

Perish 171

Chapter 171: Consecutive Battles and Consecutive Victories

When the messenger from the nearby coastal towns finally managed to find Publilius, delivering the news that "Crodianus's army was defeated," Hamilcar was already advancing with his troops.

With superior forces, Publilius immediately arranged his troops to confront the enemy.

However, Hamilcar did not attack but simply arrayed his forces in opposition. When Publilius ordered his troops to initiate an attack, Hamilcar swiftly withdrew his forces.

Publilius sensed something was amiss and immediately ordered a retreat.

But Hamilcar closely followed with his troops, forcing Publilius to be cautious, which significantly slowed down the retreat.

Ultimately, Publilius led his troops to a defensible location, flanked by mountains and a river, and once more arrayed his forces.

By the afternoon, Spartacus arrived leading a large army. After observing the enemy's formation, he organized the rebel army to launch attacks in batches.

The battle was fiercely contested, yet the rebel army made no headway against the Roman Army, which was intent on defense.

However, with greater numbers and Spartacus's adept coordination, the front-line troops, when weary, could withdraw, allowing the rear forces to advance and engage, maintaining order throughout the process.

The Roman Army, meanwhile, had nearly all its soldiers continuously engaged in battle, coupled with the significant losses suffered by its main force—the Roman Army—during a previous engagement with Cross's troops (because of these losses, Publilius had pursued Spartacus's forces at a slower pace after battle recovery), its strength had been weakened. Finally, by dusk, their defensive formation was

breached, the Roman Army suffered a crushing defeat, and Publilius fled the battlefield under the cover of the cavalry.

The rebel army secured yet another great victory.

Days later, the massive rebel army approached the defensive line of the Ascoli Camp.

Though Spartacus and his forces learned from allied Marsi people that two days prior, the governor of the Northern Italy Province, Casius, had led over ten thousand troops into Ascoli, thereby strengthening the Roman Camp's defenses (this military force, originally ordered by the Governor, came to besiege the rebel army), the rebel leaders, emboldened by their series of victories, still launched an attack, only to suffer a minor setback.

While the leaders were wracking their brains about how to breach the Roman Camp, Quintus proposed a suggestion to Maximus.

"I suggest we don't attack this camp but instead march west around Ascoli and continue marching west—" Maximus relayed Quintus's proposal during the Military Commander Conference.

"Leader Maximus, you must be mad!" Cleonis first shouted, considering himself having caught Maximus making an irrational proposal during the Military Commander Conference.

"We've all seen these past few days, the western side of Ascoli is all mountains; marching west is undoubtedly difficult, not to mention the west is the Latium Region with Rome! Should Rome again send an army to block us from the west while the Roman Army from Ascoli attacks us from behind, we'll be in serious trouble!"

"What you said is not entirely correct." Maximus, undeterred by Cleonis's criticism, responded with a smile, speaking slowly, "The west of Ascoli is not the Latium Region, but Umbria; it's only further west that we reach Latium. Additionally, marching west past Ascoli isn't difficult, as there is a Sarabian Way leading to Rome, one of the closest major routes from the east coast to Rome. By following this road westward, we can reach Rome within ten days.

We're indeed worried Rome might form another large army to attack us, as it's a capability they undoubtedly possess. However, isn't the governor hiding in the camp ahead worried about that too? He, as the Roman Governor, bearing the expectations of Roman citizens, led the formidable and costly-to-establish army to besiege us, yet not only was he defeated but also allowed us to assault Rome...

Excluding the time over a hundred years ago when Hannibal led the Carthaginian army to the gates of Rome, Romans have not faced the fear of enemies arriving at their doorsteps. If we did so, regardless of success, Romans would despise this governor, effectively ruining his political future. Therefore, as long as we pretend to march towards the west, I believe he will undoubtedly lead his forces out to intercept us!"

Spartacus, listening patiently, brightened up and said understandingly, "Maximus, are you suggesting we feign a westward march to advance on Rome, when in fact, we intend to lure the Roman Army out of the camp, forcing them to engage us in battle on open ground?"

