

Perish 326

Chapter 326: The Final Assistance to the Rebel Army

"At least we still have to stay here for half a month... The food we've reserved is really not enough!" Hamilcar said with a troubled expression, solemnly reminding.

Spartacus was about to speak when the Cavalry Captain Okmar hurriedly walked in: "Spartacus, a ship has arrived at the coast, and the people on board say they were sent by Maximus!"

"Maximus?!" A cry of surprise immediately echoed inside the tent.

Spartacus, Hamilcar, Attutmus, Atmidonos, and others showed joy on their faces, while the expressions of the rest were complex. Regardless, the name that had disappeared from the rebel army for a long time suddenly resounding in the chiefs' meeting caused quite a stir.

Amidst everyone's anticipation, a middle-aged man in a light blue linen tunic, tied tightly with a broad belt, stepped into the military tent.

He scanned the chiefs in the tent, finally fixing his gaze on Spartacus: "My name is Karsipengpas, from Illyria. I once met Leader Maximus in Sarabia. This time, at his request, I took the risk to meet you, to convey his greetings."

As soon as he finished speaking, Hamilcar urgently asked, "Where is Maximus now? Is he alright?!"

Karsipengpas answered vaguely, "Leader Maximus and his team have reached a safe place and have started building their home. They're doing quite well now. As for the exact location, I won't say more for safety reasons."

"Maximus is still as timid as ever!" Cleonis mocked.

Spartacus coughed heavily and said with a loud laugh, "It's great that Maximus and his team are safe. We were worried about them before, but now we can be at ease! Since you're Maximus's friend, you're

our friend too, so please have a seat... Okmar, go get some good wine and slaughter two sheep, let's eat, drink, and talk—"

"No need!" Karsipengpas decisively declined, "I can't stay here for long. After conveying Maximus's words, I'll have to leave!"

"Alright, then please speak." Spartacus sat up straight, ready to listen.

Karsipengpas's expression was solemn. With a calm and unruffled tone, he said, "Maximus said, 'You have stayed here for too long. Rome is mobilizing heavy troops from the Spain Province and the Greek Province to encircle you. Before Rome's reinforcements arrive, you should quickly break through Crassus's army's encirclement, head north quickly, and enter the Alps to gain complete safety.'"

"Ha, Maximus ran away himself and thinks we are as cowardly as him!" Cleonis mocked again loudly.

Karsipengpas acted as if he didn't hear, looked at the crowd, and asked, "Who here is Leader Attutmus?"

"That's me!" Attutmus stood up.

Karsipengpas examined him and said, "Leader Maximus had made you a promise, and this time he sent me to fulfill that promise for him. Leader Attutmus, would you like to leave here with me? Of course, you can bring a few trusted subordinates if you wish."

Everyone's eyes focused on Attutmus, who turned red with anger and said, "Maximus is talking nonsense! I never agreed to leave the team alone! I want to be with my brothers, and even in death, I won't abandon them!"

"If that's the case, then I'll take my leave." Karsipengpas nodded subtly to everyone and turned to leave.

"Please wait!" Hamilcar hurriedly called out, "Captain Karsipengpas, you are a pirate, right? I remember Maximus told me that he often dealt with pirates in Sarabia."

"That's right, I am a pirate." Karsipengpas responded with a calm demeanor.

"Since Maximus trusted you to deliver the message for us, you must be someone he trusts very much! Could we ask you to help transport some soldiers to the other side of Sicily? Of course, we'll pay a generous fee!" Hamilcar said earnestly.

Karsipengpas didn't even give it a thought and straightforwardly refused, "I'm sorry, I only have one ship and can't help transport soldiers. Even when I mentioned taking Leader Attutmus with me earlier, I hesitated because now that the Roman warships are blockading the eastern part of the Messina Strait, my ship snuck in. If I take too many people out, it will severely affect the rowing speed, and it won't be easy to escape the chase of the Roman warships."

"The Roman Navy has blockaded the Messina Strait?!" Spartacus's face changed.

"That's correct, though it's uncertain if the western side of the strait is the same." Karsipengpas looked at the tense crowd and added a few comforting words: "The sea is different from the land. Even if the strait is narrow, it's impossible to completely blockade it. If you are willing to find a way, you can always sneak through." With that, he turned to leave again.

Cleonis watched his retreating figure, a cold gleam flashing in his eyes, and leaned over to Spartacus, whispering, "Why not detain that guy's ship. We'll have a vessel to transport soldiers across the strait!"

Before Spartacus could respond, Okmar, who overheard, immediately objected, "We can't do that! The pirates haven't docked at the shore but are anchored offshore. This captain came over on a plank, showing their wariness! Pirates value their ships greatly, and even if we capture the captain and threaten them, they probably wouldn't hand over the ship!"

"This captain risked great danger to fulfill Maximus's promise and came to remind us. We should be deeply grateful! Cleonis, you're just as eager as I am to find a way to cross to Sicily, but doing so would harm our reputation and make us a laughingstock to the Romans. We can't break the hearts of those who truly care about us!" Spartacus spoke gently to avoid provoking Cleonis but expressed a firm stance.

Cleonis looked slightly embarrassed and said no more.

