

Perish 146

Chapter 146: Internal Strife and Division_2

"Hmm." Maximus replied vaguely.

"We really overestimated ourselves." From behind came the voice of Antonix, who said seriously, "Actually, we don't need to discuss this any further. According to our previous rules, major decisions are made by the soldier conference. Now that so many soldiers demand to 'abandon the battle and retreat north', we should heed their opinion."

As Antonix spoke, the tent flap lifted and Spartacus and Hamilcar, with grim faces, walked in heavily, suggesting their attempt to persuade Cross had failed.

Upon entering, Spartacus directly said, "Leaders, the Roman Army is approaching the Turi Plain. They are only about three or four days away from us. Initially, we decided to confront the Romans here, but the majority of our brothers... oppose fighting them. Hence, we must reconvene to decide whether to abandon our previous plan and choose to retreat northward..."

As Spartacus spoke, his gaze fixed on Maximus, since the stances of the other leaders were already clear; his words were actually directed at Maximus.

Maximus sensed a hint of reluctance and helplessness in his eyes and didn't respond immediately but instead asked, "Even if we leave here, the Romans will relentlessly pursue us. Are we to keep marching north indefinitely?"

"Uh, yes." Hamilcar picked up, "A few of us discussed it privately before. If the situation worsens, we'll keep marching north into the mountains, which are inhabited by Gaul. The Romans surely won't dare pursue us there, and we will gain freedom;

but if circumstances change, for instance, if there are Roman forces blocking us north, or—"

"Or perhaps if the brothers regain their fighting spirit and the Roman Army exposes a flaw in their pursuit, then we can seize the opportunity to defeat them, restore the prestige of Free Italy, and

reinstate everyone's confidence in defeating the Romans!" Spartacus said in a deep voice, his words filled with strength.

Maximus promptly replied, "I agree to a temporary northern retreat."

Spartacus then looked toward the others and announced loudly, "Since we all agree to withdraw from this place, to ensure smooth marching north for the main force, we must quickly devise a retreat plan—"

"Spartacus, is Cross truly intent on staying here and not joining us in the north?" Antonix couldn't help but ask.

Spartacus paused, then said with a complex expression, "Yes, he has decided to lead his force to stay, not to leave with us. The Roman Army is closing in, and we have no extra time to persuade him slowly. We can only wish him well..."

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Turi Plain, the camp left by the Cross Uprising Army is now occupied by the Roman Army. In the central army tent, Governor Lucius Gaius Publicola is receiving a briefing from the Metapontum administrator Sedulius Tullius on the slave rebel army.

"Respected Governor, these damned rebels mainly split into three parts: one part was here, about forty thousand. Their leaders are named Cross and Enomai, both former gladiators from Capua.

This Enomai once led an attack on Metapontum, and I risked using cavalry to launch a surprise attack, killing him, but unfortunately, I couldn't acquire his head. Cross was intimidated by the army you led, escaping with thirty thousand to Tarentum.

The main segment of the rebels is causing havoc in northern Calabria, around Uriya, and other areas... They have approximately one hundred and ten or twenty thousand people," Tullius explained earnestly while pointing at the map before them.

"One hundred and ten or twenty thousand?!" Publicola seemed astonished at the figure.

"To the best of my knowledge, this group includes many elderly, infirm, and even women. The ones who can actually fight, I estimate, amount to at most eighty or ninety thousand—"

"Eighty or ninety thousand is still significant!" Publicola still frowned.

Tullius immediately reassured, "But most of them are without armor, without weapons, only able to fight with crude wooden shields and sticks. Even those with armor and weapons were once peasants and slaves who laid down their hoes and whips; they can't effectively use sword and shield..."

Publicola looked at Tullius and asked, "Are these insights from your two encounters with the rebels?"

"The rebels have attacked Metapontum twice, so I have some understanding of them. Moreover, I even had men disguised as poor folks infiltrate their factions; despite their numbers, they lack military discipline and are disorganized, making intelligence gathering rather effortless, indicating they're nothing more than a rabble... However, they do fight desperately in battle—"

Publicola nodded, coldly remarking, "Those who have nothing would not treasure their worthless lives."