"Precisely." Maximus glanced at Cleonis, confidently stating, "Breaching the Roman Camp is quite challenging, yet achieving victory in a pitched battle is much easier. I believe it's worth trying."

Ultimately, Maximus's proposal was approved.

The rebel army began to take action; to facilitate crossing mountains, they even abandoned large amounts of pack animals, having the soldiers carry supplies on their backs.

Initially, when Crodianus discovered the rebels circumventing Ascoli by heading west over the mountains, he assumed the rebels intended to bypass the camp's blockade to continue northward, and so decided to hold his ground until reinforced by Rome's additional forces, having already learned of Publilius's defeat, wary of underestimating this once-dismissed disorderly band of rebels.

Chapter 172: Consecutive Battles and Victories_2

However, he soon learned that after bypassing Ascoli, the rebel army did not continue north but instead embarked on the Sarabian Way, beginning to march west.

This rebel army wants to attack Rome?! ... A terrifying thought flashed in Crodianus's mind, rendering him restless, for he was well aware of the military defense situation along the Sarabian Way. He had originally led an army from Rome via this route to reach Ascoli, recruiting city guards from various towns

along the way, amassing an army of fifty thousand. Yet, this also left the Sarabian Way and its surrounding areas, which had long been unprepared for war, nearly defenseless. He could imagine the rebels smoothly entering Ladim, approaching Rome, and inciting panic among the Roman populace...

Thinking of this, Crodianus broke into a cold sweat. Having been in the Roman political scene for many years, he knew full well what this meant, so he immediately called upon Governor Casius of the Northern Italy Province and quickly persuaded him.

Although Crodianus was eager to deploy troops, under Casius's persuasion, he first sent out multiple scouts to confirm that the rebels were indeed marching westward without any ambush before leading his army out of camp to pursue along the Sarabian Way.

Two days later, the Roman Army caught up with the rebels who intentionally slowed their marching pace.

This was precisely the junction between the Pisenum and Umbria regions, where mountains stretched endlessly, with only a valley formed by a river's erosion. The Sarabian Way was built alongside this river, so the terrain was narrow, preventing the massive rebel army from deploying effectively, creating an advantageous situation for the Roman Army.

Crodianus used the army from the Northern Italy Province as the vanguard, while Spartacus positioned his forces at the forefront, and soon they clashed fiercely in the valley.

The troops Casius brought were two standing legions from the Northern Italy Province, established to defend against northern barbarians. Though they had not seen combat for many years, their fighting prowess far surpassed that of the hastily assembled eight Roman legions from the previous year.

After a period of intense fighting, the rebel army's frontline units began to falter.

Spartacus had anticipated this, as Maximus had previously warned him about the distinctive traits of the Northern Italy Province's Roman Army (based on insights from Quintus, Flanitnus, and others), so he already had plans in place. He issued an order for the frontline troops to retreat.

The advance units of the rebel army immediately retreated, with the Northern Italy Roman legions closely pursuing, aiming to disrupt the enemy's formation by forcing the fleeing soldiers into a rout.

However, behind the rebel army's frontline units, there were no other troops arrayed adjacently, and only after they had run a distance did they encounter another rebel unit arrayed in a Roman checkerboard pattern across the valley. The retreating soldiers ran through the gaps between the formations to the rear, while the pursuing Roman soldiers, who had loosened their formation while running, could not quickly generate a strong impact force. This allowed the confronting rebel unit to successfully merge their front and rear pincer formations, forming a tight line to block the pursuing enemy, and the battle resumed...

Spartacus had used the same tactic in battles against Governor Publius before, but on that occasion it was for offense, while this time it centered on defense. With experience, the units executed maneuvers with greater proficiency.

Through this tactic, even within the narrow valley, the rebels could leverage their numerical advantage, employing a carousel tactic to wear down the Roman Army's aggression.

