

48 Hours 751

Chapter 751: Suggestion

Varo spent about half an hour telling Zhang Heng his heartbreaking life story, including how his wife and best friend tricked him into investing all his money in the Egyptian textile business and how they convinced him into signing the terrible contract. After that, he talked about how he became a slave and sold to the gladiator school.

It was not until the others came back to the house that Varo shut his mouth. However, he still could not help but feel really disappointed. So, he started to cry loudly on the bed to make himself feel better. At this time, Bach and the Germanic walked into the house.

The men seemed to have adapted to their current life. Bach had once felt that Gaby was torturing him. However, he was no fool. Although his training was twice as tough as the others, Gaby had also found him more than one trainer, instructing them to tailor an improvement plan for him. Two of the trainers were willing to pass on their trump cards to him for free.

When he thought about Gaby and Mark Reuss's conversation, Bach realized that Gaby was not torturing him. Gaby had made up his mind to build him into the next Sethnets, the reason why he did not hesitate to use up the favor that others owed him so far.

Nonetheless, Bach was still not pleased. He did not know what glorious feats Sethnets had achieved so far, and he wasn't about to allow himself to be the next Sethnets. He wanted to continue to be Bach, the one and only. And now that he had accepted the fact that he had become a gladiator, the next thing that he wanted to do was to kill all opponents who stood in his path of becoming the new legend in this arena.

The group of Germanic people reminisced over some pleasantries. Maybe it was about what that they did in their hometowns or the heads they chopped-off in the battle. Everyone seemed happy. However, upon walking into the house, they heard an annoying crying sound.

"What happened?" one of the Germanic asked compassionately.

Bach and others burst into laughter upon hearing this.

"Give the poor man some space. He has just experienced the worst day of his life," said Zhang Heng.

"The worst day of his life?" Bach sneered, walked out of the crowd, and walked in front of Zhang Heng, "Let me tell you what a bad day is. My father was killed by a Roman when I was nine years old. Just because it so happened that he was fishing by the river, an arrow that came nowhere and penetrated his eyes. On the same day, my brother was stabbed in the heart by a spear on the battlefield, and my mother was dragged away in front of me. I still don't know where they sold her. I'm the only one still alive in my family because I hid under a bed. I didn't cry that day because tears only make people weaker. Crying is for women. So please tell your friend that we don't mind treating him the same way we treat a woman if he continues to cry."

Bach exuded a daunting aura. Several other people in the same house could not help but stray a little further from him. Bach was expected to graduate first in his class and became the successor of Sethnets. Gaby had poured in everything he had to train him. His violent temper was as famous as his brute force.

But what made Bach a little surprised was that the Oriental man in front of him showed no fear on his face after seeing him getting angry. He leaned on the wooden pole and tilted his head to look at him.

“This is not a competition. Even if you experienced something worse than him, you have no reason to deprive him of the right to be sad,” Zhang Heng said lightly.

As soon as he said this, the room suddenly became quiet.

All eyes were focused on Zhang Heng and Bach. This was the first time in the same class had the guts to talk back to Bach, the Germanic bull.

“Are you sure that you want to stand up for this wuss?” Bach’s face darkened. “Before my fist falls on your face, I strongly recommend that you reconsider your stand.”

It was not the first day that Bach saw Varo getting upset. To Bach, Varo was not a man that had the guts to face reality. During the first day of school, he called out to the leaving Mark Reuss and expressed his desire to leave the training ground. In Bach’s eyes, he was a wuss that only knew how to take advantage of everything around him. Besides, he did not treat his training seriously as well. He felt irritated seeing his wimpy looks, let alone his wailing and crying now.

It was hard to imagine having such a weak, cowardly and incompetent person sleeping under the same roof. However, since the recent training had drained most of his energy, he could not bother to deal with Varo. Tonight was his last straw. When he saw Varo crying on his bed, the dissatisfaction that had accumulated in Bach’s heart exploded.

As for Zhang Heng, Bach was not bothered. After all, Zhang Heng had been lying low all the time. He was neither lazy nor prominent. However, Zhang Heng’s toughness surprised him a little today.

“I’m simply stating a fact,” Zhang Heng shrugged. “Since everyone is now a slave, and perhaps we will have to compete with each other in an arena in the future. If we have no intention to get along, there is no need to hurt each other too.”