"Sagacious words, Governor!"

"Who is the leader of this faction of rebels?"

"The main leader is Spartacus, and he's the head of the entire rebellion. His rebels still maintain some military discipline, set up camps, patrol diligently, and possess some fighting capability..."

Publicola showed a look of recollection, "Spartacus... I heard the name in Campania; Valerius, that fool, was defeated by him. According to Batiatus, the lanista of the Gladiator School, he once served in the Roman Army, later became a deserter, which is why he was sentenced to become a gladiator."

"Oh, it seems Spartacus has always been devious and untrustworthy; no wonder he incited a revolt! But even if he served in the Roman Army, what he learned is only superficial, certainly not a match for you, Governor."

"You mentioned there are three parts of rebels, what about the last one?"

"The last faction is here," Tullius pointed to the Apulia region on the map, "There are two rebel leaders: one named Attutmus with about 25,000 men, gathered at Canosa; the other named Maximus hiding in Sarabia, having roughly... about over 20,000 more people..."

Publicola noticed Tullius's hesitation and immediately asked, "It seems you are not very clear about this rebel Maximus and the condition of his forces?"

"Uh... Esteemed Governor, the situation is like this," Tullius explained, "The rebel named Maximus is very cunning. After he took Sarabia, he sealed off the entire town, preventing any outsiders from entering. He also has a camp near Bari, similarly prohibiting outsiders. He even captured two of my men sent to gather information..."

"It appears that this rebel leader Maximus runs a very strict operation."

"However, this rebel leader allows merchant ships to enter the port and trades the looted supplies for food and weapons. I have previously sent a merchant ship in. The shipowners say that foreign merchant vessels dock every day in Sarabia Port, but the rebels strictly control the port, not allowing entry into the town, so it's impossible to understand the specifics of this rebel army—"

Chapter 147: The Choice of Destination

Tullius hesitated for a moment and couldn't help but say again, "I think allowing this rebel army to gain better weaponry through trade will bring some trouble to our suppression forces, so I once wrote to the governor of Brindisi, hoping he could dispatch a navy to blockade the Sarabia Port."

But... but he replied saying that most of Brindisi's warships have already been sent to Little Asia to assist Lucullus in warfare, and he doesn't have enough ships and manpower to completely blockade the Sarabia Port, he can only ensure that the rebels do not escape by sea..."

As a Roman Governor, Publius Crassus has jurisdiction over the towns in Italy, yet he seemed oblivious to the matter of Brindisi mentioned by Tullius, making no response and instead asking, "Tullius, it seems you... took office at Metapontum the year before last, didn't you?"

"Yes." Tullius, pondering the intent behind the Governor's question, cautiously said, "It was by the recommendation of Lord Cotta."

"Cotta always had a keen eye, but it's a pity..." Publius Crassus sighed lightly, briefly mourning the recently deceased former Governor, then said, "You are an excellent town governor; while other towns fear the rebels and dare not fight them, you have defeated them twice. After eradicating the rebels, I will report your achievements to the Senate."

Hearing this, Tullius was overjoyed. He strained to suppress the joy rising in his heart and feigned humility, saying, "Thank you for your praise, I am merely fulfilling my duty."

"You are too modest; it's precisely because many town governors have not fulfilled their duties that the rebel forces have swollen to nearly 200,000!"

With a solemn expression, Publius Crassus pressed one hand tightly on the map before him, saying in a deep voice, "Although they lack weapons and training, the sheer number is a major advantage! Yet, some people in Rome think defeating these rebels is easy, and any slight setback is blameworthy! To satisfy them isn't easy; how can we more smoothly eradicate these rebels? Tullius, do you have any suggestions?"

Receiving the promise and approval of Publius Crassus, Tullius was extremely excited and immediately shouted, "Esteemed Governor, you need not worry. Although this band of rebels is numerous, they are not united internally.

