

Rome Must Perish

#Chapter 21 - 20 Subordinates' Suggestions (2) - Read Rome Must Perish Chapter 21 - 20 Subordinates' Suggestions (2)

Chapter 21: Chapter 20 Subordinates' Suggestions (2)

Maximus listened intently, his iron pen writing continuously on the wax tablet. After finishing, he did not immediately respond but looked at Pigeris: "What difficulties do you have on your side?"

"Captain Maximus, like Uncle Gaius, I also have three problems here." Pigeris, imitating Gaius's manner, extended three fingers and solemnly replied, "The first problem, I lead the convoy daily to follow the main force out, intending to bring all the spoils back here. However, after the manor was captured, our convoy is the last to be allowed entry; as a result, many things inside are already taken by other units. They even repeatedly say in front of me that we're just picking up what they have left behind—"

At this point, Pigeris appeared somewhat angry, but he immediately realized the impropriety and quickly composed himself, easing up before continuing: "The second problem is the convoy lacks carpenters who can repair the carts. Initially, the team had twenty carts, but now only thirteen are usable, carrying so much every day, and still having to go up this slope, the road is uneven, almost every two to three days a cart is damaged. Although we can continue to maintain with captured carts, it's a shame to abandon these broken carts in the courtyard. If they could be repaired, our convoy could transport more in one go, avoiding multiple trips each day;

The third problem is initially Leader Hamilcar assigned me to manage those sheep, which were only in their teens back then. I still had the energy to let them feed with the horses. Now they've increased to over two hundred forty sheep and six cows. There was originally no sheep pen in the manor, and now the nearby areas are occupied by other units. We can only build a makeshift large sheep pen about two miles north of the manor for the sheep to rest and graze during the day, but this makes it difficult to manage. We lack shepherds, and others often come to steal sheep, with losses daily. Seksepis has complained to me many times, but I can't help it; my focus is mainly on the convoy, and the sheep pen is too far to manage..."

After hearing this, Maximus did not immediately respond but looked at the three: "Does anyone have any more questions?"

"No more, just these." Acronis replied promptly, and Pigeris and Gaius also shook their heads.

Maximus, looking at the wax tablet full of Latin, pondered for a moment before saying to them, "The problems you raised can be summarized as a lack of people and resources. This lack isn't just for ordinary labor; Acronis, you need more people familiar with kitchen tasks, Gaius, you want someone good with numbers to help organize stored resources, Pigeris, you want carpenters for cart repair and some knowledgeable in livestock to tend the sheep and cattle... But even more importantly, you've all mentioned that our supply team lacks security and relies too much on external forces—"

Maximus looked at the three, emphasizing his tone: "In other words, our supply team lacks a patrol team directly under our command that can ensure our safety and prevent others from causing trouble!"

"Captain, you're absolutely right!" Acronis said loudly, no longer concealing her feelings: "We used to bring up these issues with Leader Hamilcar, but he didn't care like you do! Old man, Pigeris, don't you agree?"

Gaius nodded vigorously, while Pigeris just rubbed his chin without responding.

Seeing this, Maximus coughed heavily and said, "Leader Hamilcar doesn't lack concern but knows it's hard to provide you with enough manpower, and it's even harder to have our own patrol for the supply team. Now, each unit is busy expanding its manpower to counter any Roman Army attacks, so naturally, they wouldn't agree to give us strong youth. But don't worry; I remember these issues and will find a way to solve them. It just takes some time."

Maximus's sincere attitude made the three feel that the new captain genuinely wanted to solve these problems, so instead of feeling frustrated, they expressed understanding and urged Maximus not to worry too much.

"As for lacking kitchen utensils, warehouses, tents... I think this is relatively easier to solve—" Maximus paused and said gravely, "Since the manor no longer has enough space to store supplies, we can use other manors as another base for the supply team. I remember a large olive oil-producing manor not far from the hillside—"

"But... although our army previously captured that manor, there are no stationed soldiers around it now. If our supply team sends people there, what if the Roman Army suddenly attacks? That would be dangerous!" Gaius expressed his concern.