Spartacus then shifted the topic, "We're running out of food, and earlier, that captain mentioned that the Romans are mobilizing reinforcements from the Eastern provinces of the Mediterranean, so we can't stay here any longer, or we'll be in big trouble!"

I suggest leaving part of the troops here to wait for the pirate ship to take us to Sicily, and at the same time lie low, avoiding the Roman Army's detection. I'll lead the main forces to launch a surprise attack on the Roman-constructed long wall. Once we break through the Roman defenses, the troops will quickly head north.

The Roman Army will think we've all broken out, forcing Crassus to lead his troops in pursuit, keeping our remaining troops safe. Furthermore, we can search for opportunities to defeat the Romans again while marching!"

"Spartacus," Antonix urgently asked, "How can we break through the long wall the Romans built?!"

"Here, let me tell you..." Spartacus gathered the chiefs around, using a stick to illustrate on the ground, explaining his battle plan in detail.

After a round of discussion, everyone unanimously agreed to implement the plan.

Just as the rebel army began meticulous preparations, the weather suddenly changed the next day: fierce winds blew, temperatures plummeted, the sun and moon were obscured, and even the coastal area felt cold, while snowflakes even fluttered in the mountains. Such weather was extremely rare in warm and dry Southern Italy.

Spartacus immediately ordered an early action, with nearly 80,000 rebel soldiers (including their families) traveling lightly north, rapidly reaching the southern foothills of the Apennine Mountains. This was a weak point in the Roman long wall and, with colder temperatures than the plains, most Roman soldiers were huddled in camps for warmth, with only a few shrinking in the bulwarks, entirely unaware of the approaching rebel army.

The rebel soldiers took the opportunity to use pre-prepared bags of earth and bundles of straw to fill the traps and ditches, climbed the walls smoothly using wooden ladders, killed the stationed Roman soldiers, and broke through...

In the rear camp, Crassus soon received the news, taking the blow hard and nearly fainting.

Crassus had expended enormous manpower and resources to construct such extensive fortifications, intending to trap the rebel army at the southern tip of Italy. This strategy had faced much skepticism from several Roman Elders. The mere presence of the rebel army made them uneasy, pressuring Crassus multiple times to take the initiative and quickly eradicate these despicable, lowly slaves, but he refused. Hence, the angry elders reneged on their promise to Crassus and decided to call in reinforcements from the Spain Province and the Eastern Province to jointly encircle the rebel army.

Coincidentally, at this time, Pompey had already wiped out the rebel army in Spain and gladly accepted the Senate's order, leading the troops back to Italy.

Hearing this news, Crassus immediately lodged a protest with the Senate, but the elders ignored him.

Fortunately, Pompey's army needed considerable time to return from Spain to Italy, and Crassus already felt the morale of the besieged rebel army waning. To ensure a safe outcome, he decided to continue the siege for a short while longer before launching an attack to guarantee victory.

Who would have expected that during this period, the rebel army would launch a surprise attack, easily breaking through, leaving his two-month-long encirclement plan painstakingly created in ruins? Thinking of becoming the Senate's laughingstock made Crassus feel a surge of anger and shame, prompting him to want to lead his entire army out for a decisive battle with the rebel army.

But just at this moment, his subordinates reported: some rebel soldiers had come to surrender.

Chapter 327: The Development of Various Workshops

It turns out that the rebel soldiers who wanted to surrender were mainly poor people from Great Greece. When the rebel army was winning one victory after another, they were fervent supporters of continuing the fight against the Romans in Italy instead of fleeing to the Alps. However, this period of being besieged in the Regium region was difficult, and the powerful image of the Roman Army once again filled their timid hearts. Taking advantage of the chaos, they quietly slipped away from the troops and ended up surrendering to the Roman Army that had come to their rescue.

Crassus immediately interrogated these soldiers, thereby learning that there were still parts of the rebel army lurking in the Regium region.

He made a quick decision: instead of pursuing the breakout rebel army, he immediately dispatched two legions to capture the rebel camp in the Regium region.

Remaining in the Regium region were the forces of Attutmus. Since his troops included many sailors, they were logically tasked with the important duty of crossing the sea to Sicily. Though they had hidden the provisions and other supplies in the camp, when they saw the Romans wantonly destroying the camp and burning the army tents, some soldiers couldn't help but violate military orders and came out from hiding.

Now exposed, Attutmus resolved to go all in, leading his troops to attack the invading enemies with full force. His forces numbered over 20,000, while the enemies had only a little over 10,000. He was confident in overwhelming the enemy with superior numbers.

However, shortly after he threw his army into the battle with full force, Crassus arrived with the Roman main forces and surrounded them...

Seeing his familiar subordinates falling one after another beside him, Attutmus felt as if his heart was being torn apart.

"Leader, we'll cover you, break out from here!" The blood-stained Guard Captain grabbed Attutmus's right hand holding a short sword and anxiously pointed behind him.

Although Attutmus was somewhat exhausted, his mind was still clear. He understood that the Guard Captain's suggestion to "break out" essentially meant for him to escape.

At that moment, he recalled Maximus's words: "If one day your forces are in trouble, look toward the coast. Maybe the ships I sent to rescue you will be docked there..."

