

Perish 126

Chapter 126: Weapons Workshop_2

When this water hammer works well, it can crush over 1,500 pounds of iron ore in a day, something that would take more than ten people with iron hammers an entire day to barely achieve, because at night they must rest, while the water hammer does not.

In fact, the blacksmiths have also come here with melted iron to forge at the request of my former master, which is much easier than doing it themselves. However, they complained that the force from the water hammer was either too strong or too weak, and it often malfunctioned, severely affecting the quality of weapon production. Thus, they eventually gave it up.

But I think—"

Kadesos hesitated for a moment and then lowered his voice to say, "The main reason the blacksmiths are strongly opposed is that—if the water hammer is widely used in forging, some blacksmiths and laborers might be replaced..."

Maximus asked in a kinder tone, "So what do you think needs to be improved if we want to use the water hammer more in the weapon workshop?"

"Well... I don't really know." Kadesos scratched his head, and seeing Maximus's encouraging eyes, he couldn't help but speak again, "If we could appoint a dedicated carpenter to regularly inspect and repair this water hammer, it should not malfunction so often..."

Besides, I heard them say that the reason this water channel's force is difficult to control is because our Overdue River's flow is too slow and there's not much water, so when the weather is hot and the water is low, it..."

Maximus, having listened intently, still smiled and said, "You spoke very well! Where should we go next?"

"To... the ore washing room."

"Ore washing?"

"These... these iron ores not only contain iron but also... also soil and other things. We need to place the crushed iron ore into the trough for agitation and washing, to wash away the impurities from the iron ore so that there will be more iron in the ore..." Kadesos explained, "I heard... the iron ore we use here is from Noricum, north of Italy, which is better than iron ores from other places and contains more iron..."

As Kadesos explained, Maximus attentively toured the ore washing room, roasting chamber, and grinding room.

The grinding room was built above the water channel next to the crushing room, and the rumbling noise was equally deafening.

Inside, Maximus discovered the water mill he had been thinking about for a long time. Its entire structure was similar to the water hammer, except that the large iron hammer at the end was replaced by a large stone mill. However, it didn't grind grain but instead roasted, swollen, and softened ore, which was ground into granular powder here, and this powder was then sent to the center of the weapon workshop.

There was a tower-like building about two meters high, without doors to obstruct it, remaining open, with a large circular furnace inside. It was sunk one meter into the ground, with a diameter of about 1.5 meters. The furnace chamber gradually narrowed upward, eventually becoming a straight chimney that protruded through the roof, releasing billowing black smoke outward... The people in the workshop called it a "vertical furnace".

Nearly naked laborers mixed ore powder and charcoal in a certain ratio, layer by layer, into the furnace, ignited it, and closed the furnace chamber, blowing air inside through the air channels...

No one knew how much time passed, but the room became extraordinarily hot, making it unbearable for Maximus, who had to step outside, seeing the laborers still busy inside.

Since this was the most crucial part of iron smelting, Maximus patiently waited outside until he saw fiery liquid flowing out from the bottom of the furnace chamber...

He thought it was molten iron, but Kadesos told him these liquids were slag, while the real iron ingot was still inside the furnace chamber.

Once the slag was cleared, the laborers opened the furnace chamber, carefully removed the semi-fluid iron ingot, and sent it to another large room connected to the vertical furnace chamber.

Inside the room were several heavy guillotines alongside a few laborers whose task was to cut and stretch the freshly out-of-furnace, still soft iron ingots into suitable sizes for the next stage of weapon making.

The room also housed some strapping men in leather robes, holding iron hammers. Their task was to simply forge the cut iron ingots to expel the slag, making them purer and sturdier.

After this step, the iron ore was produced into pig iron ingots, seemingly concluding the iron smelting process, but Kadesos told Maximus: Ilacus had spent a fortune to learn from Roman army merchants a method to make the iron even stronger and more durable—by placing pig iron ingots and charcoal powder in a sealed container, then heating it at high temperature for several hours...