"Of course, we can't move in alone; we need other units to garrison nearby for security assurance." Maximus had already considered this and said, "Our army is now crowded on this hillside, too dense! It would be better to spread out, occupy more manors, and expand our territory... I'll propose this to Spartacus and other leaders and try to persuade them."

"If what you propose can be implemented, it could indeed solve the lack of kitchen utensils, but we're already short on people, and this would make it worse!" Acronis reminded.

"Don't worry about this; as long as Leader Spartacus agrees to designate other manors as supply bases, they'll have to provide us with more manpower." Maximus confidently replied.

"But if other manors also have kitchens, warehouses, and transport units, wouldn't there need to be new leaders?" Acronis quickly asked.

Upon hearing this, Maximus looked at the anxious Acronis, then at the still calm Pigeris, who had his hands firmly on his thighs, and finally at the indifferent Gaius, nodding: "That's certain; for better management, I propose establishing chief positions for the kitchen, warehouse, and transport to oversee them, to prevent chaos." As he said this, Maximus smiled at the three.

The implication was obvious, and Acronis immediately became excited, while Pigeris sat up straight. Only Gaius remained with his indifferent look.

After painting a promising picture for the three, Maximus continued, "Pigeris, as you mentioned earlier, do you no longer want to manage the sheep?"

"Captain, I lead the convoy transporting supplies from morning till evening every day, and I simply have no time to manage the sheep and cattle!" Pigeris hurriedly explained.

"If that's the case..." Maximus pretended to ponder, "then let's establish a separate shepherd team and appoint someone else in charge. Do you have any recommendations?"

"Seksepis." Pigeris blurted out: "He can do it; he was originally a slave herding sheep and cattle for the Romans, and he's been overseeing the sheep now."

Seksepis... Maximus tried hard to recall, and finally, a vague face appeared in his mind.

Maximus, having stayed in the supply team, was familiar with most people, but Seksepis seemed unfamiliar, for a simple reason: this person shepherded the flock outside during the day, and Maximus rarely interacted with him. So, he responded, "Call him over later, and I'll talk to him first."

Chapter 22: Chapter 21: A New Official Starts with a Blaze

Pigeris looked distressed. "Captain, it's already late at night. Seksepis sleeps over by the sheep pen in the evenings. How about I call him tomorrow morning?"

"Alright." Maximus composed his expression, looked at the three of them, and said solemnly, "If we want Spartacus and the other leaders to approve my suggestions and solve the problems faced by our Supply Team, from now on, our Supply Team must perform much better than before. We need to make the soldiers in other units realize the importance of our team, so that they would be willing to see our team grow stronger."

The three exchanged glances, seeming unsure.

Maximus continued, "You three are all diligent and responsible, but we can do better. For instance, Acronis, in the kitchen you oversee, the breakfast consists of barley porridge, two pieces of bread, a piece of cheese, a bowl of broth, and a small portion of vegetables. Dinner is a small piece of smoked meat, two pieces of bread, and a bowl of broth... It's been virtually unchanged for more than twenty days. The soldiers eat just to fill their stomachs. While it's not easy to provide enough food for this many people, if you could put in a little more effort to make the meals tastier, the results would surely be better.

For example, adding dried seaweed and clam meat to the soup could enhance its flavor. Four days ago, I remember we seized some from a large estate. Or, brushing honey water on freshly baked bread, occasionally roasting two or three extra sheep to give the soldiers some barbecue, or slaughtering some chickens and ducks to make broth for them—"

"But Captain, if we do that, our daily expenses will be enormous!" Acronis couldn't help but interrupt.

"Everything we have is looted; there's no real expense involved. There are plenty of estates here. Once we exhaust the good food, we'll seize other high-quality supplies," Maximus replied with a dismissive laugh.

Acronis came from a difficult background, as did Hamilcar. Frugality was ingrained in their bones, and Maximus understood this. But as the newly appointed Supply Team Captain, he couldn't continue maintaining the status quo. He needed the Supply Team to show significant improvements quickly to earn the recognition of the soldiers, though he kept these thoughts to himself. Instead, he said righteously, "The brothers who joined our ranks have suffered plenty in the past. Now, as we prepare to fight the Roman Army, they could die on the battlefield at any moment. Providing them with tasty food and giving them a reason to appreciate life is the least our Supply Team can do for them! If we put more thought into making better meals and occasionally surprising them, they will be filled with gratitude towards us. And when we make requests, their support will come naturally."