Attutmus glanced toward the coast, then resolutely turned his head away, forcefully shaking off the Guard Captain's hand. Waving the short sword in his hand, he shouted fiercely, "I will never abandon my brothers and leave alone. If we die, we die together! Brothers, fight with me!"

"Kill!!! Kill these damned Romans!!!..." The soldiers, inspired, shouted in unison, their voices echoing across the battlefield.

Eventually, the shouts faded into silence...

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After Spartacus broke through the long wall, he grandly advanced northward. However, as the army approached Locri, there were still no Roman forces pursuing from behind.

Feeling uneasy, Spartacus immediately led his troops to turn back.

At this time, they found that there wasn't a single enemy visible on the long wall extending for dozens of miles. Only the eastern and western large camps were defended by Roman legions, which remained firm and unyielding no matter how they were cursed.

In fact, the camps were not heavily manned. Had the rebel army launched a strong attack, the Romans would have found it hard to defend. However, the rebel main forces had been trekking back and forth for a day, were very fatigued, and were too worn out to continue battling.

At this time, the leaders realized that the prospects for Attutmus's forces left behind in the Regium region were grim. Although Spartacus was deeply regretful, he did not urge the warriors to return to the Regium region to try to rescue any possible survivors from Attutmus's unit. Instead, he suggested: advance north as quickly as possible, shaking off this pursuit by the Roman Army, and head towards the vicinity of Brindisi.

He believed that since Maximus was able to communicate through the pirates, it indicated that the pirates in the Adriatic Sea were relatively reliable. Perhaps they could be heavily compensated to transport them to Rome's Greek Province, where the Roman military might would presumably be weaker, giving them a better chance to develop.

Other leaders, perturbed over the potential demise of Attutmus's unit and unwilling to escape into the barbaric lands north of the Alpine region, quickly accepted Spartacus's suggestion.

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With the arrival of the new year, the Official Tribe Members of the Nix Tribe remained very busy. With the assistance of the Reserve Tribe Members, they finally finished plowing their fields. Under the guidance of the Agricultural Department, they started learning how to compost and fertilize, so families no longer relieved themselves anywhere but instead dug cesspools in their yards to produce their fertilizer for themselves.

Maximus's award to the carpenter Tetilipus at the land division meeting sparked greater enthusiasm among the artisans.

Before the year end, the first batch of iron ore Pigeris purchased from the Alde Tribe had arrived in Snowdonia.

Meanwhile, the first batch of stone bricks was also fired, and the artisans quickly used some of the bricks mixed with mud to build two rudimentary lime kilns: one kiln for burning quicklime and the other, following Maximus's suggestion, to crush limestone and iron ore into powder, mix them with clay, and calcine them in the kiln, using the previously made charcoal as fuel.

After calcining for most of the day, the mixture was removed from the kiln, cooled, and then mixed with river sand and water to create a slurry, which was applied between the stone bricks to build a small wall. The entire surface was also covered in a layer of slurry, which took approximately five to six days to fully harden into a gray-red wall. It took a strong burly man slamming into it with considerable force to break it down.

The participating artisans were jubilant because they believed the kiln-fired mixture wasn't much inferior to Roman cement.

Maximus observed the entire process. Though he felt the resulting product was far inferior to the cement of his past life—lower temperature, coarser powder, and containing more impurities, which led to slower hardening and lower strength—it was an achievement that required no volcanic ash, far better than ordinary mud, making traditional stone houses sturdier and kiln construction safer and more efficient. The artisans could continue experimenting to increase kiln temperatures and improve formulas... for better cement production.

Seeing the cement's effects, the potters, though they had already made egg-shaped kilns out of clay, felt that this kind of calcined "cement" should make kiln construction more solid, less prone to cracking, and more conducive to controlling kiln temperatures. So they decided to dismantle the original kilns and rebuild them with cement.

The artisans at the Iron Workshop were also thrilled with the appearance of this cement because they discovered it was better suited for creating blast furnaces for ironmaking.

They had already begun constructing these commonly used blast furnaces from Roman military industry. In the center of the Iron Workshop in the Riverbend Industrial Zone, they dug a circular pit more than a meter deep and over two meters in diameter, planning to line the pit walls with stone bricks and coat them with cement. Once hardened, it would form a solid stone wall, which would then be built up further till the furnace rose two meters above ground (a total height of three meters).

Previously, after each ironmaking session in Sarabia, they had to repair the furnace walls since the clay-coated walls always showed some flaking at high temperatures. Their current observation, combined with past experiences, suggested that the high-temperature calcined cement used as lining inside the furnace chamber would likely not exhibit such flaking, saving them a lot of trouble. Moreover, cement-coated stone bricks would make the entire blast furnace sturdier and less prone to collapse.

Not only the Iron and Pottery Workshops, but even the charcoal burners and brick kiln workers also proposed using this cement for their new kilns.

The newly produced cement was in such demand that the cement workers felt proud, even wishing to use cement to refurbish their lime kilns. However, the surging demand also posed a problem.

The materials for cement were easy to obtain, and firing them in the kiln wasn't an issue. The problem lay in crushing. Crushing limestone and iron ore into powder took considerable manpower. With the surge in demand, finely crushing large quantities of limestone and iron ore became a significant challenge.