“Who would compete with that piece of garbage. I don’t think he can pass the final assessment. Maybe Gaby will sell him to the countryside in a few days,” Bach sneered.

“Never underestimate a person’s potential. The question is when he will realize his strength.” Zhang Heng touched his chin, and he glanced at Varo as he spoke. However, the latter’s eyes were hollow, like a walking corpse.

“So you want to stick your nose into this matter?”

“Oh, it depends on whether you are willing to accept my suggestion,” Zhang Heng said.

Bach stopped talking, and he started to clench his fists.

Before he could swing his fist, Zhang Heng said, “Wait a moment.”

“Why? Did you change your mind?”

“No, if we want to fight, I suggest that we go to the training ground to do it since there is more space over there,” Zhang Heng then paused for a while. “You can ask your men to guard the entrance of the training ground and prevent others from coming in.”

“Why? You don’t want others to watch you being beaten up by me?”

“Trust me. This is for your own good.” Zhang Heng said, “If you still wish to become Sethnets’s successor.”

Bach did not reply to Zhang Heng immediately when he what he said. He stared into Zhang Heng’s eyes and replied after a long while, “Okay. Since you have the guts to challenge me, I will agree to your request. No matter who wins or loses, I won’t bother this sissy again. Anyway, he is not going to last long here.”

“Very well. Let’s stick with this plan,” Zhang Heng said.

Chapter 752: You Won

Zhang Heng and the group of Germanic returned to the training ground.

At that time, the sun had already set entirely. Bach lit the oil lamp, and the remaining Germanic started guarding the training ground entrance to ensure that the two would not be disturbed.

“What weapon do you want?” Bach raised his chin and asked Zhang Heng.

“Just give me a training sword,” replied Zhang Heng.

“How about the armor?”

“No need for that.”

Bach then threw the training sword to Zhang Heng and warned, “I’ll give you a fine piece of warning first. I won’t show mercy just because I’m impressed by you. You’d better be prepared to be beaten by me.”

“Well... Most things in this world are unpredictable.” Zhang Heng took the training sword and weighed it casually in his hand.

The training swords in the gladiator school were all made of wood. It was much shorter than a Tachi and was similar to the bronze swords from the Spring and Autumn Period. According to a saying—one inch long, one inch strong, and one inch short, one inch more dangerous—it was probably to make the gladiatorial performance look more intensive.

Bach saw that Zhang Heng had only taken a training sword, and he did not want to have an advantage in any way. Hence, he grabbed a wooden sword as well.

“Where is your shield?” Zhang Heng asked.

“Since you are not using one, I will not use one too,” replied Bach proudly.

“It’s up to you then. Anyway, you can get it if you need it later.”

Bach was finally irritated by Zhang Heng's words. "Don't start getting arrogant just because you knew I was impressed. I've changed my mind now. I'm going to make sure you stay in bed for a week."

"Really? Then you'll have to make sure that you give it your best," Zhang Heng calmly replied Bach while raising his eyebrows.

The next instant, Bach charged at Zhang Heng furiously, brandishing his training sword at him.

The results—Bach experienced the same thing that happened to him seven days ago. Zhang Heng managed to dodge his attack easily. While Bach surged forward under his own inertia, Zhang Heng used his sword to block him.

With a loud tap, Bach flew backward, falling down and rolling on the ground.

Immediately, he stood up from the ground. The way he looked at Zhang Heng had finally changed. In the eyes of others, they thought that Bach had made the same mistake again, where he underestimated the enemy—one that subsequently took advantage of the flaws in his movements. Zhang Heng had used Bach's own strength to topple him.

Bach knew very well that the training plan tailored exclusively for him by Gaby and the other trainers was to eliminate weaknesses in his previous battles. He was different now as compared to how he was a week ago. Although he still could not defeat Habitus—if his opponent used the same move again, he was confident that he would not fall in embarrassment.

Zhang Heng darted around like Habitus. Though both were agile fighters, a rather large difference separated the two. Especially with the hit that Zhang Heng landed on Bach just now—he managed to cause Bach to completely lose his balance, the real reason behind the burly man falling to his feet.