Maximus's words deeply moved Acronis, who immediately declared, "Captain, you're absolutely right. I'll do my best to make the food better."

Pigeris quickly followed up, "Does the wagon team need any changes too?"

Maximus nodded approvingly at him, looked at Gaius, and said, "Regarding the transportation team and the warehouse, I indeed have some ideas, but now is not the time to discuss them. We'll address them later."

"Oh." Pigeris responded uneasily.

"That's it for tonight's meeting. Everyone hurry and get some rest so as not to affect tomorrow's work." After finishing his sentence, Maximus remembered something and called out to Acronis, who was about to leave the room.

"Captain, don't worry. I'll make sure breakfast is ready early tomorrow morning," Acronis quickly replied.

Maximus realized she'd misunderstood and smiled, saying, "Bring Akegu, Casius, Gaurus, Naisuya... all the children here. My room may be small, but squeezing in with the children is still better than having them sleep in the yard."

Naisuya, Acronis's youngest daughter, beamed with joy and said, "Alright, I'll go call them right now."

After the three had left, Maximus fell into deep thought. Based on their earlier behavior, his three headmen showed distinct characteristics. Acronis was passionate and willing to follow orders; Pigeris was proactive and had ideas—perhaps his background as a merchant before becoming a slave contributed to his meticulous thinking. Gaius, however, displayed a laid-back attitude, likely due to his old age and lack of desire to strive anymore.

Hence, Maximus felt dissatisfied with Gaius as a headman but currently lacked a better candidate to replace him. For now, he could only observe and decide later. This was why he'd decided to bring the children into his room—not just for their physical well-being but also because their learning ability was higher. He intended to mentor them rigorously, so they could become useful as soon as possible.

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At dawn, Maximus awoke without disturbing the still-sleeping children and went alone to the kitchen.

The kitchen was smoky and bustling with activity: people were stoking fires, boiling porridge, kneading dough, baking... Despite previous renovations to the kitchen that connected it with several adjacent rooms, the area still seemed crowded. The oppressive heat soaked through the workers' thin clothing, and some simply worked shirtless.

Acronis's voice towered over the noise. She stood in the center of the kitchen, gesturing wildly as she loudly directed her team.

Maximus watched silently from the doorway for a while before turning to return to the main building. He climbed to the third-floor rooftop and gazed into the distance.

When the uprising force first arrived, the area around the estate was lush green. Regularly spaced trees were draped in grapevines, with clusters of small grapes nestled among layers of green leaves like embedded emerald beads. Now, both the trees and vines had been stripped away by the soldiers. The dark-brown soil was cluttered with scattered tents of varying sizes and shapes, alongside crude wooden shacks, extending far beyond the estate. Around the tents, there were no earthen walls, no fences, no trenches. The open spaces between the tents were filled with people sleeping soundly... This was far from resembling a military outpost—it was more like a refugee camp.

It was precisely because of the chaos in the camp that Spartacus had decided to abandon staying in the estate and instead lived in the camp, sharing hardships with the soldiers. Inspired by him, Cross, Antonix, and many other gladiators followed suit, fostering good relations between the gladiators and the enslaved recruits.

However, discipline within the camp remained a serious issue. For instance, every morning, when the Supply Team pushed some prepared breakfast out of the estate gates on wooden carts, the camp dwellers would rush forward like starving ghosts to steal food. Even with team officers yelling to stop them, their efforts were only marginally effective. Only when the patrol units arrived with sticks to knock people back could order be barely maintained.

Observing the chaos at the estate gate, Maximus sighed inwardly: Hopefully, the upcoming military training will transform these ignorant and disorderly slaves into a competent army!

After breakfast, Maximus took the children to the warehouse.

Gaius, who was taking a stroll to aid digestion, saw them and asked in surprise, "Captain, what are you up to?"

"You're short on hands here, aren't you? I'm having them come and help you," Maximus pointed at the children behind him.

"Them?! A bunch of kids? They don't know anything and will just cause trouble. There's no way this will work!" Gaius shook his head repeatedly.

