

Perish 436

Chapter 436: Dividing the Land and Going to the Temple

Siris was one of the more emotionally controlled among the people, but even he couldn't help but shout excitedly at the moment: "I'm here!"

The subordinates from the Agricultural Department glanced at him and then looked towards the village chief Pro.

Pro nodded in confirmation: "He is Siris."

The subordinates from the Agricultural Department looked at the land allocation list for the villagers of No. 21 Village in their hand, then picked up the land distribution map of No. 21 Village from a colleague next to them. After studying it carefully for a while, they waved and said, "Please follow me."

He led the way eastwards for a short distance, then stopped in front of a wooden sign with a number carved on it.

"The 50 acres of land starting from here is allocated to you," said the subordinate from the Agricultural Department. After speaking, the two teenagers following him crossed the signboard, walked into the field, and waved to Siris, signaling him to follow.

With an excited heart, Siris stepped onto the land that was about to belong to him.

After walking dozens of meters following the two teenagers, he saw a row of wooden poles planted ahead.

One of the teenagers said, "This is 10 acres."

When the Agricultural Department previously measured the land here, they used 10 acres as the basic measurement unit.

Siris carefully observed the surroundings along the direction indicated by the teenager, silently assessing the distances of the wooden poles placed in the other three directions of the land. Although he hadn't specifically studied arithmetic, after seriously farming for more than a decade, his judgment of land area was unlikely to be off.

"That's right, it's roughly 10 acres," he nodded in response.

"What do you mean roughly, it is just 10 acres! We measured it several times before, if you don't believe it, you can measure it yourself later," the other teenager said discontentedly.

Realizing he misspoke, Siris quickly corrected, "Yes, it's 10 acres."

The teenager grunted, raised his head, and continued walking forward, stopping four times over almost 200 meters, pulling out more than twenty wooden poles, even leaving Siris carrying a large handful.

Finally, standing at the edge of his farmland, Siris turned to look back, seeing that the wooden sign at the starting point had become a bit blurred in his vision: 50 acres, this was much larger than his previous 20 acres! If he could increase it to 100 acres in the future, it would be such a large piece of land! No wonder the Nix advocate the three-field rotation system, relying on himself and his family alone to farm might really wear them out!

If it weren't for the reminder from the two teenagers, Siris might have lingered on this newly allocated land for most of the day.

The subordinates from the Agricultural Department took out two pieces of paper, which they called "land contracts of the Nixes", and handed them to Siris.

Siris couldn't read the writing on the papers at all and could only follow the subordinates' prompts to place his handprint on both papers, then take one home to treasure it carefully, as the subordinates said: This is the decree proof of his ownership of the land, as long as this land contract is there, no one in the Nix Tribe can seize his land.

At the same time, Siris also secretly resolved: He must send his son to the Nix School to learn these mysterious writings, and would not let his son end up not knowing what was written on such a precious land contract, just like him.

Siris was not the only one overwhelmed with joy. The Nixes fulfilled their previous promise, and every family among the Segestica citizens received 50 acres of land. At this moment, everyone felt: The sky is very blue! The land is great! Joining the Nix was indeed a good choice!

The Segestica citizens and the newly assimilated Scodisqi slaves again spent a peaceful day together.

Many people could hardly sleep well that night due to the excitement of receiving land.

Early the next day, the villagers woke up, hurriedly had breakfast, then went to find the village chief Pro with the original intention to ask: How to begin tending their newly allocated land.

Instead, they received Pro's notice: Villagers gather in the square, there is an important announcement!

Ever since the Nixes came to this village, the Segestica citizens have attended several gatherings in just a few days, which was rare in the past decade or more, because major tribal affairs were discussed and decided by the leader and clan leaders, who then gave orders to their subordinates to execute. The only tribal events the public could attend together were religious ceremonies or when the leader and clan leaders resolved tribal disputes and crimes, but they could only watch.

The way the Nixes called a gathering for major matters and even allowed everyone to ask questions and discuss felt novel and participatory to the people, making them sometimes forget that the Nixes were their enemies and themselves the victims forcibly assimilated into this tribe, which had destroyed their homeland.

This time, the village chief Pro told them: The Danu Temple of the tribe has been built, and they would immediately go to worship the temple and also swear an oath to the Danu Goddess.

Pro also solemnly reminded the villagers: Everyone must bring their land contracts, since they have to worship and make their vows at the temple. Only after the validation from the Priest will their land contracts become truly effective, marking their official integration into the Nix Tribe as Reserve Tribe

Members. Otherwise, they would become Foreign Auxiliary, lose everything they have now, and be sent to the camp near the Main Camp!

The villagers felt nervous upon hearing this. They had just relieved their fear of the Nixes, shedding their guilt about joining the Nix Tribe, and were starting to integrate into this new tribe. They had just gained the land they dreamed of yesterday — how could they let all their efforts go to waste!

Therefore, everyone hurried home, grabbed their land contracts, and rushed to the square to gather, fearing they might miss out.

In the morning, Pro led more than 800 villagers of the entire tribe on the road heading west.

Maiangtias did not lead his subordinates to follow because the villagers of No. 21 Village had behaved well these past few days. He didn't think they would do anything foolish at such a crucial moment, plus soldiers in full armor weren't allowed at the temple.

Today was another fine day, clear blue skies, warm sunshine, and a gentle breeze, but not too cold.