Was the Oriental man in front of him the master he claimed he was? But why didn't he see it in him during the previous training sessions? Bach was bewildered. With doubt in his heart, he attacked again. However, only two moves later, Zhang Heng slashed his sword at Bach's chest.

Zhang Heng did not exert too much strength in his attack, merely tapping his sword lightly on Bach's left chest.

When he taught the kids swordsmanship in Koyama Dojo, Zhang Heng had fought similar training battles several times, and he knew the right time for him to exert his strength.

In the meantime, Bach was drenched in his cold sweat. If Zhang Heng were holding a real sword, he knew he would have been dead by now.

On the opposite side, Zhang Heng did not continue to attack while Bach was distracted. Instead, he put away the training sword and took two steps back. He then asked gracefully, "Do you need a shield now?"

Bach became deeply embarrassed when he heard what his opponent had just said. However, he doubted that he could block Zhang Heng's attack even if he decided to use a shield. That said, he also knew that he would surely lose the battle if he chose not to grab a shield immediately.

Bach was impulsive, but he was not stupid. So, he went and grabbed a small buckler and held it in his left hand. Instead of charging at Zhang Heng, he put up an unprecedented defensive position as though facing an extremely formidable nemesis.

Upon catching sight of Bach and Zhang Heng's brief battle, the smiles on the Germanic's faces were quickly wiped away, replaced by gaping jaws and bated breaths.

Bach was a famous warrior in their tribe. In order to avenge his dead family, he had killed many Roman soldiers and even a centurion. Hence, they were surprised when they witnessed Habitus defeating Bach. A week had passed, and they had managed to dig up some information about Habitus's background. They now knew that Gaby had them fooled.

In the gladiator circle, Habitus was a very famous man. Although he was not trump card material like Sethnets, he was considered the second most powerful gladiator in the Victor Arena, causing swathes of girls to have a crush on him. After traveling a long way to the arena and not knowing the opponent's background, Bach's loss was actually justified.

As for Zhang Heng, this was a completely different situation.

Among everyone who entered the school together was Victor Arena's new hope, the successor to the famed Sethnets. As for Zhang Heng, he had been laying low and hadn't spoken much. Falling out of favor, he was assigned to the Dimachaerus group, the gladiator type that had infamously low chances of surviving the arena.

By logic, Bach should have had been able to crush Zhang Heng easily.

Judging from the previous fight, this battle's outcome was self-evident. Bach was on the losing side from the beginning to the end, unable to retaliate even with the strength he had. Although he now had a shield with him, he remained standing still, daring not to charge at Zhang Heng. Bach knew that his confidence was gone, and defeating Zhang Heng had now become a remote possibility.

Since Bach was unmoved, Zhang Heng made his instead.

He swung the training sword in his hand to match the pace of his feet. Every single strike was precise, made so Bach would find it extremely hard to defend himself. The large Germanic had to parry the attacks with the shield and training sword in his hand. After blocking several of Zhang Heng's advances, his forehead was already drenched in sweat. The noises of the clashing wooden swords and shields resonated in his ears.

Bach knew that he could not retreat anymore, or Zhang Heng's momentum would become more and more vigorous. And he was almost forced to retreat to the corner of the training ground. At this time, he tossed whatever distracting thoughts he had in his head and swung his wooden sword at Zhang Heng, embracing the odds that Zhang Heng would stab him.

This was the first time Bach fought back. It was all or nothing, and he wasn't expecting anything from it. As long as he could push Zhang Heng away and catch a breath, it would be considered a success. The thing that would happen next, however, was something he did not expect. He heard a snapping sound, and when he raised his head again, he saw that Zhang Heng had taken a half step back, and the wooden sword in his hand had been knocked away, landing on the ground.

“You won.” Zhang Heng looked at Bach, emotionless. “Congratulations.”

Chapter 753: Fantastic Strike

After Zhang Heng congratulated him, everyone fell into silence, and a burst of cheers broke out at the training ground entrance.

Bach’s companion, the five Germanic, were cheering loudly.

If someone told them before the competition that they would be excited over Bach’s victory, they probably wouldn’t have believed it. To them, Bach was supposed to win this battle.