"No one is born knowing everything. While they're young, their arithmetic skills are far better than others'. If you teach them more, once they learn, your workload will lessen in the future." Maximus's reasoning intrigued Gaius.

Akegu, who had been previously instructed by Maximus, seized the opportunity to say, "Grandpa Gaius, we'll listen carefully to your instructions and work hard for you!"

"Let me make it clear upfront: anyone who doesn't listen to me will be sent back and banned from returning here. Understand?!" Gaius's stern words did not intimidate the children, who eagerly nodded.

Watching Gaius lead the children into the warehouse, Maximus felt assured and turned to leave.

Chapter 23: Chapter 22 Talking About Agriculture

Although the oldest of these children is 14 and the youngest is only 10, Maximus doesn't feel that he is exploiting child labor by making them work so early. After all, this is not a modern developed society; it is the ancient Western world dominated by Rome. Here, they have no carefree childhood, only suffering and oppression. If they don't want to become mere tools for slave owners to make money, they must grow up quickly and bravely resist.

Returning to the front yard, Maximus saw Pigeris leading the carters with pack horses, about to walk out of the gate.

"Be careful out there and come back safe!" Maximus reminded them.

"Captain, today only the First Battalion is going out. I heard the other three battalions are staying put," Pigeris said quietly, a bit puzzled.

It was just discussed yesterday, and today it's already being implemented. Spartacus is quite decisive... Maximus thought to himself, then comforted aloud: "It's fine. It'll be like this from now on—one battalion goes out, and the others train in the camp."

After Pigeris left, Maximus went back to the roof of the main building. He saw that the gladiators, serving as team officers in the camps around the farm, were shouting, cursing, hitting, and kicking to barely gather the new recruits together. Each one was given a wooden stick and instructed to diligently strike at tree stumps where the trunks had been felled...

Chopping at wooden stumps—this was basic gladiator training, now applied to the new recruits.

Maximus wanted to watch the new recruits' training in the camp, but he had other tasks to attend to.

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Vorenius walked into the room and saw Maximus sitting at the bedside.

Vorenus had only joined the uprising for two days, and the only team leader he knew was this young man. During the previous evening in the yard, when sharing his experiences, the young man's comfort left a good impression on him.

Before Vorenus could greet him, Maximus stood up, came over, and said: "Vor... Vorenus, you're here, please sit down first." With that said, he pressed Vorenus to sit on the bedside.

"Uh... Captain, is there something you need from me?" Vorenus asked, taken aback by the special attention.

"You've served as a farm manager for many years, so you must be very familiar with farm affairs," Maximus said, looking at him with anticipation.

"I wouldn't say I'm fully knowledgeable, but I'm quite familiar with the matters I've handled," Vorenus replied cautiously, unsure why he was being asked such questions.

"That's great, I have some questions to ask you," Maximus said as he picked up a stack of papyrus from the wooden table beside him, leafed through a few pages, and, looking down, asked: "Do you usually fertilize when farming? Where does the fertilizer come from?"

Vorenus was surprised by the seemingly simple question and, after a brief pause, answered: "Of course we fertilize, even the most fertile land will yield less after a few crops, so we must add nutrients to the land.

There are several types of fertilizers. The best is bird droppings, but they're too scarce and not enough. I hear in the Latium Region, some farms specifically raise thrushes and robins to collect and sell bird droppings at a high price... Next comes human waste, followed by sheep, donkey, and lastly horse manure, which is more suitable for pastures...

Manure must be collected and not used immediately on farmland, otherwise, the crops will die. It needs to be composted, protected from direct sun, and after a while, it can be applied to fields to increase yield. Many farms near compost sites, I wonder if you've noticed that, Captain..."

As Vorenus talked at length, Maximus felt a surge of emotions: it seems the content of this book is real. The composting method was not unique to my Chinese ancestors; the Romans, though unaware of its principles, also devised this method through practice to boost grain production.

Steadying himself, Maximus flipped a few more pages and continued to ask, "This book states that on 100 jugera of land, the most valuable crop is grapes, used for wine; followed by irrigated vegetable gardens; then willow groves; and after that orchards and

meadows, with grains being least profitable... Why is it that grain cultivation yields such poor returns?"

