

Perish 371

Chapter 371: About Alde

Maximus, upon hearing this, fell into deep thought.

Flanitnus waited for a while. Seeing that Maximus still hadn't said anything, he grew slightly uneasy and secretly shot glances at Quintus.

Though the two often vied with each other, this was a significant matter for the Military Department, and Quintus naturally couldn't stand idly by. He cleared his throat lightly and began, "Leader, your previous method of awarding merits was more detailed. It could thoroughly incentivize the soldiers to fight and more accurately showcase their performance on the battlefield...

However, to implement it, it requires many subordinates skilled in arithmetic and a substantial amount of time to record the soldiers' merits. In the course of a war, which often consists of many battles, this would demand even more effort, with an increased risk of errors in the records.

We all know from experience leading troops that if soldiers earn merits but are not rewarded promptly, their morale will be affected. They might even grow disunited and blame each other—this is certainly not what we want, as it entirely contradicts the purpose of our Twenty Peerage System.

The method proposed by Flanitnus is simpler and rougher, but it allows our Military Department to record merits more efficiently and helps foster camaraderie among the soldiers. After all, we are now employing Rome's tactics, relying not on individual combat prowess but on the cohesive formations of the legion units—"

"Enough, no need to say more. I'm not that stubborn," Maximus said calmly. "If we've discovered during implementation that the current method of recording soldier merits and promotions is impractical, then it should be revised.

Alright, Flanitnus, your method seems more effective and convenient to me than the previous one. Here's what we'll do: you, Quintus, and Lebilus—yes, the three of you—work together after this to deliberate and draft a comprehensive new plan for recording soldiers' merits and promotions. Once it's ready, bring it to the Political Affairs Hall for collective review and revisions. It must be finalized and announced to all the tribes before our war with the Pannonians begins, so we can implement the updated Twenty Peerage System!"

"Understood!" Flanitnus and the other two responded, a mix of tension and excitement in their voices.

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After everyone left, Maximus eased the solemnity on his face. He started tapping his finger thoughtfully on the wooden table: It seems some political systems transplanted from my previous life still need to be continually improved through practice to better adapt to new environments and maximize their effectiveness within the tribe.

While he was pondering, his Attendant entered. "Leader, Lord Pigeris requests an audience."

"Let him in."

"Leader, great news! The Aldeans have agreed to allocate thirty percent of the annual salt mine output to our tribe!" Pigeris exclaimed excitedly the moment he entered the room.

"Thirty percent of the salt mine?!" Maximus stood up in surprise. "I remember before you set off, we discussed that in this negotiation with the Aldeans, we would aim to secure twenty percent of the salt mine output. I didn't expect you to negotiate for thirty percent!"

"Leader, it wasn't entirely my doing," Pigeris said humbly, glancing at the map on the wooden table. At Maximus' prompting, he took a seat on a wooden chair.

"The First Legion's stellar achievements made the negotiations go incredibly smoothly," Pigeris explained modestly. "In fact, I initially only proposed twenty-five percent. The additional five percent was voluntarily offered by the Aldeans."

"Voluntarily offered by the Aldeans..." Maximus immediately grew cautious. "What additional demands did they put forward?"

"The Aldeans made two requests," Pigeris replied seriously. "The first is that they hope we can help them permanently secure the salt mine. If the Otarlat people or other tribes invade their southern territories and threaten the salt mine, we must send troops to repel the invaders and protect the mine."

"As allies, it's natural for us to assist them in defending against aggressors according to our treaty. The Aldeans are just being cautious!"

Maximus smirked and chuckled. "It's understandable. Last year, when the Pannonians attacked us, they didn't dispatch a single soldier to aid us... This request, I can agree to. What's the second?"

Pigeris' expression turned perplexed. "According to Cleobrotas, who negotiated with me, this second request was proposed by their Great Chief, Acoupaigos. He hopes that you, Leader, would marry his granddaughter, Geniandafra.

I specifically inquired about her. Geniandafra is the only child of Cleobrotas' elder son, Nikaredes, and the daughter of the Aldean Great Chief. She's sixteen years old and is said to be quite beautiful..."

The moment Pigeris mentioned the second request, Maximus—ever the political creature—instinctively recognized this as a golden opportunity and of course felt it should be accepted without hesitation.

However, he displayed a troubled expression and fell into silence.

Seeing this, Pigeris hastily tried to persuade him. "Leader, the Aldeans have made this request to forge a closer bond with our Nix Tribe. By marrying Geniandafra, you would be united with both the Aldean Great Chief and their most respected elder, Cleobrotas. This would ensure we receive the Aldeans' assistance in any future conflict with the Pannonians.

Moreover, this would eliminate the reservations of the Aldean tribes in the north about interacting with us. Those Aldean tribespeople who have lost their lands and are struggling to survive would no longer hesitate to join us..."

Maximus, however, hesitated and said, "I understand the benefits of marrying the Aldean Great Chief's granddaughter for our tribe, but... I already have two wives. What will the tribespeople think if I take a third?"

"Leader, the tribespeople won't resent you; on the contrary, they'll be even more grateful!" Pigeris passionately argued. "It's obvious to everyone: the high salt mine share the Aldeans granted us is clearly part of Geniandafra's dowry!

We've long been short on salt, even to the extent that it affects our tribespeople's agricultural work and military training. Should you marry Geniandafra, this problem would be entirely resolved. The tribespeople won't have to worry about the lack of salt sapping their strength, and they'll also be able to preserve more meat from slaughtered livestock or river fish they catch.