Before I came, I just received news that the rebel leaders Spartacus and Cross had a conflict. Spartacus, fearing your might, intends to lead his troops northward. However, Cross insists on staying in Great Greece, and they had disputes, nearly fighting. Afterwards, Cross ordered his men not to associate with Spartacus's people...

Esteemed Governor, you need not rush to advance. Just wait a few more days, and these rebels will surely divide their forces..."

"You mean to defeat them separately..." Publius Crassus's eyes lit up.

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In the past few days, Sarabia City, which had been peaceful for months, became exceptionally chaotic. Various departments of the Maximus Army stationed in the city were busy packing up, preparing to retreat.

"Acronis, I've brought over a dozen carts. The leader has said to prioritize loading your kitchen supplies." The transportation captain, Seksepis, rushed into the kitchen but saw Kitchen Director Acronis sitting dazed on the ground, getting anxious: "Acronis, don't just sit there blankly, everyone's waiting for your order to load the carts!"

"I know, I know, stop shouting, it's annoying!" Acronis snapped back to her senses, grumbled unhappily, stood up, and headed for the door. At the doorway, she couldn't help but look back at the empty stove, sighed, and said, "Just got used to being here, and now we have to leave again, just like in Pompey, always drifting. When can we finally stay somewhere long-term and have a real home!"

Seksepis was startled but before he could respond, Acronis encouraged herself, saying, "The leader has promised several times that he will provide us with a real home, and he will surely succeed!"

As Acronis spoke, she regained her spirits, put aside her reluctance, and shouted enthusiastically to her subordinates waiting outside the door, "Brothers and sisters, let's quickly load everything onto the carts together!"

At Sarabia Port, Pigeris hurried to the warehouse and saw Karsipengpas and his group who had just landed. He let out a long breath, "Thank heavens, Karsipengpas, you finally arrived on time!"

"Onomabatis took some time to find me after leaving port last time, to inform me of your desire to meet quickly." Karsipengpas glanced at the other pirate captains behind him, explaining, "I then took some time to gather them, and it also took some time to evade Roman patrol ships, but it seems we are not too late."

Pigeris glanced at Alakosia beside him, stopped the chatter, and spoke directly, "Alakosia has told you, right? We are about to evacuate Sarabia, and there are still many supplies in this warehouse and several nearby warehouses that we can't take with us. The leader specifically told me to notify you to come and transport these supplies back to your tribe, so their lives can improve a bit."

"We are truly grateful to Leader Maximus!" Karsipengpas said sincerely, "Even in such times, he still thinks of us! Can we meet him and thank him personally?"

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"Well... the leader is currently busy arranging the evacuation for everyone. There are a lot of things to handle..." Pigeris wanted to decline politely but, seeing the earnest look on the other's face and recalling Maximus's instructions, hesitated for a moment before saying, "I'll go back and ask the leader to see if he can find some time to meet with you."

"That would be great, thank you so much!" After Karsipengpas said this, Onomabatis couldn't help but interject, "I heard that this time the Roman Army has come with tens of thousands of soldiers, and they're all from the Roman Legion. Can you really escape their pursuit?"

"Escape?" Hearing this word, Pigeris was somewhat displeased, remembering the inspiring words the leader had spoken at the previous meeting. Mimicking those words, he corrected, "We are not escaping; we are temporarily retreating to fight the Romans again when the time is right!"

Our army is much larger than the Romans, and our warriors have all been through rigorous training and have participated in many battles, whereas the Roman army is mostly composed of new recruits who are no match for us! Previously, in Campania, we defeated a Roman Legion, and this time we will defeat even more of them!"

Onomabatis wanted to argue further but was pulled back by Karsipengpas, who said, "If you defeat the Roman Army, will you return?"

"No, we won't return," Pigeris frankly said. "Even if we win this time, the strength of the Romans is too formidable. We will continue to travel north, leave Italy, and go beyond the Alps."

Upon hearing this, Onomabatis hurriedly advised, "North of the Alps is Gaul territory, and they are fierce and hostile. You will inevitably face conflict there. It would be better to come to our Illyria. I know there

are many Illyrians in your ranks, even your leader Maximus is Illyrian and has favored us before. I guarantee you will be accepted in our Illyria!"