Without hesitation, Vorenius replied: "Leader, the reason is simple: nowadays, there's an abundance of grain from Sicily, Afeilica, Little Asia, and Egypt, provinces of the Roman territories... these provincial grain traders, pressured by Rome, set very low prices for grain, so for the Italians, growing grain beyond personal consumption just results in losses. Therefore, wealthy people mostly cultivate grapes, fruit trees, olives, and livestock to make money. Campania still has some wheat fields because its fertile land yields more grain, and the Samnites in the nearby mountains are in desperate need of grain, providing some profit."

"So the massive influx of grain from various Roman provinces into Italy is the main reason for the widespread bankruptcy of farmers in Italian towns?" Maximus continued to ask.

"All the farmers in Italy? I'm not sure, but I know that in Capua many farmers are severely indebted and lose their land for this reason. Farming requires seeds and many tools, oxen, plows, hoes, sickles... Farmers can't make these themselves; they have to buy them at the market. But if they can't sell their grain, they can't earn money to buy these tools and have to borrow. If there's a drought and a poor harvest, they even need to borrow money to buy seeds for the next year.

But the money... it's all high-interest loans! Debts just pile up, and eventually, they can only sell their land to repay the debt. Some, after selling their land, still fall short, so they end up selling themselves... Alas, in this world, it's hard for farmers to survive!" Vorenius sighed deeply.

Despite having thought about this before, Maximus still felt a bit gratified, because the book's author is Cato. From the self-description on the first page, he was sure it was the same Cato who called for Carthage's destruction. Even if Cato wrote this in his later years, it still dates back three or four decades, meaning Italian farmers were in such plight even back then.

Maximus exhaled lightly, glanced at the papyrus in his hand, and asked in a low voice, "This book also says slaves of both genders can be bred like animals and trained from a young age to be sold... Is there really such a slave industry?"

Vorenius remained silent for a moment before responding: "I once heard from my former master that in Rome, some nobles are indeed involved in such slave trade. Because captured slaves are often disobedient, skilled house-born slaves are more popular, and of course, they fetch higher prices... Actually, I am a house-born slave, as my parents were originally slaves in the master's house."

Despite having seen and heard much about the brutal exploitation and oppression of slaves by slave owners of that era, Maximus still felt a tightness in his chest at this

moment. In his previous life, he had learned on Baidu about the Roman Elder Cato, who constantly clamored for the destruction of Carthage. Despite his stubborn personality, Cato was a Stoic who led a simple and humble lifestyle, emphasized reason, and advocated for equality among all. Yet, reading his writings: "... the tools used on a farm are of two kinds: those that speak and those that do not, with slaves belonging to the former..." Such statements, even from Cato, were telling of the other Roman Nobles.

What an abominable slave society!... Maximus couldn't help but curse in his heart.

"Ca... Captain, the book you're holding is?" Vorenus asked cautiously, driven by curiosity.

"This is 'On Agriculture' by Marcus Porcius Cato, a book I found in a room after we captured this estate," Maximus said, handing the papyrus in his hand over to him.

"Is it by the Cato family of Rome?! I've long heard from my former master that this Roman Noble family is the most adept at managing agriculture," Vorenus said with a pleased look as he took the papers earnestly.

Chapter 24: Chapter 23 The Roman Army is Coming

Maximus blinked: "You can read?"

"A bit."

"Can you do arithmetic?"

"A little."

Managing a farm requires more than just a bit of literacy and numeracy!... Maximus watched Vorenus, who was absorbed in study, realizing that he was a rare talent in the Supply Team. Replacing Gaius with him to manage the warehouse would be a waste. He thought for a moment and said, "Vorenus, from today on, you don't need to go to the kitchen anymore. Stay by my side and help me handle the entire Supply Team's affairs."

"Uh?" Vorenus looked up, stunned.

Maximus was about to speak when someone burst into the room: "Team... Captain, Spartacus wants you for a meeting!"

Maximus saw it was Pigeris who came in and asked in surprise, "Why are you back so early?"

"The... Roman Army is here!" Pigeris said, panting.

Maximus was shocked.

Vorenius's hand shook, and the papyrus fell to the ground.