Many villagers in the procession hadn't been far from home these days and felt a bit excited, chatting and laughing along the way. Some villagers even proactively asked Pro: What does the temple look like? And what does the statue of the Danu Goddess look like?

Pro himself hadn't seen the temple, so he couldn't answer, only vaguely replying: Don't worry, you'll know when you see it.

This road connecting Segestica Main Camp and Lin Kou Village wasn't exclusive to No. 21 Village; villagers from other villages could be seen joining the route in groups, forming a long dragon that stretched as far as the eye could see.

Some villagers from No. 21 Village ran to chat with acquaintances in the preceding or following groups, and Siris had to move back and forth, reminding these villagers not to leave the procession for too long.

As they were about to reach Lin Kou Village, the procession veered southwest, revealing that the new road underfoot had been constructed recently and extended to the edge of the forest.

A large clearing had been opened here, with several thatched cottages built. Near the cottages stood seven or eight young men in linen robes, holding oak staves and wearing grass crowns on their heads, directing villagers from various villages to stand properly in the clearing.

Siris recognized their attire immediately — they were Druids, whom he frequently saw in Savatoir during his youth. However, after the Segestica rose to power, he hadn't seen anyone dressed like this again; they had even changed their name to "Priests".

While Siris was feeling nostalgic, a Druid came over and asked, "Which village are you from?"

"No. 21 Village," Pro replied.

No. 21 Village... The Druid thought for a bit and then pointed nearby, saying, "Your spot is over there, please follow me." After speaking, he gracefully led everyone in that direction.

"Are we there yet? Where is the temple?"

"When will we get to the temple for worship?"

...

Someone couldn't help but ask loudly.

"Hush!" The Druid immediately turned around, made a silencing gesture, and solemnly said, "No talking or noise before the temple, please remain quiet! Calm your mind and pray, and as long as you are sincere, the Danu Goddess will sense your presence and give us guidance. That will be your time to approach Her!"

The Druid's warm voice carried an inexplicable authority, causing everyone to instinctively stop talking and even breathe as lightly as possible; many even closed their eyes and began to silently recite something.

Although Siris also held his breath, he continued to quietly glance around. He quickly noticed a procession of hundreds emerging from the mountains behind the thatched cottages. Each person had a downcast look and seemed absent-minded. Occasionally, they glanced back at the mountain forest with faces full of strong reluctance...

"No. 21 Village, please follow me to the temple!" The Druid's voice awakened the villagers still meditating. Everyone followed his steps, crossing the clearing, bypassing the cottages, and stepping onto a path leading deep into the forest.

At first, the path was lined with small trees, short with sparse leaves. The further they went, the sturdier and taller the trees became, with hard, ridged bark, egg-sized tree fruits, and dense oval yellow-red leaves that shaded the path...

These are oak trees! This is an oak forest?!... As Siris realized this, "Ding! Ding!" The clear, pleasant sound resonated above his head.

Siris looked up to see a bowl-shaped copper vessel hanging from a high branch, with a movable iron marble in its center.

He moved his gaze forward and discovered the same small objects were suspended high in the treetops at intervals, and when the wind blew through, shifting with varying intensity, they produced different sounds. Sometimes gentle and melodious, like the deep silence of a forest, calming one's mind and inviting contemplation; at other times bright and cheerful, like birds frolicking in the mountains, bringing joy and delight...

Chapter 437: The Sacred Dana Temple

Stepping on the thick fallen leaves, accompanied by the sound of bells, the whole person seemed to meld into this vast nature, casting aside all fatigue and distractions accumulated along the journey... In a trance, not knowing how far he had walked, he suddenly noticed a gate appearing on the path ahead.

Two massive, towering white stones, each taller than a person, stood upright on either side of the path. A thinner white slab was placed atop these stones, forming a stone gate.

From a distance, the two white stones appeared to depict a man and a woman standing, yet upon closer inspection, there were no visible marks of carving, as if they had formed naturally.

The stone slab on top bore an engraved semicircular mark in its center, resembling a wave crest lifted from a river. When sunlight filtered through the leaves and struck it, the mark emitted dazzling rays of five-colored light.

The Segestica citizens and Skodisqi slaves, holding a reverence for the Holy Stone, knelt down collectively upon arriving at this place.

The leading Druid whispered softly, "Stand up quickly. Once you pass through this gate of the Holy Stone, the temple is just ahead!"

The only one who hadn't knelt—Pro—stepped through the stone gate first, followed closely by Siris, who hurriedly stood back up.

As soon as he crossed the stone gate, he felt the light pierce sharply into his eyes, forcing him to close them before slowly reopening them. It took a moment for his vision to adjust.

Previously, the path was surrounded by dense trees with lush foliage blocking the sunlight, making the area dimly lit. In contrast, this place was an open, flat expanse of greenery where sunlight poured down unobstructed. The stark brightness made his eyes momentarily unaccustomed.

But for villagers like Siris who lived simple lives, this transformation was seen as the power of the Danu Goddess, inspiring greater reverence.

At this moment, the villagers who had crossed the stone gate focused their attention on the center of the green field. There, countless white flowers bloomed densely and layered, resembling a carpet of white that further emphasized the sacredness of the temple.

Some villagers recalled seeing such white flowers while herding in the mountains; they bloom in late autumn and last until the spring of the following year. However, seeing them now, flourishing in such abundance and brilliance, made them believe it was all due to the blessings of the Danu Goddess!