What Onomabatis said was exactly what Pigeris wanted to hear, but he appeared troubled, "But Illyria is currently under Roman jurisdiction—"

"No, you're mistaken. Only the coastal lands are under Roman control, while the inland areas are still our own Illyria and independent! The Romans look down upon our barren inland lands. After they destroyed the Illyria Kingdom, they quickly withdrew their troops. I heard that in the past few decades the Romans haven't set foot in our mountainous area, otherwise, we wouldn't have been so free to become pirates," Karsipengpas explained.

Another captain patted his chest and said, "Rest assured, come to our Illyria, the Romans can't extend their reach to us mountain folks."

Pigeris's eyes brightened, and he immediately said, "Sounds good, but for something this important, I can't decide. I'll go see the leader shortly. If he can find time to meet you, then you can discuss it in detail, how about it?"

"Of course, no problem!"

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At the Weapons Workshop outside Sarabia South City, warehouse manager Capito was loudly reprimanding the workshop manager Kadesos: "The day before yesterday I specifically sent someone to notify you to quickly pack up everyone in the workshop, so that you can depart with the team as soon as the order is received! But now everyone is about to evacuate and you're still not ready—"

Kadesos hastily pleaded, "Honorable sir, it's not that I didn't prepare! It's that some people just don't want to leave and are intentionally stalling. No matter how much I try to persuade them—"

"Then why didn't you inform me promptly?!" Capito's face turned cold, his sharp gaze fixed on the other.

"I..." Kadesos was flustered and didn't know how to respond.

Capito sneered, ignoring him, turned to the team officer in charge of guarding the workshop, and said, "Leader Maximus has already given the order. Everyone in the weapons workshop must leave with the team. If there's anyone unwilling, then tie them up and take them away! If anyone violently resists, then chop off their head!

Also, try to pack up the tools needed for making weapons from this workshop as much as possible! This matter is entrusted to you, and I want you, within three hours, to take all the people here and these things and join my evacuation team, understood?"

"Understood!" The team officer drew a gleaming short sword and shouted back, "Brothers, follow me into the workshop!"

"Roar!!" The soldiers shouted in unison, terrifying Kadesos. He mustered his courage and just shouted, "Lord Capito—"

Immediately, the team officer seized him by the neck: "You have to come with us, gather everyone in the workshop, and if anyone is left out, you'll see what happens to you!" He shook the short sword in his hand as he spoke.

Kadesos swallowed his saliva and replied, "Understood..."

Capito didn't pay him any more attention. Seeing that everything was arranged here, he turned to quickly head back within the city.

He had an extremely busy day ahead with Maximus's orders. Not only did the people from the weapons workshop need to leave, but also the Charcoal Workshop, Pottery Workshop, Gold and Silver Handicraft Workshop in Sarabia City...; all the slaves, the impoverished, and even citizens with special skills, along with the important tools from these workshops, needed to be taken away as much as possible. For this, Maximus had assigned three major divisions of soldiers to Capito for him to command.

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"Great Captain, the other divisions are already departing, but we're still wandering around the city!" A rebel army soldier complained.

Bubius was someone who had joined the group while the rebel army was active in the Vesuvius Mountain Area. Later, during the first fight with the Roman Army, he got injured and stayed in the medical team created by Maximus and had even testified for the Medical Camp during a military assembly. Subsequently, he joined Maximus's forces and was made a lieutenant in the Guard when the medical team got established.

Later, when the Maximus Army occupied Pompeii and expanded, he performed admirably and assumed the role of a Centurion. When the army moved into Capri, he led a team to infiltrate Sarabia City, assisting the main forces in capturing the city swiftly, earning significant merit. When the forces expanded, he was promoted to Great Captain, belonging to the First Legion under Fesaros.

In less than a year, he managed three successive promotions, not exactly because of outstanding talent or remarkable achievements. It was mainly due to the swift expansion of the army and the acute shortage of officers; thus, anyone with a bit of seniority, ability, and experience could quickly rise through the ranks. Nevertheless, as one of the over twenty Great Captains, Bubius consistently put in the hard work.