When Crodianus and Casius realized this, they also began to adopt rotation tactics to conserve their soldiers' energy. Even though they were unprepared, as the attacking side, swapping positions between the front and rear units was somewhat easier for them.

However, each time the Roman Army attempted this tactic, the rebels would immediately advance, making it difficult for the Romans to complete the switch smoothly.

Thus, the offensive and defensive roles frequently changed, and the battle became intermittent, lasting from morning into the afternoon.

Suddenly, Crodianus received an urgent report from the messenger: the rear guard was under rebel attack!

Crodianus, astonished, was also confused: since the deployment, he had never ceased sending scouts to reconnoiter the surrounding area, and no unusual activities had been detected. How did these rebels suddenly appear at the rear of the army?

It turned out that there were many Samnite and Lukanian mountain people among the rebels. Before the battle, Spartacus had dispatched them to climb the steep cliffs on both sides of the valley, cross the mountains, and circumvent to the rear of the Roman Army for an assault.

When this news spread among the Roman soldiers, morale plummeted sharply, as they all knew perfectly well: they had neither broken through the front nor withstood the sudden rear attack, and the army was about to be surrounded in the valley.

Especially since the shadow of their recent defeat and narrow escape from Womans River still loomed over the former Ascoli Camp troops, the soldiers dared not repeat the same mistakes and refused to obey the officers' orders, fleeing for their lives instead.

Seeing the situation was lost, Crodianus, accompanied by Casius, under the desperate protection of the Guard, broke out of the encirclement while the rear rebels had yet to form a complete encirclement, but most of the soldiers were trapped in the valley.

However, once the Northern Italy Province army realized their flight was hopeless, they fought to the death. The rebel army paid a significant price to completely annihilate them.

Within twenty days, the rebel army achieved three consecutive major victories, defeating about one hundred and twenty thousand Roman troops and breaking Rome's encirclement plan. However, the rebels also suffered over forty thousand casualties, significantly weakening their strength, so much so that even if there were leaders who harbored ambitions of marching into Rome, those dreams were now shattered.

The rebel army halted its westward advance, quickly turned east, and once again approached the Ascoli Camp, which was now deserted except for the raging flames.

Rebel soldiers quickly entered the camp to extinguish the fire and salvage various military supplies.

Simultaneously, the rebels' remarkable victory spread like spring wind throughout Pisenum, causing countless disgruntled Marsi, Vesti, Peligni, and other ethnic groups and slaves to flock in, eager to join the ranks.

Within a few days, not only did the rebel army restore its numbers, but it surpassed its former strength. Furthermore, the rebels had seized a large quantity of Roman military equipment and supplies, and the vast majority of soldiers now had armor and weapons, greatly enhancing their strength.

After resting for ten days at the Ascoli Camp, the rebel army began to march northward again.

In theory, with two Roman Governor armies and the two Northern Italy Province legions eliminated, there was no force on the East Coast of Italy capable of threatening such a powerful rebel army; on the contrary, towns had to worry about their own safety.

However, the pace of the rebel army's march grew slower by the day, and by the time they barely reached the Northern Italy Province and arrived at the southernmost port town Ariminum, some rebel units refused to proceed further.

Thus, the entire military commander conference of the rebel army convened.

"Gentlemen, the Alpine Mountains are not far ahead. Once we lead our troops for another dozen days of marching, we can leave the area under Roman control, and at that time we will be truly free!"

Maximus was the first to speak at the conference, and he was the leader most committed to urging the rebel army to continue the march north during this period. Since meetings like this had occurred several times along the way, his expression showed some anxiety, with his voice betraying impatience.

"Although we have defeated the Roman Army multiple times, Rome remains extremely powerful and may dispatch troops to attack us at any time. The longer we delay on the road, the greater the risk of Roman forces intercepting us! So I earnestly ask everyone to do everything possible to persuade your soldiers to speed up the march. Only once we leave Italy will we truly be safe!"