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"Omacle's men spotted the Roman army and saw them entering Napolet. There's no doubt they're coming for us, so once I got the news, I immediately returned with the First Battalion." Spartacus informed everyone of the situation he knew.

"How many Roman soldiers?" Cross asked eagerly.

"About two to three thousand, all fully armed, with eagle banners, and over a hundred cavalry."

"Is it 2000 or 3000? Can you be more specific?!" Hamilcar asked impatiently.

"Hamilcar, not everyone has your talent for arithmetic. It's quite commendable that Omacle's men stuck to their duty, dared to extend the scouting beyond the Vesuvius region, timely spotting the Roman Army's trail, and roughly judging their numbers!" Spartacus defended the cavalry team.

"I understand, but a difference of 1000 between 2000 and 3000 can impact our tactics significantly." Hamilcar felt a bit anxious.

"It doesn't matter how many come, as long as the Romans dare to show up, we'll charge and defeat them all, just like at the Flora Temple before." Enomai said viciously.

"As Spartacus mentioned, this time it should be the Roman Army, far different from Capua's City Guard. They are well-equipped and have cavalry, whereas we have less than five hundred truly armed. The others carry sticks or farm tools. How do we face the Roman Army like this?" Antonix expressed concern.

"Sticks can still kill, not to mention we have far more people. When the time comes, we'll charge together and surround them. No matter how good their weapons are, they will be ineffective and we will eventually kill them, just like when we escaped the school!" Cross confidently said.

"For gladiators like you and me who have undergone long-term training, of course, we can easily kill with sticks. But most of our men are used to wielding hoes and farm tools, dealing with wheat fields and livestock. They're untrained, even hesitant to kill, lacking courage to fight the Roman Army!" Antonix cautioned.

"If that's the case, we might as well surrender as soon as the Romans arrive!" Cross retorted sarcastically.

"My men aren't afraid of Romans. When they come, I'll lead the charge and show them the might of my Third Battalion!" Enomai said boastfully.

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"Enough with the arguing!" Spartacus swept his gaze over the crowd solemnly, signaling them to be quiet, and said in a deep voice, "Don't forget our motto is 'Resist Rome, Fight for Freedom', and the slaves joined us because they believed in us. So this battle is unavoidable. Haven't we all been prepared long ago? However, what Antonix said does deserve our attention. The Roman Army has arrived too quickly, and our forces lack training and sufficient weaponry. We would undoubtedly suffer in a direct confrontation. My thought is—"

Spartacus paused, pondered, and said, "...We should wait for the Romans to attack first, and then form ranks along the mountains with our backs to the camp. The camp is the brothers' home now, and to defend it, they will surely fight bravely. This also prevents the Roman cavalry from outflanking from our side and undermining the brothers' morale.

We will defend from a height, while the Romans will have to attack upwards. Even though the slope isn't steep, clad in heavy armor, they will have to climb, avoid falling, and fight, limiting their offensive capability and tiring easily. As long as we withstand their initial assault, we can seize victory!"

Spartacus's words invigorated everyone.

"But the Romans aren't foolish. Seeing us deploy like this, they probably won't attack recklessly." Antonix raised an objection.

"Don't worry about that. Even if they see our formation with backs to the mountain, the Romans will attack," Hamilcar explained, "I've been in the Roman Army before and understand them. Romans are now the rulers of the Mediterranean, and we are nothing but lowly slaves in their eyes. If this Roman army doesn't dare attack us without armor and lacking weapons, they will only be ridiculed by other Romans."

"Spartacus makes sense. Let's do it!" Cross loudly expressed his agreement, and no one else raised objections.

Then Spartacus continued, "Before the Roman Army attacks, our forces mustn't go down the mountain again to prevent a Roman surprise attack. We must seize the time to train the brothers, at least teach them how to form ranks and understand attack orders. Okmar's scouting team must constantly monitor the Roman Army's movements and report back to the camp anytime."

"Maximus." Hamilcar immediately spoke, "From now on until after the battle with the Romans, your Supply Team should increase meat in the meals, make sure the soldiers are full each time, so they have enough energy to train and fight."

"Understood, I'll ensure Acronis and her team work hard to accomplish this." Maximus immediately responded.