Feeling a growing sense of awe, the villagers discreetly shifted their gazes to the towering figure at the center.

The statue of the Danu Goddess stood over three meters tall. Her left hand held the hand of a lively and adorable child, while her right hand supported an urn placed atop her head. Her body leaned slightly forward, and water spilled from the urn, forming the robe draped over her figure—a garment light and majestic, like a silken mist from the clouds. It accentuated her graceful and elegant form while underscoring her solemn dignity as a deity.

Her visage was serene, as fresh as a lotus in early summer, pure and unadorned. Her eyes were penetrating yet clear, seemingly capable of peering into every soul. Her smile was warm and bright, like spring sunlight, yet her brows carried an expression of compassion, as though she comprehended all the sorrows of the human world. Her slightly parted lips seemed to ask each visiting devotee with gentle concern, "Child, have you been well lately?"

Siris gazed at the Danu Goddess and felt an overwhelming sense of warmth and familiarity. It suddenly brought back memories of his long-forgotten mother—how, on the day he was sent to Savatoir, she had held him tightly, repeatedly urging him with eyes full of care and reluctance, just like the expression now radiating from the Danu Goddess...

Unconsciously, tears streamed down his face. As Siris raised his hand to wipe them away, he heard someone nearby burst into sobs. Turning to look, he saw that it was Lerdu, his face now drenched in tears.

"This is sacred ground. Please maintain your composure!" A deep voice echoed from up front.

The villagers had all been captivated by the statue until now. Following the voice, Siris looked ahead and noticed two elderly men standing on either side of the statue, each crowned with flowers and robed in long garments, their long hair and beards flowing freely.

The speaker was someone Siris found familiar. Squinting his eyes carefully, he realized it was none other than Hemijias, the former Chief Priest of Segestica.

Not only Siris, but many villagers recognized Hemijias as well. After all, every early summer he presided over harvest rituals for the tribe, and since No. 21 Village was relatively close to the Main Camp, many villagers often went to witness the festivities, making his face quite familiar.

But this time, no one found it strange for Hemijias to appear here. At this moment, they thought that with the Danu Goddess being so magnificent, it only made sense for Hemijias to join the Nix Tribe as one of her priests.

"Assistant priests, arrange for the worshippers to step forward and pay homage!" The elderly priest on the opposite side spoke gently.

Immediately, four young Druids robed in long garments and crowned with grass stepped forth from the edge of the green field.

Everyone soon noticed that standing in the perimeter of the grove encircling the green field were forty robed youths.

The four young Druids came into the crowd and selected the ten villagers standing in the front row, guiding them to the area of white flowers before the statue. Among the ten was Siris, but not Pro, who was already an Official Tribe Member and thus exempt from offering pledges before the statue.

The closer Siris walked to the statue, the clearer the Goddess' face became. That pair of luminous eyes seemed to move with him, always focusing on him with a gentle smile, leaving him thrilled and his heartbeat racing.

In fact, every villager stepping forward shared the same sentiment as Siris.

"Let the child of Danu Goddess, the High Priest of the Nix Tribe, Leader Maximus, bless and guide the faithful in their pledges!" The elder Druid said solemnly before bowing, prompting all the other Druids to lower their heads respectfully.

A young man stepped out from behind the Danu Goddess statue. He, too, was robed, but his head was adorned with a golden crown. The sunlight striking him radiated a dazzling halo that was difficult to look upon directly.

Siris and the others instinctively lowered their heads, their hearts shaken: Maximus?! This is the famed Nix Leader who defeated Andres and Cabdes, and devastated Segestica!

Siris couldn't contain his curiosity and stole a glance upward, noticing that this young tribal leader stood calmly beside the offering table near the front of the statue. At an angle, his right side seemed almost to align with the lively child and then the Danu Goddess statues, as though all three were on the same plane.

A sudden realization struck Siris like a lightning bolt; his body trembled fiercely: The child's features closely resembled those of the Nix Leader... Could the child being held by the Danu Goddess truly be the Nix Leader?!... No wonder! No wonder the earlier Druid mentioned that the Nix Leader was the child of the Goddess!

With these thoughts, Siris felt an overwhelming sense of awe toward Maximus, whose noble presence exuded majesty. His eyes were pure and profound, resembling those of the Danu Goddess statue, capable of drawing one's very spirit into their gaze.

Siris lowered his torso even further, his heart surging with exhilaration.

Maximus began to speak, his voice melodious, like a breeze through spring leaves: "Eons ago, the world was a void, and within the void, the great Danu Goddess took form... Countless years passed, and the Goddess was born, bringing forth land and rivers, separating light from darkness, and ushering in spring, summer, autumn, and winter, in a cyclical harmony. Time flowed on, life emerged and flourished, until eventually, humanity graced the earth!"

Maximus' voice grew louder, striking the depths of every listener's soul: "The Danu Goddess is the Mother of the Earth and Source of Water! She is the Mother of All Things and the Mother of all humanity! Today, she watches over my Nix Tribe as our gracious guardian!"

No matter if one is Illyrian, Pannonian, Skodisqi... or belongs to any other race dwelling in these mountains or plains or this land, as long as they embrace Nix and sincerely honor her, she shall bless them! But those who oppose Nix shall face her wrath! Children of the Goddess, raise your heads high!"

Siris and the others obediently lifted their heads. At this moment, the statue of the Danu Goddess and Leader Maximus seemed less blinding, basking in the sunlight that now felt bright yet warm.