Isn't this carbon addition?!... Maximus was shocked. He knew about it because, in a past life, he had taken a job from a gaming company to create illustrations for an ancient civilization conquest game, which included upgrade images of various ancient technologies. Being diligent in his work, he had carefully read historical materials, looked at prototype structures, and the method of carbon addition to make steel was one such ancient technology.

Maximus thought about it again and no longer found it strange because the armor and short swords intercepted from the Roman Army had hardness far exceeding pig iron, already qualifying as steel. This showed that the metallurgy technology of the Romans had started to become widespread and was massively applied in the military, becoming the Roman Army's tool to dominate the Mediterranean.

Frowning, Maximus followed Kadesos to the east side of the weapon workshop, where weapons were manufactured.

The first entry was the casting room, a large house split into two parts: one was the crucible house, where small pieces of mature iron ingots were placed into crucibles, which were then sealed with clay and repeatedly heated at high temperatures until they melted into iron;

The other was the mold house, densely packed with various iron and clay molds, such as sheet armor molds, spearhead molds... Laborers poured the molten iron into the molds, removed them after cooling, and weapon raw embryos were formed.

Due to material limitations, crucible casting was only suitable for small weapons, while larger weapons like the short sword, helmet, Shield Core, and shin guards had to have various sizes of mature iron ingots sent to the Forging Room.

The Forging Room was larger, divided into a helmet room, short sword room, armor room... and other weapon rooms, where the mature iron ingots, as well as weapon raw embryos from crucible casting, were quenched, forged, polished, sharpened...

The formed weapons would then be sent to various assembly rooms, where it was no longer primarily blacksmiths at work but slaves skilled in carpentry and leatherworking. They would equip short swords with handles and scabbards, inset iron Shield Cores into leather-covered square shields, outfit helmets with liners and feather plumes, and connect sheet armors, assembling them into segmental armor...

While visiting the short sword room, Maximus even saw familiar faces—Pessianaxis and his son Pasipidas.

In Pompeii, Maximus had met Pessianaxis several times, and they should know each other, but Pessianaxis, clearly seeing Maximus entering, deliberately turned around, pretending not to see him.

However, his son Pasipidas actively approached and respectfully exclaimed, "Leader Maximus!"

Maximus replied with a smile, "It's been a while, Pasipidas. Looks like your leg has fully healed!"

Pasipidas touched his right leg with a mix of anxiety and gratitude, saying, "It's all my fault for being so reckless earlier. If it weren't for you, Leader, sending the Medical Team to fully assist me, my leg would have been ruined long ago!"

"No, you shouldn't thank me." Maximus said earnestly, "You should thank the Medical Team and the caring Luxina who looked after you!"

Chapter 127: Female Camp Captain Karina

Pasipidas's face suddenly turned red.

Maximus looked at him with a smile: "I heard you have a good relationship with Luxina, meeting her several times in private after your injury healed—"

"I... I didn't! She only took care of me when I was sick, there's nothing between us—" Pasipidas denied loudly, his face flushed.

Maximus looked surprised: "I originally thought you liked her and was ready to give you my blessings, but it turns out that's not the case, what a pity!"

Pasipidas was taken aback, and despite his shyness, he immediately changed his tune: "Leader, I do like her, she... she likes me too, will you really bless us?!"

Pasipidas lowered his voice: "My father is opposed to this."

Maximus glanced at Pessianaxis, who was standing a little distance away with his back to them, and deliberately raised his voice with a smile: "You two are in love and can become a married couple, that's a wonderful thing! I not only support you, but also once we find a true home and settle down, I'm willing to host your wedding and have everyone bless you both!"

"Really?!" Pasipidas looked thrilled.

"Of course, it's true." Maximus replied, then shifted the topic: "You've been in this weapon workshop for over ten days, how do you feel?"

"It's great! I never thought ironmaking and blacksmithing could reach this level, coming here has really opened my eyes and I've learned a lot!" Pasipidas said excitedly, but then lowered his voice: "However, the people here don't like me or my dad, but they have nothing to be proud about. When it comes to blacksmithing skills, not one of them can surpass me, let alone my dad..."