Leader, this marriage of yours will significantly improve the lives of the tribespeople!"

Maximus sighed softly and said helplessly, "Alright, bring this matter up at the next Political Affairs Hall meeting. If no one raises objections, you and Ritual Officer Kefisofon shall handle the wedding arrangements."

"Understood! I promise to make the wedding a grand celebration!" Pigeris responded excitedly.

"It doesn't need to be too extravagant," Maximus reminded him gently. "Don't forget about Nexia."

Pigeris' heart skipped a beat as he recalled the warm help he had received from the Leader's wife on a recent hospital visit for his injured leg. Feeling a twinge of guilt, he replied somberly, "Yes, Leader, you're absolutely right."

Not wanting to dwell on this topic, Maximus shifted the conversation. "Did you discover anything while accompanying the First Legion to the southern regions of the Aldean tribe?"

Pigeris immediately caught on and said, "Leader, on this southern expedition, I found significant internal issues within the Aldeans."

"Oh?" Maximus leaned forward in interest.

"The Aldeans are currently divided into three factions: the northern tribes living in the mountains and along the upper Kupa River, the southern tribes along the Murenica and Kolana Rivers, and the western tribes in the mountains and hills...

The northern tribes have either lost their original lands or have barren territories. They are desperate for change, but the Aldean collective lacks the capacity to help them, which is why they've turned to us...

The western tribes face similar issues with barren lands, which weaken their strength. However, many among them have followed Karsipengpas into piracy, and the looted goods allow them to scrape by. Because of this, Karsipengpas holds substantial influence among the western tribes...

The southern tribes are the strongest. However, they fear that the northern tribes, whose homes were destroyed by the Segestica people, will move southward and compete for their land and wealth. As a result, they've united tightly, unwilling to make compromises. This displeasure extends even toward Great Chief Acoupaigos, who has repeatedly called for more support for the northern tribes.

Among these southern tribes, the strongest is Acoupaigos' Main Camp, followed by Ambrosius' tribe. Ambrosius is adept at building relationships and happens to be Alistacas' father-in-law. While the southern tribal leaders outwardly follow Alistacas' orders, I've noticed they seem to pay more heed to Ambrosius' advice. He tends to keep a low profile, almost as if he's Alistacas' Attendant..."

"Interesting." Maximus stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Do go on."

"Leader, your new grandfather-in-law—" Pigeris began with a playful tone but faltered slightly under Maximus' gaze. He cleared his throat awkwardly before continuing, "This Cleobrotas, although greatly trusted as a tribal elder by Acoupaigos, seems to be distanced, even excluded, by Alistacas. The southern tribal leaders also don't seem close to him, while he has better relations with the northern and western tribal leaders.

The main reason for this is that several measures implemented in recent years by Acoupaigos to assist the northern tribes and ease internal tribal conflicts were enforced by Cleobrotas. Naturally, this has harmed the interests of the southern tribes to some extent.

Another reason is that Cleobrotas' tribe is not located along the Murenica and Kolana Rivers but in the hills between the Murenica River and the western mountains. It's considered a fairly large tribe and, strictly speaking, should be classified as part of the western faction...

Nonetheless, Cleobrotas doesn't seem to mind Alistacas' exclusion. During the recent southern campaign, he actively assisted Alistacas. According to what I've gathered, Acoupaigos and Cleobrotas grew up together like brothers and share a profound bond. It's possible Cleobrotas views Alistacas as a nephew or son."

Chapter 372: Sisters and Husband and Wife

Pigeris glanced at his leader, noticing that he was still intently listening, and continued, "I've found that among the Aldean tribal leaders to the west and north, Alistacas has the worst attitude towards Karsipengpas, one could even say he's openly hostile.

I couldn't uncover any personal grudges between them from before, but based on what I've learned, I suspect the possible reason might lie in the fact that the position of Aldean Great Chief, though traditionally passed from father to son, isn't set in stone.

Over fifty years ago, the Aldean Main Camp was located in Validosi. Yes, Budocaribas's grandfather used to be the Aldean Great Chief, but after committing a grave mistake that angered the tribesmen, Acoupaigos's father was elected as the new Great Chief by the tribal leaders.

Nowadays, the Aldeans have suffered successive defeats at the hands of the Segestica people in the north, the Brochi people in the east, losing vast tracts of land, and in the south, they've been beaten by the Otarat people, even losing the entire salt mine. In the western mountains, snow disasters have occurred for two consecutive years, yet Acoupaigos has been unable to provide significant aid. His prestige among the tribes has declined drastically, especially among the northern and western tribes that have grown quite dissatisfied with him.

In contrast, Karsipengpas enjoys high acclaim among these tribes. If Acoupaigos were to pass away, and the tribal leaders adamantly oppose Alistacas's succession, fully supporting Karsipengpas to become the Great Chief, the outcome might indeed be unpredictable..."

"So, Acoupaigos marrying off his granddaughter to me—could it be that he wants the Nix Tribe to stand behind his son?" Maximus chuckled lightly before asking, "Does Karsipengpas have any intentions of vying for the Aldean Great Chief position?"

"It's hard to tell," Pigeris answered honestly. "During those few days at the southern border of the Aldeans, although he never hesitated to retaliate against Alistacas's provocations and was unyielding in discussions over salt mine profits among the tribal leaders, when the army later returned, he informed me that after handling the aftermath for their fallen tribesmen back in his camp, he plans to take his men and set sail..."