"That's settled then. Everyone quickly go back, and make the most of the time to train the troops." Spartacus swiftly concluded the meeting.

After everyone left the living room, Maximus fell behind, as he hadn't expressed any opinion during the meeting, he'd been pondering his role in Spartacus's uprising during the first battle against the Roman Army.

In past records, there were only a few brief mentions of Spartacus's uprising, but many novels and films had been inspired by it, varying in plot. Yet, a few key points were consistently aligned...

Maximus instinctively gazed out the living room window, towards the hills...

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For two consecutive days, the uprising forces intensified their training for the impending battle, but the Roman Army remained unseen, and Omacle's scouts hadn't gathered any information, as they were intercepted by Roman cavalry upon entering the Napolet vicinity. Some Roman cavalry even patrolled near the hills below the wine farm.

On the morning of the third day, while Maximus was in the bedroom consulting Vorenius on herding sheep and planting forage, the long blast of a copper horn sounded, "Wuuu!..."

The Romans are here?!... Maximus shot up instantly and dashed out of the bedroom, rushing out of the farm.

The camp outside had already erupted into chaos, as the officers shouted, and the soldiers jostled to gather...

Maximus dashed through the camp and saw Hamilcar standing on a large rock on the hillside, gazing west.

Chapter 25: Chapter 24 Pre-War

Maximus rushed over in large strides and stood by his side. Hamilcar glanced at him and then looked forward again: "The Romans are here." Although Hamilcar tried his best to appear calm, Maximus could still sense the tension in his tone.

Maximus raised his eyes and looked into the distance. In the near view, he saw Roman Cavalry advancing steadily toward the wine farm in a fan-shaped formation, ten men per squad. In the far view, a long column stretched out, led by two Banner Carriers draped in wolf pelts, holding aloft an eagle insignia and military flag. Behind them came several

horn players carrying long horns, followed by Roman Legion Soldiers arranged in five columns. Each soldier wore a red cinched tunic, a Gaul Helmet, segmented armor, carried a red large square shield in the left hand, a heavy spear in the right hand, a Roman Short Sword on the left waist, and a short dagger on the right waist. They marched with heads held high, exuding confidence and readiness for combat rather than mere marching. At the end of the column followed numerous auxiliary soldiers equipped with leather helmets, Chain Armor, long spears, and long shields. Even the equipment of these less-regarded Roman auxiliary soldiers far surpassed that of most rebel soldiers. At the very back of the line, a dozen carts and some slave laborers accompanied the column.

The sunlight gleamed on the polished armor and helmets of the Roman Army, radiating dazzling brilliance...

Hamilcar and Maximus squinted their eyes, holding their breath, as they watched silently from a distance for quite a while.

Hamilcar exclaimed indignantly, "There's far more than two or three thousand soldiers—this is over 4,000!"

"Approximately 4,300," Maximus replied with certainty.

"I need to inform Spartacus immediately!" Hamilcar turned and ran toward the camp.

Maximus did not move, continuing to observe the advancing Roman Army. They weren't moving very fast. After about half an hour, they had gotten near the olive oil farm about three miles below the slope. By that time, the rebel forces had almost finished forming their battle lines.

Spartacus, Cross, and several other leaders also came near Maximus to observe the enemy's movement.

Hamilcar, however, grabbed Maximus and whispered harshly in his ear, "As the leader of the Supply Team, you should be with your men at this moment, not wandering around here!"

Maximus snapped out of it. His curiosity about the Roman Legion had momentarily made him forget his duties. He quickly apologized and humbly asked for advice, "Teacher, I was wrong! What should I do in a situation like this?"

Hamilcar replied solemnly, "The Supply Team mainly consists of women, the elderly, and children. You should gather them together and calm their nerves! Also—"

He lowered his voice even further, "You need to prepare the carts, load them with supplies, just in case—"

Hamilcar did not finish his sentence, but Maximus understood his meaning. He nodded seriously and turned to run back.

The rebel formation was directly behind him. The first rows were mostly Gladiators, all heavily armed. Maximus could hear several people shouting his name, but he had no time to respond at that moment.

As Maximus rushed back toward the farm, the Roman Army passing the olive oil farm halted their advance. They faced the rebel formation and began arranging their lines...