"You two are outsiders, it's normal not to be accepted at first. Once time passes and everyone gets familiar, it won't be an issue. Work hard here, don't be satisfied with just being a blacksmith, strive to learn everything here so you can take on greater responsibilities. Then, Luxina will be proud of you too!"

Maximus's words encouraged the young man who was already excited by the good news, and he nodded vigorously, returning to Pessianaxis's side, excitedly reminding him: "Father, you heard it all!"

Pessianaxis remained silent for a moment before asking with a worried expression: "It seems you really intend to marry that woman? Really plan to stay in this group?"

"Yes!" Pasipidas nodded heavily again, prompting a long sigh from his father: "Sigh..."

Maximus spent most of the day touring the entire weapon workshop, growing more excited as he saw, not only witnessing the long-awaited water mill and hammer, realizing that the iron smelting technology used in this era was already quite advanced, but also the workshop's weapon manufacturing had distinct division of labor and assembly line operations. More importantly, the weapon workshop maintained a complete production chain from ore refining to fine iron manufacturing to weapons preparation, forming a perfect closed loop.

Even if Kadesos said "the cast iron produced here is less than 500 kilograms per month, and the output of short swords and armor does not compare to the weapon workshops in the Latium Region," it still far exceeded Maximus's expectations.

Therefore, after leaving the weapon workshop, Maximus could no longer suppress the joy that filled his face.

He rode a horse to a higher ground, overlooking the smoky, noisy blackened lowland, and said with a serious expression: "Capito, you must focus on this weapon workshop, ensure its normal operation at all costs, allowing it to continuously produce weapons and equipment! Our team is expanding rapidly, with many new recruits. In the future, when the Romans come, we can't let them fight with wooden sticks."

"That won't be easy." Capito, not one to nod approvingly without thought, voiced his objection directly: "Two crucial raw materials for iron smelting—iron ore and charcoal, are already scarce in the workshop's warehouse, with not much captured in the whole city. I've estimated that, with the current surplus of iron ore and charcoal, the weapon workshop can run for at most a month, equipping about 300 new soldiers with a full set of arms..."

Maximus, caught up in his excitement, hadn't considered this aspect, and upon hearing this, he was dumbstruck and frowned: "I know the iron ore used here is purchased from the Noric. Besides Noricum, can we get iron ore from other places?"

Capito shook his head: "I inquired, there isn't any."

Maximus, lacking any assumptions, rubbed his chin and thought: "I'll have Pigeris find a way to contact the Noric, and if we can reach them, purchase iron ore at a high price. I think they shouldn't refuse... However, it takes time, and what we lack most now is time. Another way is to deploy troops to confiscate various iron tools while conquering surrounding areas, then bring them here to be melted down—"

"That method is feasible and also saves time," Capito agreed.

"Where did the charcoal used here come from before?" Maximus asked.

"There are charcoal workshops just outside the north city of Sarabia, and there are two of them. They not only supply here but also provide for pottery and brick making, with most of the labor being slaves, all under our warehouse's control. However, the wood used to make charcoal comes from the Galgano Peninsula not far to the north. We're currently sending troops to conquer areas around the large lake to the north, and by then we can demand wood from towns near the mountains, such as Sipotum..."

Chapter 128: Female Camp Captain Karina_2

Maximus vaguely remembered Vorenius reporting on the charcoal workshop in Sarabia. Realizing the importance of this resource, he said gravely, "I understand. I'll ensure the expeditionary forces bring you enough wood. You must get the charcoal workshop operating properly as soon as possible—"

He paused momentarily and then said solemnly, "The Roman Army could attack at any time. When that happens, we might have to abandon this place. Therefore, Capito, you must do everything in your power to produce enough weapons in the shortest time possible!...

Weapon workshops and charcoal workshops are excellent assets, extremely useful to us. You must exert significant effort to control the craftsmen and laborers, and do your best to win their allegiance. I noticed in the workshop earlier that most people seemed indifferent to our arrival. Even Kadosos, who appeared obedient, was asking about his former master's situation as we left. This shows they still resist us in their hearts...