As it happened, today was his turn for a few Centurion teams under him to patrol. Fearing that the soldiers would complain, he personally joined one of the squads, seeing his concerns were valid.

Before he could speak, Centurion Stags sharply reprimanded, "Leonidas, shut up! It's the rule that all teams take turns patrolling in order. It's just our bad luck that it fell on us today; no one is to blame for that."

"Captain, I'm not worried about being tired. I'm just concerned that once other teams depart first and we're still wandering in the city, if they encounter the enemy, we won't even make it to the battle," argued the centurion named Leonidas, echoing concerns that garnered support from other soldiers.

Even though the patrol team had some disruptions, Bubius was pleased to see the soldiers harbor a strong enthusiasm for battle. It seemed that Quintus, the Chief of Staff, was right. The rigorous military training over such a long time had boosted the soldiers' confidence and sparked their desire for battle. Yet, for now, he had to persuade them to focus on their current duties.

Chapter 149: Precautionary Measures

Bubius thought for a moment and said, "Brothers, we are not idly strolling; our various teams are busy evacuating. The city is quite chaotic, and if these Sarabians secretly gather together to cause trouble, we will have big problems! So, we must patrol seriously to ensure that all Sarabians stay quietly in their rooms, to ensure that our main force can evacuate smoothly. Don't you think our task is important?"

"Yes!..." Although the soldiers' responses were mixed, everyone's spirits lifted.

"Brothers, let's be cautious on the street ahead, and make sure nothing goes wrong!" Centurion Stags reminded.

Without his reminder, the soldiers who had carried out patrol missions several times knew that the team was about to enter the slum area of Sarabia City. Since the occupation of the city, most Sarabian people have been compliant with the rebel army's orders, but the slum area occasionally stirs up trouble. Perhaps it is because the residents here are perpetually poor and have no scruples, liking to fight recklessly.

The soldiers braced themselves, drew their short swords, reorganized their formation, and slowed their pace as they entered the narrow and winding alleyways, their wary eyes scanning each dilapidated house along the street.

The team walked a short distance, rounded a corner, and suddenly saw seven or eight people standing in the middle of the road ahead, making everyone tense up.

"Who are you?! Why haven't you obeyed the city hall's order to stay quietly at home?!" Centurion Stags shouted loudly.

The soldiers simultaneously struck their square shields with their short swords to intimidate.

Seeing the soldiers approaching aggressively with their blades in hand, the few people shivered in fear.

Only one of them remained somewhat calm and quickly replied, "We...we are Sarabians and want to...want to join Free Italy, become soldiers like you, resist the Romans, and fight for freedom!"

He was a bit nervous at first, but soon his words became fluent and resonant.

"Sounds nice." Stags sneered. "But I know you, Casaridaoa, the notorious rogue of Sarabia City, who often bullies slaves and extorts money. You think you can fight for freedom? Don't sully such a sacred word!"

Stags' face darkened, and he shouted, "Get back to your houses quickly, otherwise—"

"Roar!!" The soldiers again struck their shields with their short swords and shouted in unison.

The group was already pale and pulled at Casaridaoa, stammeringly persuading, "Forget it, let's... let's just go back..."

Casaridaoa shook off his friends' pull vigorously, and said loudly in defiance: "More than ten years ago, many towns in Italy resisted Rome (the Roman Alliance War), and Sarabia was one of them. My father was the Great Captain of the Sarabian army, but the Romans eventually won, and Sarabia surrendered.

My father was seriously injured and passed away shortly after returning home... The Sarabian councilors feared Rome's wrath and did not provide compensation as stipulated. My mother had to raise me alone, enduring great hardships... and eventually fell ill from exhaustion..."

Tears shimmered in Casaridaoa's eyes; he took a deep breath and emphasized, "Do you think I don't want to work for money?! But in Sarabia, those nobles and rich people only buy slaves for labor and will never hire commoners!