Consider this: Acoupaigos likely won't live two more months. If Karsipengpas truly intended to vie for the position of Great Chief, he should be focusing on cultivating relationships with familiar tribal leaders and relentlessly building his influence right now, wouldn't you agree?"

"What you say makes sense. If Karsipengpas isn't deceiving you, it seems he doesn't want to compete with Alistacas for the Great Chief position." Maximus nodded thoughtfully before asking again, "Is Acoupaigos really not going to last two months?"

"Yes, leader. I've visited him twice recently, and his condition has worsened noticeably each time. He is now bedridden and completely immobile; even his voice is exceedingly weak... Cleobrotas suggested that if you agree to this marriage, the ceremony should be held quickly, perhaps so Acoupaigos can witness it with his own eyes before passing..."

"Conduct the wedding swiftly... So Acoupaigos hopes his son can secure the succession smoothly," Maximus remarked with a faint smile before asking another question, "What's your opinion of Alistacas?"

"Hmm..." Pigeris took a moment to reflect before responding, "Alistacas isn't young anymore, but he's quite reckless in his actions, prone to anger, and openly favors the southern tribes while showing hostility to the tribal leaders in the north and west. Moreover, he doesn't bother hiding these biases—they're plain for all to see... To be honest, I feel that if he becomes the Great Chief, the Aldean Tribe is likely to face turmoil."

"If Alistacas becomes the Great Chief, it might not necessarily be a bad thing for us," Maximus remarked with hidden meaning, adding, "Besides, right now we also need a stable succession of the Aldean Great Chief's position... Pigeris, make another trip to the Aldean Main Camp and tell them—"

Maximus abruptly halted his words, swallowing back the statement "The Pannonians might launch a massive offensive; they must prepare for it" that was about to escape his lips.

"Leader, what is it you need me to do at the Aldean Camp?!" Pigeris asked, puzzled.

Maximus waved a hand dismissively, his expression calm as he said, "Go back to the Aldean Main Camp and discuss with them whether it's possible to obtain more flax in the shortest time possible."

"Even more flax?" Pigeris asked in surprise.

"Yes, and you'll soon understand why."

"Understood, leader. I'll do my best to negotiate with the Aldeans," Pigeris replied, suppressing his inner doubts and accepting the order willingly.

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In the afternoon, Nexia returned early to the main house and went straight to the sheep pen in the backyard, where she found Florist Lusia feeding the sheep, just as expected.

When Florist Lusia became a Reserve Tribe Member of the Nix Tribe, she chose to work as a nurse in the hospital due to the care offered by Nexia and Emmerich, which also allowed the doctors to observe her condition conveniently in case of relapse. In truth, tending to injured soldiers wasn't her preference; the trauma of Wallis still lingered. After marrying Maximus, she stopped nursing altogether with his approval, instead taking up the task of raising cattle, sheep, chickens, and ducks at the main house. Occasionally, she helped Acronis with cooking.

Noticing Nexia's downcast expression, Florist Lusia asked with concern, "Sister, why have you come back so early? Are you feeling unwell?"

Nexia glanced at the maid standing behind Florist Lusia and spoke softly, "Lusia, come with me."

Florist Lusia, puzzled, followed Nexia to her bedroom. Once seated, she curiously asked, "Sister, is there something you want to tell me?"

Instead of answering, Nexia questioned in a serious tone, "Luscia, are you pregnant yet?"

"Pregnant with what?" Florist Luscia didn't immediately grasp the meaning.

"A child! Have you conceived the leader's child yet?!" Nexia emphasized each word.

Florist Luscia's cheeks flushed instantly, and she stammered shyly, "Sister, what... what are you saying?! I've only been here for ten days... and I haven't been with the leader every day... How could it happen so quickly?"

Indeed, since her marriage, Florist Luscia and Nexia had been taking turns spending the nights with Maximus...

Nexia was, of course, aware of this. She sighed softly, "Sister, don't blame me for being anxious. Today, during the Political Affairs Hall meeting of the tribe, Pigeris mentioned that the Aldean Great Chief has formally requested to marry his granddaughter to our leader to strengthen the ties between the two tribes.

The various department chiefs mostly voiced support, and the leader didn't oppose it. The matter was decided. Horace, after returning to the Medical Department, relayed this to me immediately, so I came straight back to find you."

"So... there will soon be an Aldean woman moving in! Sister, what... what should I do? What should we do?" Florist Luscia grew visibly flustered.

"You don't need to worry," Nexia reassured her gently. "Even if that woman is a noble and has the entire Aldean Tribe backing her, this is the Nix Tribe. As the most recent arrival, she ought to show you and me respect! But for your future's sake, you must try to conceive the leader's child as soon as possible—and preferably a boy!"

Florist Luscia clenched her hands tightly and whispered, "Sister, why can't the leader just refuse the Aldeans' request?"

"This matter... You can't blame the leader. Our Nix Tribe needs the Aldeans as allies, their support, and their assistance, so that we can thrive here." Nexia sighed helplessly and said gravely, "Do you know? The Pannonians are planning another attack against us!"

Florist Lusia heard this and began trembling uncontrollably.

"Sister, don't be afraid!" Nexia rushed to embrace her tightly, comforting her in a loud voice, "Last year, we defeated the Pannonians multiple times! Now we are even stronger—we will definitely defeat them again!"

