, the tribe is safe, but there isn't much land for us to cultivate; we don't want to continue living by relying on other tribes' support..."

Maximus nodded understandingly and asked, "Is this your idea or have you discussed it with Great Chief Acoupaigos?"

The leaders exchanged glances, and Budocaribas solemnly said, "We did mention this to Great Chief Acoupaigos; he didn't express a clear stance but didn't object either. After all, he signed the pact with you and is embarrassed to make additional requests. Moreover, if he were to make this request for a few tribes, those other tribes dwelling in the mountains might also have opinions. Besides, he is not in good health right now, and we feel reluctant to trouble him too much, so after deliberation, we decided it would be best to talk directly to you."

"Great Chief Acoupaigos is not in good health?" Maximus keenly caught on to the thing he cared most about from their words.

"Old injuries from the past have never healed, and every winter he coughs incessantly. This year seems to have worsened; when I went to him, he was having difficulty walking and had to sit down to talk to me..." Budocaribas said honestly.

Maximus stroked his chin: It hasn't been long since the last meeting with Acoupaigos, and although last time it was evident his health wasn't very good, he could walk and talk without much trouble... Apparently, he was forcing it but can no longer hold on, having no energy to restrain these leaders, otherwise, if it were me, I would never allow subordinate tribes to negotiate with foreign powers privately...

In an instant, Maximus thought of many things, but he didn't realize that Budocaribas and the others were lying.

Budocaribas and the others did seek out Acoupaigos but only to ask him to help them retrieve part of their lost land from the Nix Tribe, which Acoupaigos rejected outright, leaving them disappointed. Ciciliotes then blurted in anger, suggesting they go directly to negotiate with the Nix. Acoupaigos ignored this.

However, the subsequent event where the 30,000-strong Pannonian army besieged the temporary camp and was eventually repelled made them realize that even if they could reclaim the land, the Pannonians would not sit idly by. Should the Pannonians initiate another attack, they would find themselves fleeing once again under the pressure, realizing that only under the military protection of the Nix could they possibly keep their homeland. Driven by faith in the Nix's military might, they secretly decided to approach Maximus themselves.

Maximus, abandoning his earlier seriousness, spoke sincerely, "Our Nix Tribe was once also in crisis; thanks to your help, we could settle here peacefully. So when you're in need, we are also willing to lend a helping hand. You wish to send warriors to follow us in attacking the Pannonians and secure a better settlement; I completely agree to this request!"

Budocaribas and his companions immediately showed signs of joy.

"However—" Maximus shifted his tone: "Our Nix Tribe has experienced a series of battles and sustained significant casualties. We've just settled here, and our tribesmen need time to rest and recover. At the same time, we must invest time in building our homes and cultivating our new land to ensure next year's harvest... So we cannot possibly attack the Pannonians in the short term!"

Maximus spoke reasonably, leaving Budocaribas and others without grounds for argument. Ciciliotes asked a bit reluctantly, "How long will it be before you attack the Pannonians again?"

Maximus held up one finger, "At least a year."

The leaders exchanged looks and held a quiet discussion, agreeing that having endured for several years, now that there is hope, waiting another year or two would not be a problem.

Budocaribas cleared his throat lightly and said, "Leader Maximus, we are willing to wait! But we hope to establish an oath with you and hope you will consent."

"That won't be a problem," Maximus immediately responded, "But I have one request as well; after defeating the Pannonians, the settlement land each of your tribes will acquire must be designated by me and not freely selected by yourselves."

"That won't do!!—" The leaders almost unanimously responded in opposition.

But Maximus's demeanor was stern, and his voice firm, "If not, then I'm afraid I cannot enter into any oath with you!"

The leaders' faces changed, and Cleonidas couldn't help but shout, "If you don't agree to let us choose our own lands, then we cannot agree to your demands for purchasing ore and grain!"

Maximus's face darkened, "Is the decision to sell or not sell ore and grain up to you? Even if you don't sell, I have my ways to deal with it!"

Seeing the tense atmosphere in the hall, Budocaribas exchanged glances with the other leaders and quickly intervened to mediate, "Leader Hashikphilos is merely worried that the land allocated in the future might not meet all the tribesmen's needs, but considering it would be the Nix Tribe leading any future war against the Pannonians, it's only right for Leader Maximus to allocate the land."

"Is this your collective opinion?" Maximus looked at the others.

"...Yes... yes..." The leaders responded one after another.

Maximus spoke in a moderated tone, "Rest assured, when distributing the land, I will certainly consider meeting your tribe's land needs as much as possible."

These words brought a sense of relief to everyone.

Budocaribas immediately said, "Leader Maximus, please establish an oath with us."

"Certainly." Maximus smiled, "Before establishing an oath, I have another suggestion. Currently, your tribesmen are living hard lives, and my tribe has just settled here and is busy building homes and cultivating land; manpower is indeed quite tight...

During the time when we are not launching another attack on the Pannonians, why not have your tribesmen come to our tribe to help with the work? We will offer them some compensation, this way, everyone benefits; what do you think?"