Chapter 173: The Real Reason for Refusing to Go North

Maximus's gaze swept over his comrades who had fought alongside him back in Campania, earnestly advising, "Spartacus, Hamilcar, Antonix, Attutmus, didn't we make a promise to resist Rome and gain freedom when we escaped from the Gladiator School and started a rebellion in the Vesuvius Region?! Now that it's about to be realized, for the sake of those brothers who have always believed in us and followed us, we absolutely cannot back down!—"

"Maximus, you are talking nonsense!" Cleonis loudly interrupted Maximus's speech, "Will leaving Italy grant us freedom?! Do you know that north of the Alps are terrifying Gauls and even more terrifying Germanic tribes!

I have asked some Gaul brothers in the army, and they all told me that each of those barbarian tribes has its own territory, and if outsiders enter, they will treat them as enemies, waging war to kill or expel them!

Although Rome is strong, they are somewhat afraid of the barbarians north of the Alpine Mountains because in the past, they were defeated by the barbarians multiple times; if you don't believe me, you can ask those soldiers from Umbria and Pisenum regions.

Moreover, barbarians are extremely cruel to captives; if we lose, our heads might be cut off to make urine pots or we might become slaves, suffering abuse! Since there will be fighting no matter where we go, why shouldn't I stay in Italy, where the situation is more familiar!"

"Cleonis is right!" Phitodorus quickly picked up the conversation: "I heard that north of the Alps is full of dense forests and swamps, with many wild beasts and mosquitoes, and during winter, the weather is extremely cold.

Barbarians wear thick robes and do not primarily eat bread but like to stew wheat, beans, and meat together randomly, and when there's nothing to eat, they even dig up snakes and insects...

Everyone, think about it, most of the soldiers in our ranks are from Italy; they're already used to the warm climate and delicious food here. If we move them to a place entirely different from Italy, I'm afraid half of them would fall sick before even fighting, so how could we beat those barbarians who see us as their enemies!" Phitodorus looked at Maximus, spreading his hands, showing a helpless look.

"Earlier, Maximus mentioned that Rome is very strong, but we are also very strong now!" Depeitimas and Cleonis, along with Phitodorus, seemed to have planned this together, speaking one after another.

"Initially, our soldiers were indeed afraid of the Roman Army, but after winning victory after victory, they not only are no longer afraid but also eager to fight the Romans. Moreover, their combat ability has significantly improved, so even if Rome sends more armies, they absolutely won't be our match; instead,

we will grow stronger the more we fight, becoming a powerful army like under General Marve, and by then, no one can resist us!"

Maximus retorted, "Depeitimas, you are a veteran, and you should know very well that until now, the Roman armies we've defeated were just some recruits who were trained for only a few months and barely saw the battlefield. The only Roman army that caused us trouble came from the Northern Italy Province; they are the real Roman regular forces trained for years, and we've paid a great price to defeat them. Have you all forgotten that! And how many such armies does Rome still have?!"

Maximus pounded the table forcefully, loudly reminding, "At least tens of thousands! Led by Rome's best generals, Lucullus and Pompey, some are fighting the Bendu people in Little Asia, and some are suppressing the rebel army in the Iberian Peninsula; they've been fighting for years, and their combat strength is formidable. Once the Roman Senate recalls them to Italy, Depeitimas, do you think we can defeat them?!"

Depeitimas was momentarily speechless, unable to lie with open eyes after serving in the Roman army for many years.

"Of course, we can!" Tormas took over, arguing: "Even if Rome is strong, its roots are in Italy! Now, the name of Free Italy has spread throughout all of Italy; all the slaves and poor in Italy are willing to join us. Our ranks have exceeded 100,000 in just a year, and we will become even stronger in the future, strong enough to destroy Rome!"

By then, will those Roman soldiers fighting abroad and whose homes are in Italy still want to fight?! Those City States and Kingdoms that once succumbed to Rome will definitely rise up against it again, and by then, Rome won't be as strong, and the various peoples and City States of Italy will regain freedom with our help!"