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At dusk, Maximus returned to the main house's backyard, where Acronis had long since had dinner prepared.

He sat around the table with Nexia and Florist Lusia, eating in silence. The atmosphere was heavy and oppressive.

Acronis, having caught some faint rumors, found an excuse to leave early.

After dinner, Maximus let out a heavy cough, breaking the tense silence in the room: "Lusia, leave us for a while. I have matters to discuss with Nexia."

"Oh..." Florist Lusia hesitated as she stood up, glancing at Nexia.

Nexia winked at her reassuringly, and only then did Florist Lusia leave the dining room with some relief.

Facing Nexia's calm gaze, Maximus cleared his throat lightly. "You must have heard about what was discussed in the Political Affairs Hall today, right?"

"What matter?"

"The Aldean Great Chief wishes for me to marry his granddaughter. I never expected him to make such a request, and the people in the Political Affairs Hall even agreed to it!" Maximus's voice held a mixture of guilt and frustration. "I... I—"

"They're right. We need the Aldeans' friendship, especially with the Pannonians about to attack us." Nexia's tone was calm, though a faint sadness lingered. "I only hope that after you marry this... Aldean woman, you won't forget about me—"

"How could that be!" Maximus grabbed Nexia's hands firmly, his eyes locked onto her delicate face. Speaking with deep emotion, he said, "You are my wife, my comrade. From the time we met to now, we've shared joys and sorrows for over two years. You're my most important family! Lusia can't compare to you, and that woman Geniandafra, whom I've never even met, is even further beyond comparison!

So I wanted to speak with you just now to discuss—henceforth, you will manage all affairs in our household. Lusia, and even Geniandafra once she arrives, must obey your guidance—"

Chapter 373: Crassus Joins Forces with Pompey

"Really?!" Nexia's face lit up as the gloom swept away upon hearing this.

"Of course it's true!" Maximus said solemnly. "I heard that in some kingdoms in Little Asia, the king has a queen, and the queen is responsible for managing the king's other wives and maidservants... Our Nix Tribe is still just a tribe and can't make you a queen, but I appoint you as the First Lady of the Nix Tribe. Your responsibilities are the same as those of a queen!"

First Lady of Nix! ... Nexia thought this new title sounded wonderful.

Maximus saw the smile overflowing on Nexia's face, and he secretly breathed a sigh of relief. Then, he softly added, "However, as the First Lady of the tribe, you must not abuse your powers. You must manage all household affairs well, make them orderly, and ensure that everyone gets along harmoniously. That way, I'll be able to devote all my energy to the survival and development of the tribe."

"Do you see me as someone who would go out of control?" Nexia cast him a reproachful glance and said solemnly, "Rest assured, I will dutifully fulfill the responsibilities of the First Lady!"

Speaking of which, she suddenly seemed to recall something. Her brows furrowed slightly: "Does this mean that once I've become the First Lady, I can no longer serve as Deputy Officer of the Medical Department?"

"As long as you can handle both, you may continue to serve as Deputy Officer of the Medical Department."

"Does Acronis also fall under my management?"

"Acronis is responsible for overseeing all chores in the main house, not just matters within our family, so she does not fall under your management. However, you can assign her tasks as needed."

"I see..." Nexia seemed slightly disappointed. Her eyes sparkled as she asked again, "So, have I already been officially appointed as the First Lady?"

Maximus explained solemnly, "Not yet. After obtaining your consent, I still need to discuss the matter in the Political Affairs Hall. The Legal Department must define the responsibilities of the First Lady and notify the tribesmen, and the Cultivation Department must establish specific ceremonial practices for the role of First Lady..."

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At the age of 24, Pompey commanded an army and quelled the rebellion in the Numidian Kingdom in North Africa within only 40 days. The Roman Dictator Sulla held a Triumph in Rome for him.

A decade later, Pompey led troops to suppress the rebel faction under Sedulius in Spain and, on his way back to Rome, incidentally eradicated the remnants of the rebel army. The Senate once again held a Triumph for him.

For a time, Pompey's prestige in Rome was unsurpassed. Each day, guests visited his mansion in an endless stream, and the streets buzzed with conversations revolving around him...

However, a few months later, this frenzy began to cool off because the election for the next Governor was approaching.

Pompey, feeling somewhat lost due to the sharp decline in visitors to his residence, was also restless after a few months of idleness. He yearned to remain at the center of public attention.

Now, the Mediterranean under Roman control was peaceful except for the ongoing conflict in Little Asia. There, the war between Rome and Pontus was being handled by the Senator-appointed military Commander Lucullus. Not only did the former Governor have deep roots in the Senate, out of Pompey's current reach, but also the Eastern conflict seemed to be progressing smoothly.

With no immediate opportunities for military glory, what about in politics?

Pompey's subordinates strongly urged him to run for next year's Governor election. They argued: Pompey had previously disbanded his army for the Senate to organize his Triumph, but he had once promised his soldiers in Spain that, should they fight valiantly for him, he would reward them with land and wealth after the war. Now these soldiers remained in Rome and its surrounding areas, awaiting the fulfillment of that promise. If Pompey could gain the highest power in Rome, he could push the Senate to pass legislation to settle his men.

Pompey was deeply tempted by his subordinates' proposal, not only to keep his promise but more importantly, to ascend to the highest position in Rome, surpassing past illustrious figures and living up to his title "Magnus."