But it's not a big deal. Back then, Pessianaxis and his son were even more defiant. And now, they've become one of us. You should encourage them to express their grievances, care about their health, and improve their living conditions. I believe, given enough time, they will accept us."

Capito remained silent. As a former Roman citizen from a relatively affluent family, he was not particularly enthusiastic about the idea of assimilating slaves. After all, during decades of military service, Roman Soldiers had always coerced slaves into working with the threat of short swords and strict decrees.

However, after joining the rebel army and influenced by the environment, he had no choice but to adopt a more amicable stance toward the slaves. Eventually, he realized the freed slaves, treated as equals, displayed far greater enthusiasm for their work than before. Gradually, he began to accept some of Maximus's practices, though treating slaves—once viewed as mere livestock—as equals or brothers was nearly impossible for him.

Nonetheless, as a manager, Capito only needed to follow Maximus's instructions and delegate tasks to his subordinates, so he didn't have much resistance to this.

Maximus continued, "...Ensure more people are trained in charcoal burning and weapon forging, so we can expand production in the future.

Additionally, inform the engineering team, especially Spukala, to deeply explore the facilities, layouts, and structures of the charcoal and weapon workshops, study their operating principles, and draw schematics... This way, we'll be able to build these workshops and facilities ourselves someday and completely master the techniques of charcoal burning and iron smelting!"

Maximus occasionally mentioned unfamiliar terms, which Capito had grown accustomed to. He replied, "Leader, rest assured. I've already assigned the personnel from the blacksmith's shop to the weapon workshop and plan to add more manpower. This will make the original staff even more cooperative.

Spukala and his team were already interested in this place. They even helped repair the water hammer. After I relay your orders, I'm confident they'll move here first thing tomorrow morning."

Maximus smiled, "That's good."

"Um..." Capito couldn't help but ask softly, "Leader, where will we build the new weapon workshop in the future?"

Maximus glanced at Capito, his expression calm, as if the question were asked casually.

Maximus chuckled, "You'll know in due time."

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Maximus returned to Sarabia's governor mansion. Before he could have dinner, his attendant Akegu reported to him: the kitchen steward Acronis had been waiting for him for quite some time.

Upon entering his office, Acronis immediately greeted him, showing no signs of irritation from the wait. Instead, she seemed eager to report her accomplishments: "Leader, I've already found the person you wanted!"

Maximus's gaze focused on another individual in the room: a tall, athletic woman with golden hair, blue eyes, and sharp features. Despite knowing Maximus was the leader, she did not shy away from his scrutiny, instead meeting his gaze boldly.

Maximus steadied himself, "Is it her?"

"Leader, her name is Karina. She's Germanic and was a farmhand for a wealthy merchant in Pompeii. After we captured Pompeii, she joined our ranks and even strongly requested to become a Soldier.

However, Flannitnus didn't approve her request, so Vorenus assigned her to my team. She's very diligent, able to outwork three men. She's currently our slaughter team's captain, and none of the men working under her dare to challenge her authority," Acronis passionately introduced her subordinate.

The information provided and the woman's demeanor convinced Maximus that she was a suitable candidate, though he remained slightly skeptical. "Why did you originally want to become a Soldier?"

"I want to kill Romans with my own hands!" Karina replied solemnly, her emerald eyes flashing a hint of ferocity.

Another person with deep hatred toward the Romans, Maximus thought. His team already included many individuals who had suffered tragic experiences. He had grown accustomed to such stories and did not probe further.

Clearing his throat, Maximus said seriously, "Not being able to become a Soldier is no problem. You can serve as the Female Camp Captain, overseeing all the women in our ranks, ensuring their safety, and protecting them from unnecessary harassment. This will allow our Soldiers to fight the Romans without worrying... Will you accept this responsibility?"

"I accept!" Karina's voice, though that of a woman, was short and deep, conveying a sense of dependability.

"Our ranks currently include over a thousand women, and there will only be more in the future. They work in kitchens or warehouses during the day and gather at the Female Camp at night to rest, which makes management quite challenging," Maximus noted.