I once thought about seeking work elsewhere, but my mother's health did not allow me to leave; I had no choice but to make some money this way to buy medicine for my mother. Do you think I want people to say behind my back that I've shamed my father's name? He was a hero who fought against Rome!..."

By the end of his words, his emotions were so intense that his face appeared slightly distorted.

For a moment, the soldiers were touched. They had no idea that the notorious rogue had such a complicated and heart-wrenching story behind him.

Bubius broke the silence: "Since you have a mother to take care of, why do you want to join us?"

Stags cleared his throat: "Great Captain, this kid's mother just passed away a few days ago, and he was unable to leave the city. We helped with the burial."

"I want to join you, not just to repay kindness," Casaridaoa exclaimed excitedly. "You say you are the army of the poor, fighting against the Romans, nobles, and rich people who oppress the poor..."

From observing these past few months, I know you're not just talking. You defeated the Romans in Campania, wiped out those despicable nobles and rich people here, and your ranks are filled not only with slaves but also with commoners, and they seem to be living well... So I want to join you, become a soldier of Free Italy, and, like my father, bravely fight against the Romans!"

Bubius watched the impassioned Casaridaoa for a while and then turned his gaze to the others: "And why do the rest of you want to join?"

Encouraged by Casaridaoa's example, one young man gathered his courage and said, "My... my situation is the same as Casaridaoa's; my father died at the hands of the Romans. Now the Romans rule Sarabia, they retaliate against us, making it impossible for us to survive. I want to join you and fight those damned Romans!"

"Me too!" the others chimed in loudly.

Seeing Bubius become somewhat tempted, Stags softly reminded, "Great Captain, remember that we stopped recruiting six days ago!"

Chapter 150: Preparation Before Trouble Arises_2

"I know, but look at them—young, strong, with years of fighting experience. What's more, they understand why they've joined us! That's much better than when we first joined the ranks! With just a bit of training, they'll make a fine group of soldiers!" Bubius's eyes lit up as he looked at the men from Casaridaoa.

"But we're about to leave!" Stags reminded him again.

"Here's what I'll do—I'll take a few of them to the Legion Commander right away and seek his approval."

Seeing that Bubius was set on this, Stags refrained from persuading him further.

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"Chief, the marching plan we've currently arranged is like this... The First Legion will lead, followed closely by the Second Legion. Next, you and the Guard will position yourselves in the center of the formation, while our enormous Supply Camp will bring up the rear, protected by the Third Legion. (Before the rebel army turned north, the number of soldiers in the Maximus Army had already expanded to 15,000. Maximus reorganized the 3,000 extra soldiers from two legions and the 1,000 Guards to form another legion, with Camillus appointed as Legion Commander and Oluus as Deputy Legion Commander. Initially named the Guard Corps, it was later renamed the Third Legion after Quintus and others suggested the change for operational convenience. The 1,000-man Pequot unit then became the new Guard.)

Given this march, with the Roman Army pursuing us from behind, it won't be as easy as last time when we traveled from Campania to Apulia. Also, the personnel in our Supply Camp have multiplied, many of whom lack long-distance marching experience. We'll need to dispatch part of the Third Legion to form a retrieval team placed at the end of the marching formation, responsible for daily collection of those who lag behind or lose their way..."

Quintus held a wooden map board, gesturing as he spoke. "Our forces will march along the coast to Sipotum, then follow the edge of Gallanum Cape to reach the town of Apulum at the northern border of Apulia near Fluentani. This whole route consists of existing roads and relatively flat terrain, making it easier to travel... Chief, are you certain Attutmus's army will meet with us at Apulum?"

"I've coordinated with him well in the past. This time, we're both serving as vanguards and have already planned accordingly. We set forth today, and they will also depart today, maintaining contact through cavalry at all times. I trust that by the time we reach Apulum, they'll be close by and won't keep us waiting." Maximus said resolutely.

"If that's the case, things become much simpler." Quintus pointed at the map. "Fluentani and Apulia are different—Fluentani is entirely mountainous. Even if we follow the coastal route, the narrow roads will stretch our formation significantly. Should we face a sudden enemy attack, it could cause serious trouble. If Attutmus's army can march alongside us, it will ensure our flank's safety."