But after witnessing this arduous battle with their own eyes, they would never have such a thought in their minds anymore, especially after seeing Bach enduring a “hard fight” and never gave up. He tenaciously chose to face his opponent’s intensive attacks again and again. In the end, they assumed that he had found Zhang Heng’s weakness and defeated him with a single blow.

There was nothing more exciting than how he claimed his victory. Bach was like a hero who could never be killed in a comic. Not only such a spirit had inspired him, but it also influenced the people around him. However, Bach was not as excited as his companions. He was still in a daze when the cheers burst out.

Seeing Bach’s expression, Zhang Heng had to say, “That was a good strike. You found my only weakness. Given the circumstances at the time, your attack was very bold. Coupled with impeccable timing, I didn’t expect I’d lose this battle. If you struck me too early or too late, you’d be the one to lose.”

“I found your flaw?” Bach was skeptical, mainly because he was suppressed by Zhang Heng earlier. He knew that there was no way he could have won the battle. The last strike that he performed was something that he did out of desperation. However, he still won the fight in the end. When he thought about Zhang Heng’s unremarkable performance in the training camp before, it was hard not to suspect that Zhang Heng might have lost the battle on purpose.

“Isn’t it?” Zhang Heng’s sincere rhetorics had Bach wondering if he hit the jackpot. After all, the situation was very critical, and his last strike might have had the blessings of Mars, granting him victory in this intense battle.

Seeing the ecstatic look of his companions, Bach could not say a single word.

“You should join them to celebrate your victory.” Zhang Heng stretched out his hand.

Bach hesitated and finally handed over the training sword and the small round shield in his hand. It also meant that he accepted the final result. After that, Zhang Heng picked up the wooden sword that fell to the ground and put them back where they belonged.

Bach promised that he would leave Varo alone whether he won or lost, so winning or losing did not matter to Zhang Heng. According to his original plan, he wanted to become a free man in this gladiator school without raising any attention. Hence, losing was a better outcome for him.

Although he lost the battle, Zhang Heng could also see from those Germanic eyes that there was no need to worry that the armistice between them would be voided. After all, those who possessed excellent skill and strength in this school would earn everyone’s respect.

Since Zhang Heng had shown a part of these skills, he knew that he had earned their respect.

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In Zhang Heng's opinion, Bach's troubles were the easiest to solve. As for Varo, he had to get out of the darkness on his own.

Zhang Heng had a good impression of Varo, being the first person he encountered in this quest after all. Before getting sold as a slave, he was a Roman citizen, and since Zhang Heng knew nothing about Rome's history, he had to ask Varo many questions and learn from him. Although most of the knowledge he had learned so far couldn't be put to use yet, it would eventually come in handy, considering the 24 extra hours he had. In other words, Zhang Heng would have to stay here for the entire duration of a year and a half. It would be impossible for him to stay here for that long, and taking comfort in the fact that he would be leaving this place soon, everything he learned from Varo would come in handy.

As for Varo, he was pretty interesting. Perhaps it was because the family's business had been handed down to from his father that he became quite the expert in buying and selling antiques. That said, he wasn't nearly as treacherous as most businessmen were. According to him, his daily work was quite simple. All he needed to do was to go to the streets to collect antiques and sell them in his store. Most of his customers were regulars.

His innocent character also caused him to be deceived by others easily. All the wealth he accumulated so far was gone, and he was sold here to become a slave. After learning the truth, Varo looked even more devastated than before. He did not even notice the battle between Zhang Heng and Bach. When Zhang Heng returned, he had stopped crying, but he closed himself up completely this time. Whatever little hope he had was now completely lost, and only numbness remained in his eyes.

For the next two weeks, although he was still training, eating, and sleeping, as usual, every day, everyone could see that he had completely given up on the upcoming assessment. If this went on, he would be sold to the countryside sooner rather than later.

Gaby was thinking about letting Varo work in a mine. It made no sense for him to continue staying here. Bach, however, had talked to Gaby and asked him to give Varo three days to recover from the tragedy he went through.

Gaby was a little surprised. As far as he knew, Bach and Varo were not that close, and he completely didn't expect Bach to actually intercede for Varo. And Gaby did not reject Bach's request because Bach's act of goodwill would eventually draw others closer to him. After all, he was expected to become the rightful leader of this class.