"I can handle it, but I'll need your support, Leader!" Clearly, Karina had thought this through beforehand and appeared confident.

Maximus was well-prepared, too: "I can assign you one hundred women as subordinates. They will focus entirely on assisting you in managing the Female Camp, without other responsibilities. Additionally, I will

provide fifty sets of leather helmets, leather armor, and weapons for you to form a patrol team to maintain order in the camp.

However, you must personally select these hundred subordinates and report back to me. The camp's location will be your decision, and I won't interfere much with management specifics. But you must ensure order and stability in the camp, and the women must not resent your leadership. Otherwise, I will have to replace the Female Camp Captain. Do you understand?!"

"Leader, you can count on me. No one but me will serve as Female Camp Captain!" Karina emphasized with a steady voice, a faint smile forming on her face upon hearing about the women's patrol team.

Maximus appreciated confident and capable subordinates. He smiled and said, "That'll be all for now. You both can leave."

"Leader, I've recommended one of my best people to you again. If there's any small trouble in the kitchen, just don't blame me." Acronis half-joked, half-seriously reminded.

Maximus laughed and responded, "Acronis, you have a talent for discovering and cultivating people. You've helped me solve major issues several times. I'll make sure to tell Vorenius to prioritize giving you any personnel you need. How does that sound?"

Chapter 129: Bad News

"That will do."

"You've been in Sarabia for so long and haven't gone to see Naisuya yet. You can take the chance to visit her later," Maximus reminded once more.

The Governor Mansion in Sarabia was quite spacious. Maximus arranged for the oldest group of children in the team to stay there to facilitate tasks, including Naisuya.

"She's busy with her studies and work now. She probably forgot about her mother long ago," Acronis said with pride in her teasing tone.

Karina listened to their warm conversation from the side, feeling a tinge of envy...

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Metapontum, a coastal town in Tarentum Bay, was legendarily founded by Nestor and his Pylian people from Troy. It became very wealthy due to agriculture and maritime trade, attracting the covetous eyes of the northern mountain people, who attacked and destroyed the city state along with its neighbor Siris.

Later, the Achaeans rebuilt it, restoring its prosperity, and even attracted mathematician Pythagoras to reside there and design coin molds for Metapontum.

In the decades since, the Metapontum people lived in peace and were even too lazy to involve themselves in the Marci War.

However, since February of this year, one of the rebel leaders, Enomai, and his forces entered the Metapontum region, and warfare has been raging ever since. All villages were plundered, and Metapontum City was besieged. The rebel army launched multiple sieges, and without Metapontum's well-equipped defenses, Governor Silanuus's appropriate responses, and aid from neighboring towns via sea routes, it might have fallen.

By early March, after several days of rest, Enomai's army launched another attack on Metapontum City.

The battle cries thundered beneath the city as both sides fought fiercely; Enomai roared incessantly from behind, his heart filled with anxiety.

Earlier this year, he and Cross led the army, departing Campania first, following Ania Avenue southward. Cross selected this marching route, believing that the direction had the most cities built by Greeks, who were skilled in management, naturally leading to an accumulation of wealth, thus providing more resources for their army.

This turned out to be true. The army swept through, and despite lacking time to conquer larger towns like Poseidon, Brentum, and Branda, it quickly resolved the material shortage crisis. The journey through

the Lucania Mountains encountered some minor problems but ultimately reached its destination—the Turi Plain.

The largest town here is Turi.

Turi's predecessor was Xubalis. The Xubalis people were indulgent in luxury and were eventually destroyed by Croton. Later, under the initiative and support of Athens' great Governor Pericles, Turi was established on the ruins of Xubalis.

The Turiians learned from Xubalis's downfall. Their city walls were solid and thick, with well-equipped defenses, making it impossible for Cross and Enomai's armies to conquer. Nonetheless, they encamped on the Turi Plain, raiding the surrounding areas.

Turi's military strength was insufficient, making them dare not venture out of the city to fight. They could only watch from the city walls as the rebel army continuously plundered the farms and villages.