This issue quickly shifted to be addressed by the Iron Workshop, since grinding iron ore into iron powder was an essential step in ironmaking. The Iron Workshop had long devised a mature process for this, using hydrodynamic hammers to crush iron ore and water mills or grinders to grind the crushed ore into powder.

In fact, hydrodynamic hammers and water mills were already under construction, spearheaded by the recently tribe-recognized engineer Spukala and carpenter Tetilipus.

Ever since the completion of the two wooden bridges, the massive team of carpenters had begun diversifying into other projects.

A portion took responsibility for building the docks at Snowdonia Village.

Because the Nix Tribe currently had only four small boats and there was little demand for shipping, the demand for dock construction was relatively low. Thus, the dock to be built was small and had simple facilities. With the pile drivers captured from battles with the Roman Army in Italy, the carpenters worked quickly, and the dock was almost complete. In a few days, the four small boats would be able to travel back and forth between Snowdonia and Westeni.

Compared to the rapid dock construction, the performance of the shipwrights' workshop appeared incredibly slow.

Although the workshop was staffed with seasoned shipwrights from Sarabia rather than amateurs, their previous commitment to bridge building had left them no time to organize the workshop. Now just beginning to construct various facilities in the workshop and selecting suitable ship timber for seasoning, although everyone was working hard, the preparations for shipbuilding were all that had been completed thus far, with not a shadow of a new ship in sight yet.

Chapter 328: Gowes Defects

Some people went to the Furniture Workshop, where their efficiency was much higher.

After all, tools needed by carpenters such as saws, planes, and chisels were readily available, and most of the craftsmen were highly skilled. In just a day or two, small wooden furniture like bowls, cups, and cans were completed.

A few days later, larger pieces like stools, chairs, and tables also appeared. Then more complex items like wooden barrels, beds, and various cabinets were made. After careful sanding and polishing (since there was no paint, the furniture was unpainted), they were delivered to the furniture shop in the market, sold to tribesmen on credit, marking the Nix Tribe's first shop to start trading.

After completing the construction of the wooden bridge, Spukala immediately devoted himself to the construction of the Hydrological Hammer, water mill, and Water Wheel.

Don't be fooled by the fact that these three things are much smaller than the wooden bridge, as their structures are quite intricate and complex. The preliminary work alone took a lot of time, including site selection, measurement, extensive calculations, and drawing... To ensure swift success in production, Spukala gathered all the skilled and experienced carpenters of the tribe to join the team, with Tetilipus as the leader.

Everyone was very enthusiastic about this because Maximus publicly stated: The Hydrological Hammer, water mill, and Water Wheel are among the most complex crafts today. If successful, they will not only greatly aid the tribe but also elevate its prestige in the region. Rewards and promotions will be given to the top three performers among the craftsmen involved.

Motivated by this, the craftsmen worked tirelessly under Spukala's guidance. Soon, Water Wheels were erected beside the villages of Snowdonia and Westeni.

The reason for such quick completion naturally also had to do with the fact that Water Wheels are mainly made of wood, requiring no precise metal components like pulleys, nor was there a need to divert water, build dams, or construct special houses, and so on.

After several tests and improvements, the Water Wheel began operating officially on the day when tribesmen flocked to watch, forming an impenetrable barrier around the riverbank where the wheel was located.

The Water Wheel resembled a giant wooden disk, standing at an edge near the riverbank where the river water was deep and swift, and the flowing water gently spun the wheel...

Maximus noticed that the water was not being scooped by the tipping buckets he often saw in his past life in the countryside, but by triangular wooden water tanks. A round hole was made above one side of the tank. When the tank was turned to the lowest point and immersed in the river, water filled most of it through the hole. When the tank reached the top of the Water Wheel, it tilted, pouring water onto the tank's top, which then flowed out through the round hole as the Water Wheel continued to spin. As the angle of the tilting tank increased, more water flowed out...

Most of this flowing water fell into a hollowed-out groove of a tree trunk close to the Water Wheel and firmly fixed on the riverbank. The water brought up by the Water Wheel flowed through it into a pre-dug deep trench... This earth channel crossed roads and led to the ditches between fields (After plowing the fields, during this pre-spring sowing period, the Agricultural Department mobilized most of the Reserve Tribe Members to fully excavate the channels while also encouraging the Official Tribe Members to join when free, and so nearly half of the channels that the Agricultural Department planned to dig were completed in a short time.).

Seeing the clear river water flowing into the ditches beside their fields, thus relieved from the trouble of fetching water for irrigation and the fear of dried-up fields, tribesmen cheered with joy...

Maximus also smiled with relief: Whether buckets or tanks, as long as the effect is the same, there's no need to be overly persistent...

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With the passage from winter to spring, the cold vanished, and the earth warmed.

A gentle drizzle nurtured all things; small grass pierced the ground, growing lush; wildflowers bloomed in competition, adorning the fields; birds soared in the blue sky, fish frolicked at the riverbed, frogs croaked in the grass, wild deer bounded through the forest... a lively early spring scene.

The sentries of the Nix Tribe were not enchanted by this charming spring view. They stood in the watchtower on the north bank of the Kupa River, mindful of their duties, always watching the dense forest ahead.

Since the Nix Tribe settled along the Kupa River, initially, they only set up posts in the mountains on the south bank to prevent sudden attacks from the Brochi people.