But he was uneasy. After all, he was only 34, which was at least eight years short of the age required for Roman citizens to run for Governor according to tradition.

Moreover, he had never held any public office before running for Governor, which broke Roman law and would inevitably attract criticism.

Another concern weighed heavily on him: without administrative experience or time served in the Senate, he lacked political finesse. He was accustomed to bold and decisive actions in the military camp but would he adapt to the verbal sparring and maneuvering in the Senate?

After extensive deliberation, Pompey ultimately decided to run for Governor. To err on the side of caution, he leaked news of his intention to run earlier this morning, gauging the reactions of Roman citizens.

Unexpectedly, within only two hours, someone paid him a visit—it turned out to be none other than Crassus.

Pompey was deeply surprised and personally stepped out to receive him, warmly inviting him into the sitting room.

"Demetrius," Pompey ordered his trusted butler in a loud voice, "Quickly bring out the finest wine and food! Make sure our distinguished guest is well taken care of!"

Once the servants left to tend to matters, Pompey found himself alone with Crassus, and he felt a trace of nervousness.

How could a valiant Roman general, who had led thousands of troops, witnessed countless blood-soaked battlefields, and endured life-or-death trials, experience such an emotion?

Perhaps it was because Pompey, idolized by citizens as a hero of Rome, stood opposite Crassus, the richest man in Rome, revered yet feared by ordinary citizens. Both men's contrasting philosophies had kept Pompey from close interactions with Crassus within Sulla's faction.

Or perhaps it was due to the rumors circulating recently in Rome: "It was actually Crassus's contributions that enabled the defeat of Spartacus's rebel forces, yet the Triumph's glory was entirely claimed by Pompey..." Although Pompey openly dismissed these claims as nonsense, deep down he knew he had indeed gained some advantages...

Suppressing his discomfort, Pompey asked, "Crassus, what has brought you here today?"

Crassus replied earnestly, "Pompey, I've heard that you intend to run for Governor. Given your current prestige, the citizens will undoubtedly rally to elevate you to the central seat in the Senate! I wonder if I might have the honor of becoming your joint candidate?"

Crassus's straightforwardness left Pompey stunned. After a brief pause, Pompey exclaimed, "Of course, I'd be delighted!"

Indeed, Crassus's personal request greatly satisfied Pompey. Deep down, he had long wished to extend goodwill to such an influential figure in Roman politics, but until now, Crassus had always held him at a distance. Today, his wish was finally realized, and Crassus's seasoned political expertise complemented Pompey's shortcomings, making the campaign much smoother...

Crassus smiled, his seemingly sincere thanks masking a trace of cunning: as long as he achieved his goal, occasional concessions were inconsequential.

Soon, Crassus and Pompey publicly announced their "joint candidacy for Governor," an important declaration that instantly ignited a sensation throughout Rome.

The two then appeared together at the speeches for the Governor campaign. At the climax of Pompey's rousing speech, he declared, "...To have Crassus as a colleague is a greater honor than simply becoming Governor myself!"

With that, he initiated a handshake and embrace with Crassus. The crowd erupted in thunderous cheers; in their eyes, the collaboration of these two distinguished figures promised peace and prosperity for Rome in the following year!

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Anrotas had been both excited and nervous these days.

Excited because the tribal coalition was finally assembling an army to eliminate this group of outsiders. Ever since they settled near Segestica as neighbors, even with a ceasefire agreement signed, Anrotas had always been on edge, fearing they might one day break through the borders and besiege his encampment. Now, this major concern could finally be eradicated.

Nervous because the newly appointed Great Chief Cabdes had instructed him to keep this declaration of war secret before its formal announcement. If the Nix people discovered it, they would have ample time to prepare defenses, undoubtedly increasing casualties among the coalition forces. Considering Segestica's current shortage of troops, the warriors' lives had to be preserved... Thus, Anrotas deployed additional manpower to strengthen border patrols to prevent Nix spies from uncovering the coalition's military mobilization...

Last night, Anrotas was so excited that he couldn't sleep well, for today marked the expiration of the one-year peace treaty signed between Segestica and Nix, and also the day when the tribal coalition would march from Segestica Main Camp towards enemy territories.

After breakfast, Anrotas fully inspected the military supplies delivered to the camp in recent days and convened the elders of the tribe, repeatedly instructing them to prepare for combat. Once the army arrived, they were to follow and join the assault against the Nix territory.

After finishing these tasks, an already fatigued Anrotas still remembered to inquire of his subordinates, "Has the messenger sent from the Main Camp arrived yet?!"

"Leader, even if the Great Chief dispatched a messenger riding fast horses towards us at top speed, they likely wouldn't arrive until tomorrow. You know the forest paths aren't easy to traverse," his subordinate reassured him. "Rest assured, since the tribal coalition decided to launch today against the Nix, Great Chief Cabdes wouldn't fail to act. The army should have already departed from the Main Camp."

"You're right. Originally, the tribal coalition could have launched earlier, but it was delayed until today due to Cabdes's insistence. Even if he's cautious, he has no choice but to act now." Anrotas relaxed upon thinking it through.

Chapter 374: Cabdes's Caution

At this moment, the Personal Guard Captain rushed in: "Leader, our scout has urgently reported that the Nix Army has entered our territory and is advancing here!"

"What did you say?!" Anrotas was startled and urgently asked, "How many of them are there?!"

"The scout said there are so many, it's beyond sight. The Nix people were chasing so closely that they had to retreat and couldn't investigate further."