Meanwhile, the reputation of Free Italy quickly spread throughout the Bruttium region (including the Turi Plain in the front part of Italy's boot), and displaced farmers and the poor from the region flocked to the Turi Plain, eagerly requesting to join the rebel army.

The substantial increase in material wealth and rapid expansion of the army's strength, however, led to friction between Cross and Enomai. This rebel army was primarily led by Cross, and their forces camped together and often acted in unison. But due to Cross's rather selfish nature, he often distributed more loot to his own troops, which naturally provoked Enomai's dissatisfaction after several instances. The two argued, and eventually, in a fit of anger, Enomai led his forces away from the Turi Plain, traveling along the coast northward in search of a new encampment.

His final choice of Metapontum was because he found it to be quite wealthy and able to support his troops. Moreover, not far to its east was the territory of Tarentum, where the main force led by Spartacus was stationed. Compared to the selfish and stingy Cross, Spartacus was undoubtedly more trustworthy, and Enomai could rely on him to ensure the safety of his forces.

However, the lessons learned on the Turi Plain also made him unwilling to merge into Spartacus's main force. This was due to the pride of a rebel leader, and he also wanted to prove to Cross that he could lead his troops independently and live well.

Still, the wealth of Metapontum was clearly incomparable to that of the Turi Plain. After plundering the surrounding areas, he still felt unsatisfied, thus wanting to capture the town. With Maximus already occupying Pompeii and his forces living better than anyone else, Enomai sought to emulate him.

But as it turned out, this coastal town, much smaller than Turi, was not so easy to conquer. Repeated failures in sieging made him extremely agitated. Ignoring the casualties of his soldiers and the advice of his subordinates, he vowed to capture the town. This was not only due to his stubbornness but also because he needed this victory to reinvigorate his prestige within the troops.

Chapter 130: Bad News_2

After learning from the lessons of previous failed sieges and spending several days meticulously preparing, he launched another attack, fully expecting to succeed this time. However, after enduring a grueling morning of battle, soldiers finally managed to reach the ramparts, only to be quickly driven back, failing at the last moment.

This enraged him greatly. In a fit of anger, he ordered the entire army to press forward, stationing himself in the rear to maintain order, declaring that any deserter would be executed without mercy. He vowed to capture the city today.

Meanwhile, as Enomai's army was vigorously attacking Metapontum City, a fleet docked on the nearby coast. It carried nearly 150 allied cavalymen from Heracleia and Metapontum, who disembarked on the beach (Heracleia is located not far to the west of Metapontum, and there is a small Roman naval base within the city at Tarentum Bay, which is one reason Enomai had not attacked it).

After a brief rest, the cavalry circled to the north and then charged straight for Enomai's position, where Enomai only had a Guard of twenty by his side...

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In the gentle sunshine, the azure waves lapped against the steep coast. Black and green rocks emerged intermittently among the white waves, and green grass and low bushes crawled along the shore. Amidst this vibrant greenery, a broad gray-white road ran along the coast, remarkably conspicuous.

Because of the rebel army's presence, it was nearly impossible to see bustling crowds on the road. However, today a force of nearly a thousand marched along the highway.

Leading the procession was Maximus. Today, he wore a white waisted undershirt beneath a segmented iron armor polished to a bright shine and donned a feather helmet while riding a black steed, exuding an aura of majesty.

Surrounding him was fifty cavalymen, a unit he had painstakingly built over several months. Behind them followed five hundred fully armed infantry, a part of his Personal Guard, led personally by Oluus.

Following the infantry was a Supply Team of over a hundred, with several dozen carts carrying essential food, fodder, and tents for the march.

At the very front, leading and scouting were fifty cavalymen from Spartacus's army, led by Okmar.

Two days ago, Okmar arrived in Sarabia as a messenger to deliver the news of "Enomai's death in battle" and conveyed the rebels' order to hold a memorial and convene an urgent military meeting to Maximus.

This force of fewer than a thousand marched at a normal pace, and by afternoon, a coastal town appeared ahead.