But with the construction of the wooden bridge, the fields on the north bank were extensively cultivated by the tribesmen. Particularly after the establishment of the tribe's most important workshop area on the north bank, ensuring the north bank's safety became a topic of discussion. Several watchtowers were successively built on the north bank to guard against enemy surprises.

The sentry was stationed in a watchtower located on the northern bank of the Kupa River, at the northeastern border of the Nix Tribe's territory. Not far ahead was the dense forest, with the territory of Segestica to the east. Although months had passed peacefully since the signing of the truce agreement, the sentries always remembered the team officer's reminders, maintaining high vigilance.

At this moment, the sentry suddenly widened his eyes because he saw a group of people coming out from the narrow path at the forest edge where wild boars and deer often appeared...

After days of wandering in the dark forest, they were momentarily blinded by the bright sunlight upon stepping out. Goves quickly squinted his eyes, slowly adjusting after a while.

Gazing at the expansive fields and flowing river ahead, Goves felt a sense of relief. He carefully discerned and then exclaimed excitedly, "We are heading in the right direction! We not only left this damn forest but also reached our intended destination!"

As soon as he finished speaking, a companion next to him said, "That village across the river was seized from the Aldeans last year by the people of Segestica. We came here with the Segestica's team, and I remember it well."

"Indeed, the village was empty then. I heard it had been attacked by those outsiders who took many Segestica people," echoed another companion.

"It's different now," said Goves with a complex expression, "Remember what those Segestica Prisoners we captured said? Those outsiders have reoccupied the village and settled there..."

"It's indeed very different from the last time we were here..." another companion looked ahead in surprise. Before he could continue, sharp wooden whistle sounds came from the front, and soon a small cavalry unit charged towards them.

Despite only six cavalymen, each wore a helmet and leather armor, armed with Wooden Shield and Spear, looking formidable.

At a distance of fifty meters from Gowes's team, the cavalry stopped, led by the tribe's Cavalry Captain Hagux, who happened to be patrolling nearby. Upon hearing the sentry's alarm, he arrived first, suspecting there was an enemy situation.

He scrutinized the group before him: they were ragged, faces covered in dust, each was thin, some with wounds covered in blood, barely able to stand independently, supporting each other, looking like a group of refugees, with only a few holding Wooden Shield and Spear, showing a fierce demeanor that shouldn't be underestimated.

Although they looked more like the Skodisqi people, Hagux did not dare to lower his guard. He waved his long spear and shouted, "Hey, who are you?! How dare you intrude into the territory of the Nix Tribe!"

Just as he spoke, a troop of about a hundred soldiers appeared in the distance, each clad in heavy armor, carrying large shield and short sword, marching in columns towards them rapidly.

Gowes quickly responded, "Don't misunderstand! My name is Gowes, a Skodisqi, who fought alongside you months ago to defeat the army led by the Segestica Great Leader! This time, I brought these tribesmen who dare to resist the Segestica people to seek refuge with you!"

After listening to his subordinate's translation, Hagux looked carefully at Gowes, his appearance indeed seemed somewhat familiar, then shouted, "If you truly come to join us, throw away your weapons to show your sincerity, and I will take you to meet our leader."

As he was speaking, the fully armed Centurion had arrived, standing in a long line behind Hagux.

Internally startled, Gowes still replied somewhat firmly, "Before coming here, we were hunted by Segestica people, suffering multiple battles, and many tribesmen perished to escape... We won't easily discard the weapons that ensure our safety! And we won't easily go with you unless we see your leader!"

"Who do you think you are, expecting our leader to come here to meet you! So many Skodisqi people have come from Brochi, none as unreasonable as you!" The Centurion leader couldn't help but scold after hearing the translation.

"Enough, stop talking," Hagux restrained the Centurion leader.

Observing the stubborn Gowes, Hagux was also upset, but knowing "this might be the band of robbers that has been plundering in the Segestica territory for months" shocked him.

Realizing the unusual situation, Hagux held back his anger and coldly stated, "If that's the case, then wait here. I'll immediately report to the leader and see if he's willing to meet you. Until then, it'd be wise to stay put, or you'll be seen as having malicious intent, and don't blame them if they take action." Hagux pointed to the Heavy Infantry behind him, solemnly reminding.

Then, after some instructions to the Centurion leader and his cavalry, he rode off alone.

Chapter 329: Paper Making Workshop

"Brothers, listen to my command," the Centurion shouted loudly: "Two-column arc formation!"

The soldiers quickly formed their positions. Although the formation was obviously shorter than the previous long line, it now had some depth, and the arc presented a significant sense of encirclement toward these Skodisqi people.

"Raise shields and sit down!"

With the sound of "clank, clank," the soldiers set their shields diagonally in front of them and sat neatly on the ground, their eyes fixed straight ahead at the Skodisqi people.

Some of the Skodisqi were intimidated by the soldiers' imposing aura and instinctively moved closer to Gowes.

Gowes intentionally raised his voice to reassure his subordinates: "We have come with genuine intentions to join them; what is there to worry about? These past days, we've either been fighting or marching, and now everyone is exhausted. It's a good opportunity to sit and rest properly. I believe the leader of the Nix Tribe will be moved by our sincerity, will come out to meet us personally, and will allow us to join this tribe!"