Although the gladiators were expected to fight with each other, it didn't mean camaraderie and friendship didn't exist between them. Sometimes they would partner up to fight other gladiators. Although a lone wolf was strong, it would be even stronger if other wolves helped it.

Gaby was a little curious about how a man like Bach could think of something like this, but he gave it no extra thought since he had something else to do now. After all, leaving Varo here another three days was a small matter.

More than twenty days passed. The deadline given by Mark Reuss was getting closer, and Bach's training continued on smoothly as planned.

Now, however, Gaby realized that he had a bigger problem to deal with.

Gaby knew very well that Bach's current training would never get him to Sethnets's level. Even if he tried to bribe gladiators more famous than him to fight with him, the lie would be exposed one day. The higher he went, the more pain he would be in when he fell.

If he was unlucky, Bach might even lose his life. By that time, the gladiator school would have suffered a significant loss.

Gaby even thought about replacing him with a well-known gladiator, Habitus, for instance. He had always been popular and had a consistent winning rate as well. Other than that, his fighting style seemed very pleasing to the audience. Though he didn't have as much potential as Bach, he was of greater strength. Perhaps Habitus could be selected as Sethnets's successor, so Bach would have more time to grow.

Gaby was so deep in his thought that he forgot Bach was still standing in front of him. When Gaby saw that Bach was getting impatient, he nodded, "Yes, he can have three more days."

Chapter 754: Double the Training

Bach didn't care if Varo lived or died. He was only willing to plead for Varo because of Zhang Heng.

Since that hard-fought victory, Bach had begun paying attention to this Easterner that he previously never bothered to even look at. He even secretly observed Zhang Heng from time to time during the training.

However, the outcome only confused him even more. Looking serious, Zhang Heng did not slack off during the duration of the training. When it came to his performance, however, it was lower than average. Hence, it was not an accident that Gaby classified him as a gladiator candidate with a good attitude but limited talent.

Zhang Heng's Asian appearance was rare and strange to them, not to mention how it could be used as a selling point. Consequently, Gaby was prepared to loosen up some of his requirements during his final assessment.

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Three days was a short time, especially for someone who had just experienced something devastating. It was far from enough time for Varo to cheer up. But as Bach had said before, everyone on the training ground had a story, and they had a reason for their enrolment at the gladiator school. Although it was wrong to be miserable, life was, at most times, cruel. With no way to change what had happened, all the person could do was grab hold of the present.

Judging from his current condition, it seemed Varo had even given up on the present. And he intended to give up on himself as well. In the three days granted to Varo, Zhang Heng did not do anything for him. Zhang Heng had decided to help because he was a friend, not to mention how this was supposed to be

Varo's last chance of proving that he was worthy of staying here. If Varo himself had lost the desire to live, however, it would be pointless trying to help him no matter how hard someone tried.

It was a shame that Varo would have to spend the rest of his life in a cold and dark mine.

But Zhang Heng did not expect that a small accident would happen in the afternoon of the third day.

There were gladiator performances in the arena. Since the arena was low on manpower, Gaby ordered Varo, who had no hope of passing the assessment, to help him, informing him at the same time that there was no need to attend the training anymore.

Gaby had given up on Varo completely, and it was almost the deadline. A group of new slaves would be sent off to work in the mines the day after tomorrow, and he planned to send Varo away at that time.

When Varo heard the news, his face still bore no expressions. Neither struggling nor resisting, it appeared his heart was dead. He put down his training sword and followed the overseer to the arena obediently.

His partner showed a touch of joy when he left. He felt unlucky after he was asked to train with Varo, seeing how the experience was similar to chopping a tree. Now that his sparring partner was his trainer, Varo's partner could feel the pressure mounting on his shoulders.

Zhang Heng watched Gaby disappearing into the entrance of the training ground. He did not know if this would be the last time he would see Varo. On the other side, Bach stole glances at Zhang Heng as usual. And Gaby found out about it this time. The latter harrumphed in dissatisfaction, then clapped his hands and asked for everyone's attention. He then made an announcement.

"Starting today, everyone's training volume will be doubled."

The announcement caused a mighty uproar. The training regime designed for the gladiator candidates was extremely tough, no doubt harder than the basic training regime during the first week of school. If their current training were to be doubled, they would not have time to sleep or eat. Let's not even talk about the assessment. If this were to go on, they might not even last until the day that would happen.