"Damn it! Why did these Nix people choose to attack today?!" Anrotas was both shocked and angry. He looked at his subordinates and, with a trembling voice, said, "Hurry... hurry and ring the alarm bell, issue a war warning! Immediately notify... the elders to gather their tribesmen, take up arms, and prepare to defend against the enemy's attack, hold our village! And... and—"

Anrotas looked at the Personal Guard Captain, who was also his own son, Acacus, and said solemnly, "You must ride to the Main Camp immediately, find Cabdes, and tell him that our village is under fierce attack by the Nix Army, and he must lead the army to rescue us as soon as possible!"

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The Pannonian Tribe Alliance indeed split into two routes to attack the Nix. The northern coalition consisted of the armies of Desitia and Segestica.

Segestica Great Leader Cabdes worked hard to summon nearly 7,000 warriors, some of whom were prisoners exchanged from the Nix with grain by the tribe.

Desitia Great Leader Temagis mobilized 8,000 warriors, including 500 cavalry, which only represents half of Desitia's forces.

The reason Temagis didn't mobilize fully was partly because, although the Boyi people suddenly allied with the Pannonians, Desitia and the Boyi people had been fighting for years. There was still some mistrust, so enough forces had to be kept to defend the territory to avoid repeating Brochi's mistake.

On the other hand, even though the seven Great Chiefs reached a consensus at the Pannonian Tribe Alliance meeting, Desitia does not border the Nix, unlike Segestica and Brochi, who feel the threat from the Nix more deeply. Additionally, with the death of his friend Andres, Temagis' motivation to help Segestica decreased. This time, he is merely fulfilling the alliance's decision.

The combined forces of the two major tribes amounted to 15,000 men. When departing from the Segestica Main Camp, Cabdes led the troops in front, and Temagis' army followed, proceeding slowly. They arrived at Lin Kou Village outside the dense forest pass by dusk.

In the evening, after having dinner, Cabdes was about to sleep when he suddenly received news: Anrotas' son had come for help, saying their village was besieged by the Nix Army.

Cabdes was stunned, then calmed down and immediately assured Acacus: he would definitely lead an army to rescue them, but now it was late, and they could only hurry on their way the next day!

After Acacus received this promise, he set off early the next morning to rush back, so he could promptly inform his father that "reinforcements are imminent," boosting the tribesmen's confidence to hold firm.

However, not only did Cabdes not hurry on his way, but he let the army continue to rest in the camp and merely sent numerous scouts to the banks of the Kupa River to carefully investigate the enemy situation.

Cabdes' strange move of halting the army not only caused criticism from the warriors but also drew questions from Temagis. Last night, when Acacus arrived, he not only sought help from Cabdes but also informed Temagis of the situation.

"Cabdes, your territory is under siege by the Nix people, your subordinate tribe is being attacked. Instead of rushing to rescue, you halted your march. Do you intend to watch as your tribe is destroyed by the enemy?!"

Facing the criticism from Temagis, Cabdes was not angry. Instead, he humbly pleaded: "Great Leader Temagis, I have my reasons for doing this. Please don't rush, can you listen to my explanation first?"

Cabdes' attitude made it difficult for Temagis to remain angry. He snorted and said irritably, "Go ahead, what kind of excuse could justify ignoring the safety of your tribesmen!"

Though both are Great Chiefs, they should traditionally show respect to each other, but Temagis was annoyed with Cabdes because he believed Cabdes had used underhanded means to usurp the position of his friend's son. Although this was acknowledged by the tribal alliance, it left him displeased.

"Great Leader Temagis, according to our prior plan, the main force attacking the Nix Tribe is the army of Great Leader Bricks. Only after their army clashed with the Nix people would we attack from the Kupa River side, making it impossible for the Nix to defend on both fronts, and finally encircling and annihilating them... so our marching speed couldn't be fast. This was agreed upon beforehand, right?"

"Of course, I remember. There's no need for you to go on and on." Temagis said impatiently. "But the problem now is the Nix people launched the attack first, and your subordinate tribe is besieged. Are you just going to watch them die without helping?!"

"Of course, I want to rescue them, but even if you and I lead the army there, can we really drive the Nix people away and protect Anrotas' village?" Cabdes retorted.

Temagis' expression changed: "What do you mean by that?"

"The combined force of you and I is less than 15,000 men, while last year, Andres led almost 20,000 troops against these Nix people. I recall the Nix had about 10,000 soldiers then, yet we suffered a devastating defeat in the battle. I'm sure you've heard of this battle too."

Cabdes gravely emphasized, "The combat strength of these Nix people is very strong! And in the year since they settled here, many Scodisqi slaves have escaped from us and joined them. Oh, don't forget Bricks complained about this at the alliance meeting!

So, I fear the Nix's numbers now exceed ours, and many of their soldiers wear armor. It's likely difficult for just your and my armies to stand a chance against them..."

Temagis snorted again but said nothing.

He had admired Andres primarily for his bravery, so he was intrigued by Andres' defeat despite outnumbering the Nix, and he had specifically inquired about the battle details, shocked by the Nix people's resilience and tactical ingenuity despite being at a disadvantage.

Moreover, previously when he joined the tribal coalition to besiege the Nix people's temporary camp, he personally experienced their fierceness and tenacity. For this reason, he had supported the decision

to eliminate the Nix people at the tribal alliance meeting, believing such dangerous enemies must not be allowed to grow and threaten the survival of the Pannonians!