"Rest assured, Attutmus will keep his promise." Maximus reassured confidently once again.

It wasn't just his good relationship with Maximus that motivated Attutmus to maneuver his army across rugged mountain paths instead of flat coastal roads. The key reason was an agreement: should Attutmus's forces face food shortages, Maximus's troops must prioritize providing aid.

As a neighbor, Attutmus knew well how effectively Maximus had managed his territory in recent months—wealthy and substantial, making others envy him.

"Chief, has Spartacus's army already set out?" Quintus asked again.

"Just received word—they departed early yesterday morning."

Quintus lowered his head, studying the map as he muttered, "If their marching speed is fast enough, they should almost be at Bari by now... With the size of our Supply Camp, even if we stick to the main roads, covering 25 li a day is the best we can hope for. That should leave Spartacus's forces half a day ahead of us, enabling timely support—it's a pretty good setup."

"You and your team have been working tirelessly these past few days to ensure our northbound journey goes smoothly—thank you!" Maximus said sincerely, looking at the exhausted Quintus.

"It's our duty." Quintus replied calmly.

"From your words, you seem to believe the Romans will intercept us ahead?" Maximus asked.

"Absolutely," Quintus responded without hesitation. "From what I know of Rome, the Senate would never tolerate us escaping Italy. That would be a grave humiliation for them. They'll undoubtedly deploy troops ahead to block us—they'll likely command the governor of the Northern Italy Province to lead

elite forces southward, forces otherwise stationed against northern barbarians. With pursuers behind and a formidable enemy ahead, breaking through their encirclement will be a significant challenge!"

Quintus sighed, appearing troubled. Though he was initially pleased about the rebel army's rapid expansion, the arrival of the Roman forces revealed that many rebel soldiers lacked the courage to face them in battle. Forced into flight and abandoning direct confrontation, what was the use of sheer numbers?

"Trust me, not only will we ultimately break through the encirclement, but we will also defeat all enemies who come at us!" Maximus responded with conviction. His words were not merely for comfort—though history did not record specific details of Spartacus defeating the Roman Army, the rebel forces successfully reached the Alpine region. Now, with his involvement, Maximus firmly believed the rebel army would grow even stronger, making victory over the enemy more achievable.

Quintus was momentarily stunned, unsure where Maximus derived such confidence. He thought of persuading Maximus to avoid undue optimism, but before he could speak, Flanitus strode in hurriedly. "Chief, all the legions are ready—just waiting for your orders to depart!"

"Let's go to the military camp!" Maximus said. No sooner had he spoken than Akegu, standing nearby, promptly handed him his helmet. Maximus placed it on and took the lead outside. Just as he reached the door, someone rushed in and almost collided with him.

"Ch... Chief, I've brought Karsipengpas!" Pigeris said urgently.

Maximus felt a surge of joy upon hearing this. "The heavens are truly on our side! Karsipengpas arriving before our departure—it's perfect timing. I have important matters to discuss with him! Flanitus, Quintus, you head to the military camp first—I'll join you shortly."

The two complied and left. As they exited the Governor Mansion, they found Karsipengpas and his entourage waiting outside. Flanitus glanced at their attire, recognizing their identities and muttering irritably, "The Chief delaying our departure just to meet a bunch of pirates—it's frankly outrageous!"

Quintus said nothing, quietly observing the group and pondering Maximus's intentions in receiving them at this specific moment.

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Under Spartacus's leadership, the rebel army that had camped in northern Calabria for several months finally began moving northward.

By midday, the Cross army from northern Bruttium also marched northward. Hearing the news, Spartacus was delighted, speculating that Cross had come around. To spare Cross any embarrassment, Spartacus refrained from sending someone to contact him directly.

After days of continuous marching, they finally approached the northern border town of Apulum in the Apulia Region. At dawn, Spartacus was preparing to muster his troops and continue his march northward when sudden news arrived: the Cross forces, originally trailing 20 to 30 li behind, had abruptly vanished.