His words finished, and some in the audience were so invigorated they couldn't help but shout, "Well said, Tormas!"

"Haha, we all know Rome's roots are in Italy, but don't the Romans know it themselves?!" Maximus sneered, loudly saying, "Rome has always underestimated us, and now they've suffered significant defeats; both Governors nearly captured by us. We have seriously threatened Rome's rule in Italy, and from now on, they will surely see us as their real enemy!"

It will certainly gather its most elite troops, aiming to annihilate us quickly! It will also use all sorts of tricks to gather information on us, bribe our soldiers, and break up our ranks to cause internal dissent!

Chapter 174: The Real Reason for Refusing to Go North_2

"Yes, perhaps during this process, other city-states and kingdoms outside Italy may rise to rebel, but so what? They can't possibly come to Italy to help us, and under the continuous attacks from Rome's elite army, we may never see the day Rome falls!"

The military tent suddenly fell silent. It wasn't because everyone was convinced by Maximus, but rather the mention of various contemptible methods Rome would employ left those who hadn't yet experienced them feeling uneasy.

At this moment, a man in the corner of the tent shouted, "In any case, my brothers and I absolutely refuse to continue heading north, to those barbarian lands north of the Alps! If you insist on going, then we'll detach from Free Italy and head south to fight desperately against the Romans!"

The speaker was the newly joined leader of the Marsi, Demolius. As soon as he finished his words, two other leaders who had recently joined from the Pisenum region also firmly declared their stance: "We feel the same way. We won't go north either; otherwise, we'll lead our troops to leave!"

The statements of the three leaders abruptly rendered the military tent unusually quiet. Some people's faces displayed tension because it reminded them of the scene months ago when Cross detached from the troops.

Cleonis suddenly laughed. He looked at Maximus and sarcastically said, "Spartacus leader, we cannot continue listening to the advice of some foolish individuals. If we keep heading north, Free Italy will fall apart!"

"I suggested earlier that the troops should turn south and return to Great Greece, where trade flourishes and supplies are plentiful. Moreover, there are countless slaves and impoverished people urgently needing our help. Especially Sicily—decades ago, the people there instigated a massive revolt, almost capturing the entire island, though in the end, they were crushed by the Roman Army..."

Since the Military Commander Conference has been unable to reach a final decision on this matter, I propose convening a soldiers' assembly to let all the soldiers decide where we should go next!"

Maximus felt a tight pull in his heart.

Since the formation of the rebel army, the soldiers' assembly had only convened a few times. With the rapid expansion of the troops, organizing such an assembly had become much more complex, and it hadn't been held since they moved south earlier this year. However, it was originally established as the highest authority during the rebellion; once a decision was made by the assembly, it could not be overturned.

"I agree to convene a soldiers' assembly and let all the soldiers collectively discuss the direction our troops should take!" Several leaders who had joined later vocally expressed their support. They understood well that the majority of the rebel troops now consisted of poor townsfolk from Italy. As long as there was a sliver of hope, these people would be unwilling to leave Italy easily.

Maximus was fully aware of this as well. He cast a pleading gaze toward his former comrade-in-arms, Attutmus, hoping he would speak up to deny this seemingly reasonable request.

However, Attutmus lowered his head, avoiding any eye contact.

Antonix did not evade his gaze but slightly shook his head, signaling his refusal.

Hamilcar and Spartacus were whispering seriously to each other about something, seemingly oblivious to his plea for help.

At that moment, Maximus suddenly felt: despite the crowded tent, he was utterly alone.

Over the past period, due to his insistence on moving north, he increasingly felt distanced from the other leaders. This time, he indeed felt disheartened.

"Ahem! Ahem!" Spartacus coughed heavily twice, sweeping his gaze over everyone before finally landing on Maximus. With an enigmatic tone, he said, "Everyone has deliberated for so long today; we're all tired. Let's go back and rest well, then discuss with our subordinates properly. Tomorrow, we'll reconvene to decide whether the troops should continue northward or head southward."