"Besides, the Nix people are quite cunning, do you know? Half of the land they occupy now once belonged to my tribe!"

Cabdes, both angry and somewhat apprehensive, said, "Initially, they disguised themselves as Alde farmers, lured Chief Wallis to attack, then encircled and defeated him, and seized the opportunity to capture his village. At that time, I was unaware of this situation; I simply received a messenger for help from Wallis and hurriedly led warriors to rescue out of solidarity. The Nix people pretended to attack Wallis's camp to lure me into hastening, resulting in an ambush where I quickly collapsed, and ultimately lost my tribe and clansmen..."

Cabdes pounded his thigh in anguish and finally said solemnly, "This time, the Nix people are attacking our village again. If we rush forward, who knows if it's another ambush! Even if there's no ambush, can our exhausted warriors who rushed there defeat the rested Nix people? Our Segestica people have endured numerous wars, greatly reducing the number of young tribesmen; we cannot afford significant casualties anymore!"

These final words profoundly moved Temagis. The last time, to help Andres, he led troops to join the coalition, attacking the Nix people's temporary camp, resulting in considerable casualties and complaints from elders and tribesmen alike. If there were major losses again this time, he would face the blame from all the tribesmen when he returned!"

Temagis, silent for a moment, said reluctantly, "You... have a point. Against an enemy like the Nix, we must be cautious, but what about the besieged tribe of yours?"

Upon hearing these words, Cabdes knew he had convinced Temagis and sighed in relief, confidently saying, "Rest assured, Anrotas' tribe is right next to the Nix people. For his own safety, during this year's truce, he's been leading the tribesmen in building wooden walls to strengthen the entire village's defenses.

Given their preparations, it is impossible for the Nix people to capture that village quickly. Meanwhile, Bricks and his forces will penetrate the Nix territory within a few days, forcing the Nix to abandon attacking Anrotas' village and turn west to face Bricks' army.

Then we'll advance swiftly to form a pincer attack against the Nix people..."

Temagis pondered for a while and then said stiffly, "Let it be so, but I must immediately send a messenger to inform Bricks of the situation here." With that, he turned and left.

Only then did Cabdes reveal a slight sneer; he had another reason for not rushing to aid Anrotas.

Anrotas was once a close confidant of Andres; otherwise, he wouldn't have been among the first Segestica nobles to allocate land along the Kupa River. Both he and Pulikas had staunchly supported Andres' son's succession. However, after the situation was resolved, he didn't remain stubborn like Pulikas but instead readily displayed willingness to submit to the new Great Leader.

Chapter 375: Change of Plan

Kekabudes remained cautious, knowing that if Anrotas's tribe were destroyed or suffered great losses at the hands of the Nix people, it would be a significant problem alleviated for him. Even if he faced criticism from other leaders, as long as he ultimately defeated the Nix people, reclaimed the lost territory, and rescued the tribesmen who had been captured, he would be celebrated by the entire territory's tribespeople, and his prestige would rival that of Andres!

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Maximus led three full infantry legions and the newly formed Fourth Legion, which had less than 4,000 men, as well as auxiliary troops like crossbow soldiers, totaling over 24,000, to heavily surround Anrotas's village. However, he did not use the fleet to block the side of the village adjacent to the river and the river port, allowing messengers from the village to continuously urge the Pannonian alliance to come quickly for rescue.

To this end, Maximus ordered the various units to launch probing attacks on the village while constructing camps in the harvested fields near the village, presenting a stance of not stopping until the village was conquered.

However, after waiting a day, the enemy didn't come; after two days, still no enemy; finally, they received news from the scouts.

Upon receiving the news, Maximus immediately convened a military meeting.

The meeting was attended by the three main officers of the Military Department—Flanitus, Quintus, and Lebilus, the four legion commanders—Fesaros, Torrelugo, Camillus, Oluus, and also the deputy legion commander of the Fourth Legion, Pequot.

"Gentlemen, I have just received confirmed information that this Pannonian alliance army has been stationed at Lin Kou Village for the past few days and hasn't moved at all!"

Maximus's words surprised some, while others seemed thoughtful.

"No wonder the Pannonians haven't shown up until today; they haven't moved at all!" Torrelugo realized.

"Could it be that the Pannonians have seen through our plan and are allowing us to attack this village?" Fesaros asked.

"It's also possible that the Pannonians are waiting for us to fully attack this village before coming to the rescue. We've carefully scouted the village these past two days, and it's not that easy to conquer. We might suffer some casualties to take it." Flanitus said worriedly.

"Weren't the Pannonians supposed to launch an all-out attack on us? Now it seems like they're waiting for us to attack instead?" Oluus wondered.

"Leader, have our scouts obtained clear information about this Pannonian army?" Quintus asked.

Maximus responded, "According to the scout reports, this Pannonian army is composed of warriors from the Segestica and Desitia tribes, with the Desitia army led by their Great Chief, Temagis, who arrived at the Segestica Main Camp four days ago;

the Segestica army is led by their newly appointed Great Chief, Cabdes. These two tribes have a combined force of about 15,000 men, and they've been stationed at Lin Kou Village since their departure three days ago."

"The fact that both our side and the Pannonians took action on the same day indicates that our previous judgment was correct; the Pannonians do plan to declare war on us once the ceasefire ends!" Flanitnus analyzed, "But with only two great tribe armies here, and merely 15,000 men, I don't think the Pannonians would be arrogant enough to believe they could defeat us with such a small force, so—"

Flanitnus looked at his colleague, "Quintus, your judgment was correct; the Pannonians indeed split their forces into two; their main force should be to the east, as they have five more tribe armies not present on this side."