Hearing the announcement had Zhang Heng feeling displeased. He could see that Gaby was getting desperate. Although there was no scientific training in this era, the gladiators were the cash cows of gladiator schools. Under normal circumstances, the school was obliged to take good care of them.

There was a limit on both the amount of training and the frequency of performances that every gladiator could endure. The gladiator school would also use massages, baths, and strict diet control to keep their gladiators in good shape. The warriors ate a staple diet made of whole-wheat, and at the request of the school, grounded animal bones to enhance their bone strength and toughness.

Doubling the amount of training could seriously damage the trainees' physiology. It might work well for a short time, but it certainly wasn't a cost-effective option in the long run.

Because he had just chatted with Habitus, and the outcome was not optimistic.

The Gaul was very cunning. It seemed like they were told that Gaby was having a problem finding someone to be Sethnets' successor. So, they had asked the gladiator school to invest more money in them, refusing to become the backup gladiators.

Habitus was a veteran gladiator, and he knew exactly how this business worked. There are always twists and turns in a matter like this. Gaby asked him to hold on until Bach's skills had fully matured. After that, in order to squeeze every penny out of him, Gaby would arrange a duel between him and Bach, allowing Bach to defeat him.

There was nothing more eye-catching than this kind of battle, something that would certainly trigger the audience's interest in Bach. It was a good plan so far, with the only problem being Habitus not wanting to become Bach's stepping stone.

If Habitus was a slave, Gaby could disregard his opinions and make him obey his orders without question. In general, the school would not force their star gladiators to do things they were unwilling to do. However, the school was not in a special phase, and Habitus, unfortunately, differed from Bach, Zhang Heng, and others. He was a free man.

And he was not just a free man who regained his freedom from slavery. He was a regular Roman citizen, just like Varo. He wanted to become a gladiator simply because of the money and women. Although he had signed a contract with the gladiator school, one that required him to perform in the arena for a few years, at least after training was complete, he was only bound by the school on the surface.

Gaby wanted to discuss things with him that he could not tell anyone else. Every gladiator school had unspoken rules when it came to arranging duels for their gladiators. They had to consider their popularity and promote their newcomers. The crowd wouldn't want to see some carefully choreographed stunt, so such things were naturally not in the contract.

Habitus's contract was not entirely fulfilled so far, and he did not want to go against the gladiator school. However, he did not want to sacrifice his own interests and let the school take advantage of him. Habitus was also unsure if he could hang on until Bach's skills were fully grown. Hence the two parties did not agree to the terms of the initial negotiation.

Gaby could only continue to force Bach to develop his potential as soon as possible. Bach was still young anyway. Although he came off looking rough and rugged, his actual age was only eighteen. Even if he had hidden illness, it wouldn't be surfacing for the time being.

Others were collateral damage. To make Bach feel like he wasn't the only one asked to double the training, Gaby decided to ask everyone to do it with him.

Chapter 755: Thank You

As expected, no one could complete the extra training on the first day.

As the sun went down, it was way past their mealtime. Everyone was famished. The fastest among them had only completed a third of the extra training. Zhang Heng made sure he did not over perform during the training, crucial that he maintained moderate progress. Among all of the gladiator candidates, Bach suffered the worst. Even before their training volume was doubled, he already had to train harder than the rest of them. In other words, he had to work even harder after their training was doubled.

Looking like a fish out of the water, he stared at Gaby not far away from him.

And Gaby seemed to have not felt Bach's anger and resentment. He watched the trainers walking among the crowd without saying a word while urging those who wanted to take a break to carry on with their training.

Finally, there was a candidate who could stand it no more. He threw away the training sword in his hand, shouting, "I want to eat!!! I want to eat!!! If you want us to train more, at least let us eat first."

Many actually agreed with him, but only three to five people responded. Although the rest did not speak up, the looks on their faces were enough to show that they agreed with his suggestion from the bottom of their hearts.

Gaby heard the words and walked to the man who threw away the training sword. He then said coldly, "Pick up your weapon."

Usually, the man who tossed the sword would not dare disobey Gaby's order. But now, perhaps he felt that his request was reasonable, or perhaps he felt that there were a lot of people supporting him from behind that gave him more courage than usual. Hence, he didn't bend down to pick up his training sword.