"Is this Bari City?" Okmar made a gesture of looking afar and then asked. When he arrived, he had gone directly north, first reaching Canosa to inform Attutmus, and then downriver to Sarabia, so he hadn't passed through Bari.

"That's right." Maximus looked ahead with a calm expression but spoke with increasing weight: "At the end of last month, Bari had already submitted to us, Free Italy, and promised to supply a certain amount of provisions monthly. They fulfilled their promise last month, which I found quite commendable."

Not expecting Maximus to bring this up, Okmar was momentarily stunned before letting out a dry chuckle: "Leader Maximus, your approach is quite different from others."

Maximus smiled softly and spoke in a deep voice: "I think this method is better, as it can prevent our brothers from suffering casualties and provide us with essential resources regularly, strengthening our might... Looting, of course, can yield more, but it's a one-time deal. You and I should remember this from our time in Campania. Let's not forget, our greatest enemy is the Romans, who can attack at any time, and we must be ready to respond!"

"Maximus, there's some truth in what you say, but—" Okmar's tone shifted, becoming more serious: "Many of the newly joined brothers believe that the nobility in every town of Apulia and Calabria are also enemies of our Free Italy and must be eliminated early to prevent them from allying with the Romans against us. Yet, you, Maximus, shield these Roman accomplices, which has garnered a lot of resentment against you!"

"The newly joined brothers? You're probably talking about that fool, Cleonis." Maximus let out a cold laugh, speaking in anger: "Everything should follow a proper order of precedence. Bari submitted to me long ago, providing the urgently needed supplies, and I promised their safety, so my word must hold.

Recently, that fellow ignored my subordinates' repeated warnings and led his troops into Bari Territory, injuring the soldiers who tried to block him. Naturally, I had to send troops to teach him a lesson; otherwise, how could I face being the leader of this Free Italy!"

"But Cleonis accused Spartacus of arbitrarily seizing the supplies he had looted and letting go of the captured Roman citizens (referring to Bari's residents), even injuring many of his subordinates... But, Spartacus didn't believe him at all and didn't even send anyone to ask you about the situation; instead, he warned him, telling him not to lead troops into Bari Territory again."

"With Spartacus's shrewdness, I, of course, trust him to remain impartial. However, my subordinates told me, this guy calls himself a leader. Since when can anyone just become a leader?"

In response to Maximus's question, Okmar explained: "Since we entered the Calabria Region and set up camp east of Tarantu, many have come to join us; it's almost reaching 100,000 now! And a few, like Atmidonos and Tormas, have organized their own troops and demanded to join collectively, forcing Spartacus and Hamilcar to agree to let them lead on their own.

Take Cleonis, for example; he was originally an impoverished horse breeder in Southern Calabria, reportedly quite respected in the area. This time, he gathered over a thousand people to demand joining our forces and, within a few days, doubled the size of his unit.

Spartacus, following previous practice, allowed him to participate in the Military Commander Conference but gave him neither voting nor proposal rights. For him to become a true leader of Free Italy, it requires unanimous consent from a few of you. As for the leadership claims you've heard, they're probably just his and his followers' wild exaggerations, not to be taken seriously..."

At this point, Okmar sighed: "Conflicts similar to yours with Cleonis have indeed happened several times among us before. Now that there are so many people and ideas, each unit wants to secure enough resources, and Spartacus and others have tried their best to coordinate, but... sigh!"

Maximus remained silently thoughtful.

The troops bypassed Bari City, taking the road between two highways southwestward. After traveling a distance, a military camp appeared by the road ahead.

This is a camp built by Maximus Army. Since the indication of the rebel army to enter Bari Territory from the south surfaced, Maximus dispatched a unit promptly to safeguard Bari's safety. After repelling Cleonis's attempted invasion, the Barians agreed with Maximus to have this army stationed here long-term, with rations mainly supplied by Bari City.

Maximus raised his head to take a look and said: "It's almost evening; let's rest here overnight and head to Uriya (uria) first thing tomorrow morning, okay?"

"Sure." Okmar promptly agreed and then added: "You see, it takes two days to travel from Sarabia to Uriya. I think your camp is a bit too far."