"Another postponement till tomorrow?!" Cleonis grumbled in dissatisfaction.

"Relax—tomorrow, we'll come to a definitive decision, no more delays!" Spartacus assured firmly, putting Cleonis at ease so he stopped pushing the matter further.

Maximus, his face darkened, stood up and walked out. Hamilcar called after him twice to no avail. He was about to chase after him when Spartacus stopped him: "Forget it, don't chase him. Earlier, I quietly signaled for him to stay back after the meeting so we could discuss privately... but it seems he's already understood our choice and has no intention of discussing further."

"Sigh..." Hamilcar let out a long sigh.

"Hamilcar, go see him on my behalf." Spartacus said listlessly.

Maximus returned to his own camp.

"Leader, how did today's discussion go? Are we able to continue marching?" Attendant Akegu stepped forward and asked.

Maximus didn't answer but instead said in a deep voice, "Go summon Vorenius, Acronis, Pigeris, Capito, Quintus, and Flanius... Have them all gather in my tent for a meeting!"

"Yes!" The attendants replied in unison, not daring to dawdle. They understood this was the first time Maximus had convened all the heads during the march, indicating something significant.

At this moment, a guard entered and reported: "Leader, Attutmus has arrived."

"Let him in."

"Maximus, you walked too fast; I called out to you several times from behind, but you didn't hear me." Attutmus complained as he entered the tent.

"Leader Attutmus, why have you come looking for me?" Maximus looked at him, speaking with formality rather than his usual casual tone.

"Uh... well..." Attutmus hesitated, scratched his head, then guilt-riddenly said, "Back at the meeting, I knew you wanted me to speak up for you. But... you know my soldiers are either Apulians or from Pisenum, and if I openly voiced support for moving north, they'd probably start causing trouble..."

"What about your own thoughts? Northward or southward?" Maximus asked indifferently.

"My soldiers are like this—what difference would my thoughts make? Could I possibly abandon them all and head north alone?!" Attutmus responded earnestly, then persuaded in a solemn tone, "Not just me—Antonix, Hamilcar, Spartacus... they're all in the same situation. Otherwise, why didn't they stand up for you when Cleonis and the others besieged you today? Maximus, don't waste your energy opposing everyone alone—"

"Leader Attutmus." Maximus impatiently interrupted him, "I won't persuade you to head north with me, and you shouldn't persuade me to go south with you. Out of respect for our past camaraderie, remember: if, one day, you find yourself surrounded by Roman forces near the sea, perhaps I'll send a ship to save your life."

"Ugh?" Attutmus was stunned once again. When he finally came to his senses, he tried to speak.

Maximus waved his hand dismissively. "I have a meeting to convene; we'll discuss no further."

Attutmus was escorted out of the tent, still dizzy with confusion. As he lifted his gaze, he saw Hamilcar approaching and waved energetically to greet him, "Hamilcar, are you here to persuade Maximus too?"

Hamilcar pointed toward the tent. "Is he inside?"

"He is, but—"

Hamilcar didn't say much and quickly stepped past Attutmus, walking toward the tent flaps. He addressed the guards: "I need to see Maximus."

"Please wait a moment."

Attutmus watched Hamilcar head inside and lingered for a while before exhaling deeply and walking away briskly.

As soon as Hamilcar entered, Maximus immediately said, "Teacher, you've come to bid me farewell, haven't you?"

Hamilcar showed no surprise. He calmly asked, "Are you really determined to lead your troops north alone? Will you not wait a little longer, in case the situation changes?"

Chapter 175: Advice for Spartacus

"No more waiting." Maximus shook his head: "Spartacus didn't agree to convene a Military Conference today, which gave me some buffer time. It's much better for me to take the initiative and leave than to leave after the conference amid the soldiers' insults..."