Then, a group of robed young men approached them, handing each one a small wooden urn filled with water-mixed soil. They gestured for everyone to hold the urn in their left hand and lightly press their palm against the soil with their right hand.

Siris and the others followed the instructions without hesitation.

Maximus spoke again: "The soil beneath your palm is the most fertile earth of this land. The water in your urn derives from the purest snowmelt from the mountain peaks. Soil and water are embodiments of the Goddess herself. Whatever your thoughts and desires may be, they shall reach the Goddess through them. Now—"

Maximus' tone turned solemn and profound, his voice heavy and commanding: "I ask! You shall answer! Before the Goddess, swear your most steadfast oaths!"

"Can you vow to honor the Danu Goddess, unwavering for life?!"

"We can!!" everyone answered without hesitation.

"Can you swear loyalty to the Nix Tribe, never betraying it?!"

"We can!!" Their responses were just as unified, filled not with thoughts of penalties for unpledged land but with resolute notions like "The Danu Goddess favors Nix, and Nix's Leader is her child. How could we ever betray Nix..."

"Can you promise to coexist peacefully within the Nix Tribe with members of other races, like the Skodisqi people, and build a harmonious home together?!"

"We can!" Siris replied eagerly. Others faltered, hesitating briefly, but under the sacred presence of the Goddess' all-encompassing smile and Maximus' commanding demeanor, they ultimately resolved to give their affirmative pledge.

Chapter 438: The Priests

"Very well!" Maximus's expression remained solemn: "The entire life of us humans is but a blink of the Goddess's eye. The souls of those who uphold their oaths will ascend to the Water God Country where the Goddess resides, living worry-free with the Divines! Meanwhile, those who break their vows will see their souls fall into hell, suffering various tortures, never able to rise again! ... You must remember this!"

Faced with the imposing gaze of Maximus, Siris couldn't help but shiver and quickly nodded solemnly.

The young Druids let Siris and the others retreat, then led a new group of villagers to stand before the statue...

At this moment, more young Druids arrived, instructing them to take out their land deeds, and then used oak stamps, dipped in blue ink, to imprint a temple mark on the deeds.

The mark was identical to the one on the stone gate—"a wave formed a semi-circle (designed by Maximus for the Nix Tribe, it was an artistic representation of the Chinese character 'Nix' that resembled a wave). Strangely, when sunlight shone on it, the blue temple mark would emit a starry glimmer, convincing the villagers that the Goddess was watching them through the mark, so they reverently held their deeds...

After the villagers of No. 21 Village had sworn their oaths, they were supposed to leave the temple, but most villagers were reluctant to go, dawdling in front of the stone gate, so the Druids had to drive them away like herding sheep.

Before crossing the stone gate, Siris glanced back at the statue with reluctance, convinced in his heart: it wasn't just a statue, the Goddess Danu was embodied in it!

On the way down the mountain, they, like the villagers before them, felt an emptiness, somewhat lost.

Someone couldn't help but ask, "Sage, when can we come again to worship the Goddess Danu?!"

The leading Druid smiled and said, "The Goddess Danu blesses all the Nix tribe members, the temple is open to you, you may come at any time. However, during this period, the temple is busy arranging the worship and oath ceremonies for the newly joined tribe members, leaving no time to receive you. After this period, it won't be a problem.

But I advise you not to come too often, because the Goddess also has matters to attend to in her divine realm, she does not wish to be frequently disturbed. As long as you attend to your own affairs, you will naturally gain the Goddess's attention."

Someone regretfully said, "But I really want to come here often. Once I enter the temple and see the Goddess Danu, all my worries seem to vanish..."

"Ah, I feel the same!" His words were immediately echoed by the other villagers.

The young Druid listened as everyone shared their peculiar feelings after entering the temple and fell into contemplation.

As the sun set, and the weary birds returned to the forest, the newly built Danu Temple finally regained its tranquility.

"Leader, the villagers from each village have finished their worship and each has returned with their group." The Guard Captain, wearing a robe, entered the temple and reported to Maximus.

"Here one should not call me Leader, but High Priest." Maximus reminded in a slightly hoarse voice.

"Yes, High Priest."

"Emmerich, how many villages still haven't come?" Maximus glanced at one of the two elder Druids.

"There are still eight villages, they can all worship by tomorrow." Emmerich said, "However, in a few days, dozens more village residents will likely come to the temple to make their oaths."

"Standing all day and speaking endlessly is truly tiring!" Maximus stretched and expressed a couple of frank words, then continued seriously: "But for the expansion of the followers of the Danu Goddess, all the hardship is worthwhile!"

"High Priest, today the tribesmen came to worship, and everything went smoothly! Following the Goddess's inspiration, you personally sculpted Her statue, playing a crucial role as the villagers worshiped, entirely subduing them into becoming Her faithful followers!" Another elder Druid sincerely praised.

"And you, Hemijias?" Maximus looked at him meaningfully.

Hemijias humbly replied, "Honorable High Priest, this is more than just a statue, the design of the entire temple represents a miracle! Only the inspiration from the Goddess Danu could enable your hands to create such a miracle! High Priest, you are the most beloved progeny of the Goddess, this is beyond doubt!"

Maximus gazed at the statue, smiling without speaking.

Naturally, this was not a miracle created by the Goddess Danu, but a showcase of the beauty of sculptural art far beyond this era, by him, a former art academy graduate.