Hearing this, their hearts settled slightly.

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While the tribesmen of the Nix Tribe were tilling the fields on the northern bank of the Kupa River, under the guidance of the Public Works Department, they took the opportunity to press out a dirt road. Riding along this road, Hagux raced westwards on horseback. In little more than half an hour, he crossed the wooden bridge and arrived at Snowdonia's main house.

"The leader has gone to the Paper Making Workshop," Casius, who was stationed in the main hall, said solemnly. "Captain Hagux, if you have urgent matters, please wait for a moment in the side room while I go and notify the leader to return."

"No need, I will go myself," Hagux replied, feeling a little annoyed. Had he known the leader was at the Paper Making Workshop, he wouldn't have traveled this far.

The Paper Making Workshop was located at the northernmost part of the workshop district. Maximus had designated a large piece of land for its use. Within the grounds, over ten square pits had been dug, though only two were in use while the rest remained idle, intended for future use as cyclic wastewater settling ponds.

A major part of the workshop consisted of the paper drying yard—a flattened, thoroughly compacted earthen ground that had been repeatedly washed to reduce dust formation. Surrounded by simple wooden walls to block the strong river winds, the yard contained several large wooden frames. Each frame was neatly filled with uniformly sized square wooden molds...

Maximus had come to the Paper Making Workshop at the invitation of the Public Works Officer, Capito, to inspect the progress.

At that moment, he stood in the paper drying yard as Capito enthusiastically showcased the workshop's achievements over the past few months: "Leader, this is the 'paper' that the craftsmen have made according to the method you taught us! It can really be written on, and the writing is clear and lasting, just like papyrus!"

Moreover, it's like a piece of cloth—it can be folded and crumpled. Though it still tears easily, it's sturdier than papyrus! The key is that this paper can be produced in large quantities using just the bark of trees that are easily accessible to us. Children can use it to learn, officials can write reports and record data, craftsmen can draft designs and construct devices, and we can even use it to write books and create artwork! With it, we can..."

Usually calm and composed, Capito had become increasingly animated as he spoke. His face flushed, and he waved his arms, as impassioned as a lawyer delivering a courtroom argument.

In contrast to Capito's enthusiasm, Maximus appeared composed. He gazed at the piece of paper laid out before him: roughly square in shape, about the size of a bamboo frame, but with uneven edges, obviously damaged during the peeling process. Its primary color was grayish-white, with scattered black dots and yellowish stains. There were numerous fine, elongated protrusions resembling veins beneath human skin, as well as a few finger-sized holes...

Maximus furrowed his brow slightly, reached out his hand, and gently stroked the paper's surface: it was uneven, with some protrusions feeling hard, as though containing solid particles, while others were soft, resembling water blisters. He could also feel that the paper's upper half was thicker while the lower half was thinner, making it impossible to lay the sheet flat on the wooden rack. The lower portion curled upward, and the entire piece was slightly wrinkled...

He then held the paper by its edges with both hands and tugged lightly. It showed some resilience by not immediately tearing, but with a bit more force, a small tear appeared.

Capito let out an "Ah!" and snatched the paper from Maximus with visible distress, gently smoothing out the tear as if to comfort it.

Maximus ignored him and turned to the craftsmen standing nearby. In a calm tone, he asked, "Do you see any issues with this sheet of paper?"

"Yes, plenty of issues," stepped forward one of the craftsmen. Pointing at the paper in Capito's hands, he earnestly explained, "Leader, as you can see, there are many black dots on this paper that shouldn't be there. This likely resulted from our failure to fully remove impurities from the pulp. Alternatively, dust might have blown onto it during the drying process..."

The yellow stains on the paper, I think, occurred because of the recent continuous rain. The damp weather caused some mold growth... During the pulping process, we did not fully mash the pulp, leaving some tree fibers inside the paper... Additionally, the linen we used for the frame was not tightly woven or thin enough. The pulp oozed through the gaps, creating these uneven surfaces after drying...

When we used wooden molds to scoop pulp from the vat, we sometimes acted too quickly or too slowly, or we failed to hold the mold level, causing the pulp to spread unevenly across the linen. This requires more practice on our part... We also dried the paper in too much haste and didn't ensure the pulp was fully dried, leading to drops pooling and forming these holes... Lastly, our paper-tearing skills are lacking due to inexperience... not to mention the air bubbles in the finished paper..."

The craftsman droned on, listing a litany of issues, yet Maximus listened carefully. He then asked, "What kind of tree bark did you use?"

"Oak. This type of tree is abundant in the nearby mountains. We've also tried using pine bark, but it's firmer, so we've temporarily set it aside. Still, I think paper made using pine bark might end up being tougher."

"What about the adhesive? What did you use?"

"Emmerich suggested several types of grass, but we eventually settled on a tree vine. Its sap is milky white and very sticky—almost like mucus—so we named it 'nose drip vine.' This vine is also common in the mountains. I think one reason the paper feels brittle is that we may have used too little adhesive. Next time, we'll extract more sap from the nose drip vine and incorporate it into the vat. I believe this will make the fibers bond more closely."

Maximus asked a few more questions, and the craftsman answered all of them.