"Ah... since you've made up your mind, I won't say any more." Hamilcar sighed: "Don't blame us. When we first started the rebellion, everyone indeed wanted to escape Italy, but now most of the soldiers want to stay—"

"I understand, Attutmus just talked to me about this." Maximus was unwilling to elaborate further on the matter, his eyes keenly fixed on Hamilcar as he lowered his voice and asked: "I've always believed that among our leaders, you and Spartacus are the most intelligent and militarily talented, and you both have served in the Roman Army, so you're most familiar with Rome's military capabilities!

I don't think you wouldn't be aware that even if we're winning now, our situation in Italy is still very precarious. But the soldiers' voices wanting to stay in Italy are growing stronger every day. You and Spartacus have never taken any action to remind them, and you've barely voiced any opinions in the Military Commander Conference, allowing Cleonis to argue with me, which is completely unlike your past behavior, why?!"

Hamilcar was silent for a moment, then said: "The vast majority of soldiers refuse to leave, should Spartacus abandon them? He's the leader of Free Italy, and he has a responsibility to ensure that those willing to follow him can survive well! Of course, both Spartacus and I think that as our forces grow in fighting power, if we continue to fight like this, we have a good chance of eventually defeating Rome..."

Maximus looked at him without blinking, his tone airy as he said: "Teacher, even when I'm about to leave with my troops, are you still unwilling to speak the truth?"

Hamilcar looked up at him.

The two stared at each other for a while, then Hamilcar turned his head away, speaking again: "What I said just now is the truth, but... ahem, do you know how I got the name Hamilcar?"

Maximus shook his head; the original in Gladiator School really never mentioned it.

"I gave myself that name in Gladiator School." Hamilcar said leisurely: "When I was serving in the Roman Army, people said Rome once had a strong enemy called Carthage. A Carthaginian general named Hannibal once led his army in Italy for over a decade, killing many Romans, and was a nightmare for them..."

I originally wanted to take this name, but it was too sensitive for the Romans and easily angered them. I then heard that Hannibal's father was also an excellent general who won several victories and caused a lot of trouble for the Romans, so I took this name instead..."

Hamilcar turned back, his eyes bright and piercing as he stared into Maximus', his voice deep and powerful: "The Romans killed all the family of both me and Spartacus and destroyed our tribe. Spartacus and I wanted revenge, but we became captives and were forced to become gladiators. Apart from taking a name to express my hatred for the Romans, there was nothing else I could do..."

But now it's different; the two of us have the ability to retaliate against Rome. Even if Spartacus and I leave Italy and gain freedom, so what? Home... is long gone. It's better to stay here and fight the Romans! The blood of my entire tribe that was shed back then, we can repay it a hundredfold, a thousandfold!"

Maximus vaguely remembered that countless historians and experts had long debated why Spartacus turned southward with his troops instead of leaving Italy when the Alps were so close...

Now he finally understood: the pressure from the rebel soldiers was only a secondary reason; Spartacus's desire for revenge was the true cause. As a gladiator, death was never something he feared. What he most worried about was other leaders and soldiers opposing his desire to fight the Romans till the end. So he always pretended to lead everyone toward true freedom. Only when the other leaders and the majority of soldiers aligned with his wishes did he finally realize his hopes...

Thinking of this, Maximus couldn't help but shiver: Fortunately, he had already made his decision; otherwise, learning the truth now, how disappointed he would have been!

"Originally, Spartacus intended to meet you personally, but he felt some guilt and asked me to convey a few words." Hamilcar's voice continued by Maximus's ear: "He is very grateful for everything you've done for Free Italy over the past year. Without your help, this force could not have developed to its current size or achieved so many victories!

He regrets that you insist on leaving and sees it as a great loss for Free Italy but respects your decision, acknowledging that everyone has their own choices. If you have any request, as long as he can fulfill it, he will do his utmost to satisfy you!"

Maximus, moved, thought seriously before saying: "If I want all the troops to stay here two more days, not urgently head south, but instead act like we're continuing north along the coastal road, can it be done?"