When designing the appearance of the Goddess Danu, he put considerable thought into blending the facial features of Celtic and Illyrian women, rendering the image as gentle as possible, fully showcasing its maternal attributes, so that the tribesmen would feel a sense of kinship and admiration, without inciting blasphemy.

Additionally, he utilized special techniques from Buddhist Avalokitesvara images, adding an element of solemnity and compassion to the image, fitting for Her identity as a Divine... To create a beautiful, majestic, kind, and compassionate perfect statue of the Goddess Danu, Maximus spent a substantial amount of time and used countless sheets of paper before finally completing it.

This painting amazed the artisans; however, during the carving, they struggled because their skills were insufficient to capture the divine essence of the Painted Goddess Danu, no matter how much guidance Maximus offered. Ultimately, he had to pick up the carving knife and personally undertake the task.

Fortunately, Maximus had specifically studied carving at an art academy in his past life, joined a studio upon entering the workforce, and spent years working on sculptural art, thus he had no shortage of experience in this area. Carving a godly statue was not difficult, but to convey a lifelike presence was challenging; the key lay in the paint, thus Maximus instructed the guards to gather various flowers, soils, and minerals from the wilderness, spending considerable time to prepare paints that met his satisfaction.

The eyes of the statue demanded the most effort, utilizing the angle of the head, the focusing of light, and the clever use of colors to make devotees feel that the Goddess's eyes were watching them from the front of the statue, creating the illusion that the eyes were moving.

As for having the Goddess Danu holding a child, apart from increasing her maternal affinity and strengthening the appeal to believers, there was also Maximus's ulterior motive. Having systematically studied anatomy in his past life's art academy, he sculpted a child in likeness to himself as a child, based on his current appearance, to affirm the rumor of his being a progeny of the Goddess Danu.

This Danu Goddess statue, into which Maximus invested much effort, would have been an average work in the past life but appeared as an actual miracle in this ignorant and backward present!

"Are you sure it won't rain in the coming days?" Maximus asked.

"It won't rain," Emmerich confidently stated, "Late autumn is usually dry with little rain, and both Hemijias and I have confirmed repeatedly, it definitely won't rain in the next few days."

Maximus trusted his words because Druids, in this era, were considered all-round scholars, understanding a little of rituals, law, medicine, astronomy, geography... virtually everything. Moreover, both Emmerich and Hemijias had lived here for decades and were certainly very familiar with the local climate.

"Once the oaths for the new tribe members are completed, it's essential to quickly construct the temple for the Goddess Danu," Maximus held back the latter part of his statement: otherwise, if it rains, the paints on the sculpture will wash away, and all my efforts will go to waste.

"Valles!"

"Present!" Valles stepped out from a group of robed young men at the back.

"I am leaving this task to you; take my command and find Capito, have him allocate a few more artisans to this place to construct the entire temple according to the Danu Temple blueprint I previously designed," Maximus ordered.

"Yes, Leader."

"How many Druids has Emmerich recruited recently?" Maximus lowered his voice to ask.

Valles earnestly replied in low tones: "A total of 12, they are all Segestica people, and have willingly joined our tribe as reserve tribe members. These past few days, they have been assisting in the construction and management of the temple, and thus far, their performance has been quite satisfactory."

Maximus nodded, quietly instructing, "Even though they are Segestica Druids, as long as they can treat followers of other races within the tribe fairly, you may use them without concern. Observe them for a few months, and report the names of those who perform best, I will appoint them as official Assistant Priests of the Danu Goddess, to encourage others."

"Yes, Leader." Valles discreetly gestured towards Hemijias: "What about him?"

Maximus did not immediately answer but stepped forward two steps, "Hemijias, I've heard from Valles and Emmerich that since you joined the Nix tribe, you've fully assisted them in recruiting Druids, building the temple, preparing the worship ceremonies... you've played no small role!"

Hemijias humbly said, "The High Priest overpraises; this is my first time participating in constructing such a temple, and the temple's worship rituals differ greatly from before, from which I've learned a lot."

Maximus earnestly stated, "Once all the preliminary tribe members successfully swear their oaths to the Goddess Danu, you will be appointed as the Deputy High Priest of the Nix Tribe and share the responsibility of managing all affairs of the temple with Emmerich!"

Hemijias responded with delight, "Thank you, High Priest!"

"Emmerich," Maximus focused on the tribe's Chief Priest, emphasizing: "Now with Hemijias assisting you, the compilation of the Danu Scripture must be expedited, and the completed parts can first be submitted to me for review. Once reviewed, it can be related to the tribe members as they come to the temple for worship."

Chapter 439: New Territory Expansion Plan

Emmerich cautiously reminded, "High Priest, isn't it a bit too hasty?"

"To complete the Divine Canon is not something that can be achieved in a short time. Writing it well is even more difficult. But now the tribesmen's understanding of the Divine is chaotic and urgently needs to be unified. It would be better to write while teaching the tribesmen, discovering problems during the teaching, and then refining the Divine Canon accordingly, rather than writing it behind closed doors and finding many issues only after it's completed, leading to constant revisions... thus keeping the Canon unusable for a long time. Which method do you think is better?"

Emmerich was in thought, while Hemijias was quick to answer, "High Priest, your method is better, we will do as you say."

Maximus nodded approvingly, "Very good!"