This craftsman, Torimias, had been a slave washing clothes and fabric for Sarabia nobles before being appointed by Capito as the head of the Paper Making Workshop.

At this moment, Maximus regarded him with a faint smile of approval: "Torimias, your dissatisfaction with merely producing paper and your ability to identify so many problems, analyze their causes, and propose solutions are commendable!

With a responsible leader like you and such diligent companions, I'm confident you'll be able to produce excellent paper and make significant contributions to the tribe. When that time comes, the tribe will reward you accordingly!"

These words filled the craftsmen with excitement.

Maximus continued, "Are there any difficulties that need my attention?"

"Leader... we need more hands," Torimias mustered the courage to say earnestly. "With our current manpower, producing a dozen or even a hundred sheets of paper isn't a problem, but this will never meet the demand of the entire tribe. Tasks like collecting bark and nose drip vine, pulping, and extracting sap all require a lot of labor..."

"No problem," Maximus replied. "Capito, you'll handle this matter. Also," He paused in thought before adding, "I noticed that pulping is indeed labor-intensive and repetitive, often leading to fatigue. Have Spukala come by when he's free to see if he can create a small device similar to a water hammer that uses water power instead of human power. This could greatly enhance papermaking efficiency!"

"Understood, Leader," Capito responded respectfully.

"Anything else?"

"I heard that bricks from the kilns are becoming more plentiful. Could we pave the drying yard with tiles and replace the wooden walls with stone ones to prevent dust and debris from getting into the pulp?" Torimias, encouraged by Maximus accepting his earlier suggestions, boldly made another request.

"Haha, your commander Capito already brought this up to me, and I've decided to take care of it. Tomorrow, tiles will be laid, and stone walls will be built for your yard."

The craftsmen cheered in excitement.

At that moment, Akegu approached and whispered a few words in Maximus's ear.

Maximus's smile faded, and after a brief pause for thought, he said, "Go tell Hagux to find Emmerich and have him meet these Skodisqi people.

Also, ask Hagux to remind Emmerich to ensure that these people are genuinely joining our tribe with no ulterior motives. Otherwise, the Nix Tribe will refuse to accept them."

"Yes, Leader," Akegu replied before leaving.

Soon after, Maximus also left the Paper Making Workshop.

"Leader, would you like to visit the Iron Workshop? The water hammer and water mill that Spukala and his team are building have made significant progress!" Capito suggested as he followed behind.

Chapter 330: Emmerich's Persuasion

"Since we're already here, we should definitely take a look!" Maximus immediately showed interest.

The group headed straight for the Iron Workshop.

Along the way, Capito casually remarked, "Earlier, when I saw the paper they made, I was overly excited, but you, leader, remained as calm as always..."

Maximus blinked, recalling the recent rumors in the tribe about him being favored by the Divine, and said softly, "If I told you that I have seen much better paper in a dream, which is why I could stay calm, would you believe me?"

"I believe!" Capito replied with certainty this time.

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When Hagux found Emmerich, he was brewing herbal concoctions at Snowdonia Hospital. Upon receiving orders, he set out immediately.

With no extra horses available, he rushed to the dock just as a small boat transporting supplies to Westeni was about to leave. He got permission to board, and the boat swiftly sailed downriver, moving almost as fast as a horse.

By the time he reached the Westeni dock, crossed the wooden bridge, and arrived before Gowes, Emmerich was already out of breath.

"It's Emmerich Sage!" The Skodisqi people became excited upon seeing Emmerich, even those injured showed their respect with grand bows.

Only Gowes frowned and asked discontentedly, "Sage, why didn't the leader of the Nix Tribe come?"

"Why should the leader come?" Emmerich, seeing Gowes's disgruntled demeanor, felt it necessary to dispel his illusions and spoke bluntly: "In the past few months, dozens to hundreds of compatriots have fled from Brochi, obediently following the tribe's arrangements, without anyone demanding to see the leader before seeking refuge;

During this time, the leaders from the Alde Tribe have visited several times, each time politely going to the main house to meet the leader;

Even the envoys from the Segestica people, whom we despise the most, have dutifully followed the tribe's arrangements... You tell me, with your group of less than a hundred, looking like refugees, what right do you have to demand the leader come to see you personally?!"

"We...we..." Gowes was at a loss for words, then gritted his teeth and said, "If it weren't for us constantly launching attacks within the Segestica Territory, distracting them, would these outsiders have it so easy?! We did them a great service, we're their benefactors, shouldn't their leader come to see us in person?!"

"Gowes, first I must remind you, stop calling 'outsiders, outsiders,' my tribe has a name, it's called Nix!" Emmerich gravely reminded him, "Gowes, when you attacked the Segestica Territory, was it our tribe's leader who asked you? I recall Leader Maximus wanted you to stay, but you insisted on leaving, and it was due to your hatred against the Segestica people that led you to actively launch attacks, which has nothing to do with the Nix Tribe.

As for why the tribe now enjoys a stable life, it's not your credit, but because Leader Maximus led the tribesmen courageously to attack the mighty Segestica people, capturing two fortresses in one day, then defeated Segestica Great Leader Andres's 20,000 troops in a battle against the odds, and finally held the camp, thwarting the Pannonian Tribe Alliance's 30,000 army, even severely injuring Andres...