Quintus didn't show any self-satisfaction as he approached the wooden table and looked down at the map showing the situation around the Nix Tribe (this was hand-drawn by Maximus based on a year's worth of scouting intelligence on the Pannonians, Aldeans, and Yapodes, although not very accurate). He then reached out and indicated, "From this map, it seems that gathering the armies of these other five large Pannonian tribes together saves time and also facilitates food transportation, as the Sava River, Delaware River, and Danube River connect the territories of these tribes."

"If that's the case, then with the Pannonians having two great tribe armies here, amounting to 15,000 men, they would have four large tribes in the east, wouldn't that be more than 40,000 strong!" Fesaros reminded with some astonishment.

"Likely more, don't forget that Segestica suffered severe losses from us and can't have sufficient troops, otherwise they wouldn't have agreed to a ceasefire with us." Pequot reminded.

"Whether it's 40,000 or 50,000 on that side, it's all within our expectations, and we have confidence to defeat them!" Torrelugo cheerfully encouraged.

"Leader, what exactly is the situation in the east? Haven't our scouts returned yet?" Fesaros anxiously asked.

Maximus shook his head, "Not yet, considering the mountain ranges in the east make the journey longer... but by the time, they should be back soon."

"Leader, we overlooked something." Quintus suddenly appeared regretful, "I remember that this new chief of Segestica, Cabdes, once led his army into our ambush, losing his village in the process and becoming our Westeni.

I've heard he's not as decisive as Andres, and having suffered such a loss and with fewer troops, that should be the reason why he's been staying inactive at Lin Kou Village, not daring to come to the rescue!"

"Even if we conquer this village, they still won't come?" Torrelugo asked further.

"...Yes." Quintus hesitated briefly before affirming.

"If that's the case, we can't afford to waste time here any longer! We should immediately lead our army back south, focus all our forces on defeating the enemy's main force coming from the east!" Torrelugo straightforwardly suggested.

"But if we leave, perhaps the enemies here won't remain stationary and might advance rapidly, attacking our territory and besieging Westeni!" Fesaros was somewhat worried.

"The Pannonian army would take at least a day to move from Lin Kou Village to here and another day to reach Westeni from here..." Oluus confidently stated, "As long as we can swiftly defeat the enemy coming from the east and then return, we'll be perfectly in time to stop the Pannonian army here from breaching our Westeni."

"You think the Pannonians will only attack Westeni Village!" Fesaros reminded, "They would also burn down our houses outside the city! Destroy our newly planted fields! —"

"There will always be losses in war, but as long as our losses are far less than the enemy's, it will be worth it!" Oluus was slightly dismissive, having gone through many such experiences in his decades-long military career.

"But they could also destroy the wooden bridges and water wheels, water mills that we painstakingly built, or might even send troops along the north bank to destroy our important workshops! Are those losses also acceptable?!" Fesaros emphasized.

Oluus was momentarily speechless; he clearly understood how important these buildings were to the tribe compared to some fields and houses and how much manpower and time it had taken the tribe to build them.

"Stop arguing." Maximus finally spoke up.

He realized after hearing what Quintus said, that he made a mistake by not thoroughly analyzing the Pannonian army's commanders, leading to a plan where the enemy did not take the bait. This was also due to the Pannonian tribes timing their arrival at the gathering place precisely to save food and then marching immediately, making it impossible for him to timely understand the enemy's troop configuration and leader situation.

Maximus felt some self-blame, but he wouldn't show it. Instead, he racked his brains to find a way out of the current predicament and quickly came up with an idea.

He confidently addressed the leaders, "If we have confirmed that the enemy in the east has dispatched troops and their direction of advance, then to intercept and defeat them swiftly while ensuring that the enemy here does not immediately advance into our territory once we leave, I have a strategy, which is deception!"

"Deception?!"

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The plan proposed by Maximus convinced everyone, and they all contributed ideas to perfect it. After the meeting, the entire army began acting according to the newly devised plan.

The number of probing attacks on the enemy camp was reduced, with most soldiers focused on building the camps, creating a land-based encirclement of the village...

At the same time, the Nix fleet struck the village's dock, setting fire to the docked ships and blocking the waterway. Additionally, a detachment of a thousand men was stationed on the south bank of the pontoon bridge near the village, posing ready to block any Pannonian reinforcements.

By noon, scouts who were lurking in the western mountains and borders of the Brochi Territory, as well as sentries on the few watchtowers in the southern mountain ranges of the Nix Territory, returned with reports: besides Andizeti, the other four large Pannonian tribes, Brochi, Mazi, Perustai, and Disone, assembled an army of over 40,000, led by the great chiefs of each tribe. They set off from the western part of Brochi's territory—the confluence of the Kupa River and Sava River—and marched west along the Kupa River. About half a day's march later, their vanguard left the Kupa River and continued west along one of the Kupa River's tributaries...

From the marching trends of this Pannonian army, it seems they do not intend to continue west along the Kupa River to eventually enter the middle reaches of the Kupa River plain to join forces with the Pannonian troops here and attack the Nix Tribe together; nor do they intend to follow the previous route taken by Pequot through the mountains, but genuinely aim to cross the hills directly to the east bank of the Kolana River.