"High Priest, about the Divinity School... when can we proceed?" Emmerich asked further.

"After this time when the Reserve Tribe Members finish their worship oath, you can start the preparations. The Divinity School will be built on the vacant land below. As for students... they can be recruited from various villages, but it must be with the villagers' consent..."

But you must note! The number of students in the Divinity School is limited and must not be exceeded! The knowledge imparted to the students must be vetted and must not be taught arbitrarily!...

Valles, since you are the Chief Officer of the Religious Department, the preparations for the Divinity School should be under your responsibility. Discuss with Emmerich and Hemijias, and draft a plan for me to review and approve."

"Yes, Leader (High Priest)." The three bowed in response.

"Let's go." Maximus waved his hand, and dozens of robed men standing on the temple's periphery immediately crowded around. They were members of the Guard. Maximus presiding over the worship oath ceremony at the temple was a risk, and the Guard had to strengthen its protection. However, because they couldn't enter the temple fully armed, they were dressed this way.

Watching Valles accompany Maximus leave the temple, Emmerich turned back to scrutinize Hemijias, teasingly saying, "I didn't see it before, when I asked you to join Nix, you were so reluctant. Yet, facing Leader Maximus just now, you were more ingratiating than I was."

"Since I joined Nix, I must do my part. Should I pretend to be arrogant in front of a tribal leader, especially when it's also High Priest Maximus!" Hemijias said seriously, "Do you know how I lived when I served as a priest under Andres?"

"I don't know." Emmerich shook his head.

"It was like facing a fierce beast, trembling with fear every day, he had no respect for us Druids..." Hemijias looked pained, recalling the unbearable past.

Emmerich was a little surprised; he knew that the leaders and nobles of the Segestica people had no fondness for the Skodisqi Druids and almost wiped them out after independence, but he didn't expect the Segestica Druids also had it so hard.

"So I've grown accustomed to ingratiating myself, isn't that what one should do?" Hemijias said candidly, "However, my feeling towards High Priest Maximus is not just ingratiation, his knowledge and demeanor are far superior to those previous Great Chiefs of Segestica! Moreover—"

Hemijias turned to face the statue, filled with admiration, "You said this statue was carved by the High Priest himself. If he wasn't the offspring of the Divine, how could he carve the Goddess Danu so vividly! Facing the offspring of the Goddess Danu, how could I not be excited!"

Emmerich looked up at the statue illuminated by the setting sun, its eyes deep and warm, as if drawing his entire soul into them, he murmured, "You're right..."

When Emmerich and Hemijias privately discussed Maximus, Maximus himself, escorted by soldiers leaving the temple, was deep in thought...

Originally, he built the temple and allowed the tribesmen to worship as a measure forced by the intense conflict between the Skodisqi people and Pannonians within the tribe. He had to wield religion as a weapon to resolve the conflict between the two tribes...

Coincidentally, the tribe conquered the Segestica Territory and tried to explore religious approaches, seeing if they could add a layer of security for the new submissive tribesmen. As a result, today he saw that nearly all the Reserve Tribe Members attending the ceremony at the temple profoundly revered the Goddess Danu, which in turn made them respectful towards him, the adversary who destroyed Segestica. This realization was sudden, realizing that the Danu Temple he had spearheaded might be the key weapon to resolve the friend-enemy contradictions caused by Nix's annexation of other tribes and promoting racial integration, so he pushed Valles to expedite temple construction and urged Emmerich to start disseminating the Divine Canon hastily. Even the previously hesitant decision to build the Divinity School was now fast-tracked.

Though he was tired from the day's exertions, Maximus felt content.

In the evening, Maximus rode back to the main house in Ophelia, and just as he finished dinner, Quintus rushed in upon hearing.

Maximus's heart skipped a beat, he quickly asked, "Did anything happen today?"

"Everything is very calm, nothing unusual." Quintus's words made him sigh in relief.

"But I have a few suggestions for you to consider, Leader."

"Go ahead."

"Tomorrow, soldiers of the First Legion will escort the new Foreign Auxiliary back and then arrange for them to enter new villages... I suggest increasing a Centurion for each village."

"Two Centurions stationed at one village... why?"

"Leader, the Segestica villages west and southwest of the Ophelia Western Fortress have almost all completed stationing. Next, the First Legion's Centurions are to head south. It's relatively far from here but close to Gonami Lake."

Quintus cautiously reminded, "According to the information from Casinos, there are nearly ten Segestica Tribes in the Gonami Lake Region. Although they don't have many people, this time when Cabdes assembled an army to attack us, these tribes at Gonami Lake did not enlist warriors or join the Segestica Army, which means they might have some strength left."

Though so far, these tribes at Gonami Lake have been relatively calm, when the First Legion's Centurions are stationed in nearby villages, there's a risk they might be disturbed.

Additionally, according to intelligence from Hagux's cavalry, after we entered here, many Segestica people fled south, some to Brochi's territory, and others remained in the Gonami Lake Region. Even though most of them were either old or young and lacked combat strength, driven by hunger, they might attack the villages we've settled in..."

"These concerns of yours... I too have considered, but at the time I aimed to swiftly complete the stationing of various Segestica tribes west of the Sava River, then withdraw half of the First Legion's forces across the river while the Segestica tribes were still somewhat disordered, and Brochi, Mazi, and other Pannonian Tribes had just suffered heavy blows..."

As long as the vast areas on both sides of the Sava River are under our control, we can firmly establish our foothold here..."