It's precisely because of these successive victories that Segestica's strength was greatly reduced, and they dared not go to war with the Nix Tribe again, which has little to do with your raids on the Segestica Territory. On the contrary, I recall when you left us last time, you took nearly 700 tribesmen with you, where are they now?!"

Emmerich's words deflated Gowes's momentum, he dared not face the questioning gaze, lowering his head, and after a moment, said angrily, "Isn't it because these outsiders... the Nix Tribe no longer fights the Segestica people, letting them focus on dealing with us!

There are too many Segestica warriors, and like dogs, no matter where we hide, they can find us!... Sage, you're our compatriot too, once oppressed by the Segestica people, you should persuade the Nix Tribe's leader to continue the fight against Segestica—"

"Gowes!" Emmerich loudly interrupted him, unceremoniously questioning, "Did you come to our tribe's territory today just to say these things to Leader Maximus?!"

Gowes did not respond.

Emmerich further said, "I've heard some things about you in the tribe, you've led multiple raids on Segestica people's territory, indeed rescuing many of our compatriots, reportedly at times up to 2,000—"

"No, over 3,000," Gowes corrected.

"But where are these over 3,000 compatriots now! Most either died under the Segestica long spear or were recaptured by them and suffered even more horrific abuse! You're not saving them, you're bringing disaster upon them!"

Emmerich grew angrier as he spoke, genuinely feeling heartbroken for the deceased compatriots: "They could have endured a little longer, and led a free life like the compatriots in the tribe, but because of you, they've lost their lives! Now with only these few pitiful compatriots left by your side, tell me, have you brought them here with the genuine intention to join the Nix Tribe?!"

Before Goves could answer, the others began to clamor, "Sage, we genuinely want to join you!"

"I'm long tired of living in fear, hiding and fleeing! I haven't had a restful sleep in ages!"

"Sage, many of my familiar companions have died! I'm truly scared of being killed in the wilderness like them, with my body being eaten by wild wolves and crows!"

"Sage, I haven't had a full meal for days now, my stomach hurts from hunger!"

"Sage, sobbing..."

...

Everyone gathered around, rushing to complain, and as one person began to cry, many others followed in tears.

Goves, observing this scene, remembered what Emmerich had said earlier, feeling deeply disheartened and dejected for quite a while before saying in a downcast manner, "Sage, we genuinely wish to join the Nix Tribe."

"If that's the case, I must declare something first!" Emmerich heightened his tone, drawing everyone's attention, "For those wishing to join the Nix Tribe, there are specific decrees: after joining, you must comply with the tribe's arrangements and obey the tribe's commands, or face punishment! If you become a tribesman of the Nicos Tribe, leaving the tribe without permission will be seen as treason, and in severe cases, you will be publicly executed!"

"What?!" A commotion erupted in the crowd.

Gowes was particularly shocked, immediately questioning loudly, "Sage, if the Nix Tribe is so harsh on newcomers like us, how is it different from being slaves to the Segestica people?"

"Completely different!" Emmerich stated earnestly, "Among the Segestica people, we were slaves, poorly fed, poorly clothed, poorly rested, forced to labor to death, constantly at risk of being beaten to death, worse than their cattle and horses;

While in the Nix Tribe, you become part of the tribe, with specific decrees safeguarding your life and dignity, and anyone who dares to disrespect or violate you will be punished. You will eat well, sleep well, and after three years, become Official Tribe Members, receiving more than 50 acres of land!—"

"50 acres of land!" The crowd gasped in surprise, "Is that true?!"

"Of course it's true! In front of the main houses in the two fortresses, wooden plaques stand with various decrees from the tribe carved on them, including those about this, with specific people to explain them, you can go see and listen when you have the chance. Actually, it's not just 50 acres of land, if you contribute to the tribe and achieve Great Merit, you can gain even more land!"

A further wave of surprise spread through the crowd.

Someone asked, "Sage, if the Nix Tribe is so great, why not distribute land to us when we join the tribe?"

Emmerich patiently explained, "You should know, even by Skodisqi or Pannonian traditions, compatriots not of the tribe, even if accepted, mostly just helped tribe members for ten to twenty years, never truly becoming part of the tribe, let alone receiving land. The Nix Tribe is already very lenient!

The reason you are given land after three years is, first, to let the original tribesmen accept it, as the land was bought with their blood and lives, and you can't just arrive and share their fruits;

Second, the Nix Tribe is very different from other tribes here, you need time to adapt, and during these three years, it's also an assessment period by the tribe, frequently violating tribal decrees and generally misbehaving individuals may see their time extended before becoming Official Tribe Members, while exemplary individuals may see their time shortened towards land distribution—"

Seeing that everyone was eager to ask more questions, Emmerich raised his voice and said loudly, "It's getting late, soon I need to take you to complete the procedures for joining the tribe, so that you can have dinner by dusk, we need to hurry! Now give me a clear answer, do you wish to join the Nix Tribe?!"

Immediately, the crowd quieted down, everyone looking to Gowes, who appeared indecisive.

Finally, someone couldn't hold back and shouted, "I wish to join the Nix Tribe!"

With someone leading, others also began to express their will: "I also wish to join!"

"And me!"