Spartacus, standing on the hillside observing the scene, said gravely, "The Romans are preparing to attack!"

"Our brothers are ready. Let them come to meet their deaths!" Enomai shouted boldly.

Behind them, the Gladiators seized the moment to roar, riling up the rest of the rebel soldiers: "Roar!!! Roar!!!" In an instant, the morale of the rebel forces surged.

The Roman Army, unaffected by the provocations, meticulously formed their formation at an unhurried pace. They originally marched in an armed formation. As they pivoted to face the rebels, each cohort regrouped, gradually assembling into the Roman Army's traditional checkerboard formation. Their speed in forming up was much faster than the rebel troops. Oddly, however, the auxiliary soldiers at the back separated from the main formation, set down their weapons, and headed toward the carts parked at the rear. They took out shovels, hoes... and similar tools, beginning to dig around the olive oil farm.

This peculiar action left Spartacus and the others puzzled. The auxiliary soldiers of this Roman Army numbered over a thousand, accounting for more than a quarter of the entire force. With so many soldiers not joining the battle but instead digging, what could they possibly be doing?

Not long after, the Roman Legion soldiers had finished forming their lines but remained stationary. Meanwhile, the sweating auxiliary soldiers had dug a shallow trench encircling the olive oil farm. The excavated soil was used to construct earthen walls on the inner side of the trench...

"The Romans are building a camp!" Hamilcar suddenly realized.

"Are they still going to attack us?" Antonix immediately asked.

"The Roman Army has a habit of constructing temporary camps on battlefields. If they are defeated, they retreat to the camp for defense to ensure their safety. I didn't expect them to take such precautions against us. Perhaps once they finish building, they will launch an attack." Spartacus, who had experience fighting alongside Roman forces in

Little Asia and had some understanding of their strategies, said this, though he sounded uncertain.

"How long are we supposed to wait?! Why not take the initiative and attack them while they're fewer in number?" Enomai said impatiently.

"Since we've already planned our strategy ahead of time, we should stick to it!" Spartacus said sternly.

Even Cross, who usually prided himself on his bravery, agreed with Spartacus this time. Seeing the orderly and imposing Roman Army below made him feel a bit uneasy.

Thus, the rebel army quietly waited on the hillside, while the Roman Legion remained still at the foot of the hill, with only the auxiliary soldiers busy working.

As time went on, the chatter among the rebel forces grew louder. Their once dense formation began to scatter. Soldiers, attempting to ease their tension, started chatting and laughing, and some even sat down on the ground due to the blazing sun and prolonged standing. Spartacus and the other leaders had to rush to their respective units to boost morale and maintain order.

Meanwhile, similar issues arose in the Roman Army, though the veteran team officers were more effective in managing their troops, maintaining better discipline compared to the rebels.

The two sides thus confronted each other from several miles apart. By midday, the Romans had nearly completed their trench, and the corresponding soil walls had been fully erected, leaving designated entrances and exits. Only then did their Commander, Grabo, order his soldiers to withdraw inside the walls and into the olive oil farm.

The Roman Army did not attack as Spartacus had expected. He felt both disappointed and somewhat relieved seeing his exhausted soldiers lying across the hillside...

That day, no battle occurred, but the Roman Army's proximity made the tension within the rebel ranks palpable. Spartacus and the other leaders hastily convened a meeting, deciding to stick to their original plan and wait for the Romans to initiate the attack. Simultaneously, they resolved to tighten the camp's security to guard against potential ambushes.

On the Roman Army's side, Grabo was equally wary of a rebel attack. He instructed the auxiliary soldiers to continue laying traps and placing caltrops outside the trench. Additionally, several scout patrols were arranged to keep watch throughout the night within the camp.

Although the day passed without incident, many had restless nights, including Maximus. After all, this was his first experience with war, both in this life and the last.

At dawn, as the rooster crowed, Maximus leapt from his bed and rushed to the kitchen.

He didn't even need to urge them; Acronis had already gathered her team and busied themselves, knowing all too well what fate awaited them if the rebels lost the battle. All they could do was prepare hearty and delicious meals promptly, ensuring the soldiers were well-fed and fueled for the fight ahead.