Deliberating, Maximus said, "However, now the situation has indeed shifted. We didn't anticipate that the strength of the Segestica tribes on the east bank of the Sava River was weaker than those on the west bank. Camillus led the Third Legion to clear the leaders and nobles of various tribes without encountering significant resistance, the situation on the east bank has remained stable, and Camillus has even allocated some forces to start occupying villages near the East Village..."

I asked Casinos, he said the potential reason could be that this time the Pannonian Tribe Alliance formed a large army to attack us Nix, and his father (referring to Cabdes) took advantage of the expectation that we Nix would surely lose to urge the east bank tribal leaders and nobles supporting his appointment as Great Chief to join the force, promising rewards post-victory.

Knowing that during Andres's tenure, there was a deliberate or unintended suppression of his kin tribes, leaders and nobles of these east bank tribes recruited all able-bodied members into Cabdes's forces. Eventually..."

Maximus shrugged his shoulders, a slight smile emerging at his lips, then continued, "Since the situation on the east bank is quite good, we don't need to be overly bold and can be more prudent. Let's station two Centurions at one village starting tomorrow, as you suggested..."

Touching his chin, Maximus continued, "Quintus, since we've chosen a more secure approach to claim this land, do you think it's necessary to build a military camp in the south?"

"Leader, that's exactly the suggestion I was about to propose next." Quintus looked at Maximus's attendant and asked, "Could you bring me the map of the Segestica Territory?"

Maximus gave a nod, and several attendants hurried to carry over a rather large wooden board map.

This map was drawn by Maximus over the past few days based on information provided by Casinos and other Segestica members and the gathered intelligence from various groups. Though the map wasn't entirely accurate, it was by no means rudimentary. It marked the locations of various Segestica tribes and the population numbers, drawn in special limestone, allowing for water-erasable modifications.

Quintus examined the map placed on the wooden table, saying, "Leader, not only do we need to guard against potential disturbances from Segestica tribes and fleeing Segestica people at Gonami Lake to our occupied villages, but we must also guard against the Brochi and Mazi armies moving north. Thus, building a military camp in the south seems very necessary."

As Quintus spoke, he pointed to a spot on the map, "A military camp can be built here!"

Chapter 440: Expel the Wolf, Swallow the Tiger

Maximus leaned forward and looked. The area Quintus pointed to was near the northern edge of Gonami Lake, situated on the west bank of the Sava River. It bore the mark of a Segestica Tribe, below which was a small note reading "more than 1000 people." This was not an exact number, indicating that the tribe had not yet been stationed by the Centurion of the First Legion. This number was merely their population prior to the war, provided by Casinos and others. Following the war and possible escapes, it was certain that the tribe's current population was less than 1000.

Regardless, it was a small tribe, suitable for transforming into a camp and convenient for relocating its limited population to other villages.

Maximus thought for a moment and asked, "Is your choice of this riverside tribe for ease of transporting supplies and soldiers from Ophelia to this camp in the future?"

"Yes, leader," Quintus explained earnestly. "You previously mentioned to me that the Gonami Lake Region had special terrain. The people there used to be a thorn in the side for the Segestica Tribe. To conquer them would require considerable effort and time. Rather than marching into the Gonami Lake Region for now, or even pushing into Brochi territory, it would be wiser to temporarily use the Gonami Lake Region as a buffer zone between us and the Brochi people..."

Since we won't advance further into Gonami Lake or Brochi territory in the short term, it might be prudent to invest extra effort into turning this tribe into a strong military camp. Normally, only several hundred soldiers and a small cavalry unit would be needed here to monitor the southern activities. If the southern Segestica people attempt to disturb our villages, this camp can dispatch troops to repel them

immediately. Meanwhile, if Brochi or Mazi troops advance northward to attack, the camp can defend itself and delay the enemy's assault, buying us time to gather our forces for a counterattack.

This camp's location along the Sava River makes it convenient for transporting soldiers and grain via water routes, reducing food consumption and ensuring the camp won't be entirely surrounded by enemies, thereby cutting us off from communication."

Maximus looked at the map and contemplated for a moment before saying, "Building a military camp here is feasible, but first we need to relocate the villagers. Arrange for an emergency meeting in the Political Affairs Hall later to discuss this matter and finalize the plan...

Once the villagers are moved, direct the First Legion to dispatch 2000 soldiers to quickly overhaul this village. Meanwhile, your Military Department should swiftly draft a plan—how many soldiers will be stationed at this camp? From which units will they be reassigned? What's the rotation schedule? ... Submit your troop deployment plan to me for review and authorization."

"Yes, leader."

"By the way, has the fleet you mentioned last time been established?"

"Initial preparations are complete. The fleet consists of 80 ships, averaging about six sailors per ship, a total of 500 men. Among them, 80 are Third Legion soldiers with previous experience as sailors, and they have now been assigned as captains of each vessel.

The crew members are newly integrated Skodisqi slaves, all of whom have extensive experience following their owners during years spent fishing or transporting goods along the Sava River.

The fleet commander is Anfeltaas from the Third Legion. He has already reported this situation to you."

"Yes, I remember," Maximus said, stroking his chin.

Anfeltaas, originally a Centurion of the Third Legion, was once a slave sailor from Campania. Having earned notable battle merits in the past, he proactively requested to join the fleet and take charge as its commander upon learning of its formation.

While sailing at sea and navigating river routes are vastly different, as are naval battles and river skirmishes, it's still preferable to have someone with prior experience steering the fleet than someone inexperienced. Moreover, Anfeltaas's enthusiasm ensures he will actively study riverine combat tactics... Thus, Maximus agreed to let him command the fleet and entrusted him with safeguarding the Nix Tribe's waterway security on the Sava River Plain.

Quintus added, "In recent days, Anfeltaas has been leading the fleet on shifts to patrol the Ophelia waterway day and night, ensuring the safety of the Public Works Department's bridge construction."

"Understood," Maximus nodded before asking, "How is the situation up north today?"

"Still no movement," Quintus replied.

"Quintus, what do you think is the reason behind the northern Segestica Tribe's prolonged calm?" Maximus asked again.

What sparked his interest in the northern situation was current intelligence suggesting that within the fragmented Segestica Territory, the area north of Ophelia was the only region capable of fielding 2000 to 3000 warriors.

After confirming the authenticity of this information, Maximus and the various departmental chief officers grew tense. If northern Segestica tribes deployed their warriors to disrupt the territory controlled by the Nix Tribe, it would severely hinder construction and development in the occupied villages. As such, Third Legion soldiers stationed within Ophelia Western Fortress have remained vigilant, prepared to strike northward at a moment's notice.

Additionally, should northern Segestica tribes dispatch ships downstream, they could pose a considerable threat to the Nix Tribe's bridge-building operations. This prompted Quintus to quickly assemble a fleet to guard against northern enemy vessels from infiltrating.

Despite Maximus's painstaking efforts to guard against northern Segestica forces, the anticipated threat remained conspicuously absent, leaving him to question the reasoning.

"Leader, I believe the continuous tranquility of the northern Segestica tribes is due to their fear of the Yabod people," Quintus analyzed. "According to Casinos, the northern region of Segestica Territory borders the Yabod people, who used to frequently invade and loot Segestica lands. When Andres became the Great Chief, he immediately led troops northward to attack the Yabod people.

The Yabod suffered a crushing defeat, losing portions of the flatlands along the upper reaches of the Sava River to Andres. Since then, the Yabod people have avoided conflict with Segestica, but that doesn't mean they've forgotten their grudge.

Recently, when Cabdes assembled forces to attack us, he refrained from demanding additional warriors from the northern Segestica tribes. Allegedly, they had learned of abnormal movements among the Yabod people and were compelled to conserve strength for northern security.

Now that Segestica's central forces have been obliterated and its core region occupied by us, northern Segestica tribes are likely trembling in fear. If the Yabod people were to raid them, they would be left without reinforcements and forced to confront a ruthless enemy alone...

Under such dire circumstances, these tribes likely wouldn't dare provoke us further. Instead, they might hope we avoid attacking them, maintaining the current calm to keep the Yabod people in check."

"Your analysis is quite reasonable," Maximus began pacing and reflected aloud: "... It's plausible that the northern Segestica people and some newly integrated Segestica Tribe foreign auxiliaries share the same naive hope—that the Pannonian Tribe Alliance will drive us out, allowing them to reclaim Segestica Territory and restore their sense of security..."

Maximus chuckled coldly twice: "Still, this period of relative peace in the surrounding areas will allow us to complete our annexation and consolidation of Segestica's core region! ... Quintus, in recent years, the Yabod people have coexisted peacefully with Segestica, but now they are exhibiting unexpected movements. Do you think the Yabod people are aware of Segestica's repeated defeats and impending collapse?"

"The Yabod people only border a small portion of Segestica Territory to the northwest, with the rest divided by numerous mountain ranges. Their two tribes are also enemies with no interaction. If the Segestica people were intent on sealing off information, then the Yabod people would likely remain unaware of Segestica's internal situation. Should they truly know of Segestica's plight, it's likely they would have already launched a full-scale invasion into northern Segestica tribes..."

Quintus hesitated momentarily before saying, "However, I think... the Yabod people might have vague suspicions, prompting them to make tentative moves. Leader, last year, a group of Scodisqi slaves we rescued formed a squad that roamed Segestica's lands for several months. Eventually, Segestica organized forces to encircle them, driving them out of Segestica's core region and into the northern mountains. Is it possible they made contact with the Yabod people?"

Quintus's words immediately struck a chord with Maximus, who plunged into deep thought, gradually formulating a new plan. Yet before implementing it, he needed to clarify one thing.

"Marcus, tomorrow ride to Todleduo and ask Legion Commander Torrelugo to find a soldier named Goves. Ask him if, during his roaming in Segestica Territory with his clansmen last year, he had any contact with the Yabod people. If he says 'yes,' bring him to me."

"Yes, leader!"

.....

Today, the central hall within the Aldean Main Camp was filled with elders from subordinate tribes.

In recent days, Alistacas had been leading forces to 'resettle' the lands along the Kolana River. He had been preoccupied with aiding the returning tribesmen in rebuilding their homes. He also negotiated tirelessly with elders from other tribes, urging them to provide resources to help ensure the Kolana River tribes had enough for the winter.

In truth, Cleobrotas had contributed the most effort throughout this process. However, as acting Great Chief of the entire tribe, Alistacas claimed the bulk of recognition for these accomplishments. With the

initial resettlement completed, he called for a tribal elder meeting, hoping to use these achievements as leverage to ascend fully to the position of Aldean Great Chief.