"Very well. You don't need to train if you don't want to train. You will be sent to the mines with the man named Varo the day after tomorrow," said Gaby.

The man who threw the sword was shocked, realizing suddenly that he had just done something stupid. Gaby decided on the life and death of the slaves. With only one sentence, he could turn their fate upside down.

Since Mark Reuss was not here, Gaby was the king. Unfortunately, it was too late for him to beg for mercy now. Gaby seemed determined to make an example of him as a negative role model. After he dropped the order, two trainers came forward. They went up on both sides of the man and dragged him out of the training ground.

The latter screamed while struggling, "You can't do this to me! Let me be a gladiator! I can make more money for the arena!"

"Do I look like I lack gladiators?" asked Gaby indifferently. He had made such a decision because he wanted to motivate the others to train harder. Besides that, he was in a nasty mood right now.

Habitus was not willing to obey his orders. After all, he was a veteran in this gladiator school, and he was also a celebrity in the arena. By comparison, the sword thrower was a nobody. Gaby was mad that he used his self-worth to threaten him. People like him could be replaced easily.

After all, no one in this group was irreplaceable except for Bach.

Just when the sword thrower was about to be dragged out of the training ground, the two trainers stopped moving forward suddenly. Gaby frowned, and the sword thrower was overjoyed. He thought Gaby must've changed his mind. What he did not realize was that Gaby was looking at the man behind him.

"Why are you back?" Gaby asked.

“The performance is over. I’m back here for the training,” replied Varo. His appearance had changed a lot. His beard that had not been shaved for several weeks was now gone, and his hair had been cut short. He looked way more energetic now. The most important thing was that his eyes were once again filled with vitality. It looked like he started to care about his life again. Obviously, he was in a rush when he cleaned himself up, considering the few razor cuts present on his cheeks.

“Didn’t I tell you that you don’t need to come back here anymore?” Gaby was indifferent as if he had not seen the changes on Varo.

“You said that I have three days to change your mind. The third day is not over yet,” said Varo calmly without feeling any fear.

“Interesting.” Gaby was not angry when he heard how Varo talked. After a short pause, he continued, “I’m a man of my word. In this case, I will keep you until sunrise tomorrow. I have just doubled the amount of training. If you fail to complete it, you will be sent to the mines tomorrow.”

“I will make sure I won’t be sent to the mines,” Varo proclaimed confidently.

“I think we will know the answer to this question soon.” Gaby raised his chin, “Go back to training.”

The sword thrower saw hope when he heard their conversation. He then quickly said, “I know I’ve done something wrong. Please let me continue to complete the training. I promise I will work harder than anyone else.”

“No, I have found someone to fill your position now. You are no longer valuable to me. I hope you like the air in the mines.” Gaby waved his hand and asked the trainer to drag the person away.

On the other side, Zhang Heng whispered to Varo, who was carrying the wooden pole, “Welcome back.”

“Thank you,” replied Varo sincerely. Earlier, he looked as though he had given up on life, but it did not mean that he had no idea about what was happening around him. Varo knew that Zhang Heng fought with Bach because of him. And the reason why Gaby was willing to let him stay in this school for another three days obviously had something to do with Zhang Heng.

“You are a true friend. If I can continue to stay here tomorrow morning, I will definitely repay you in the future,” Varo added afterward.

Zhang Heng was curious about what happened to Varo. He thought that he had given up on himself, but it seemed like the trip to the area rekindled his fighting spirit. Could he have been moved by the gladiators’ heroism when they performed in the arena?

However, this was not the time for them to chit-chat. Their short conversation had managed to capture Gaby’s attention. So Zhang Heng quickly shut his mouth and carried on with the training.

...

At 3 a.m., someone finally completed the training. And Zhang Heng was one of them.

Gaby was not inhumane. He did ask the cook to leave some food for them. Although the food was already cold, no one had the strength to complain at the moment. Everyone hurriedly went to bed after eating.

In the end, only Varo and his trainer were left on the training ground. Varo's body was almost at its limit, but he clenched his teeth and did not give up on the training. Amid the training, he fainted once from exhaustion. However, he did not say a word when he regained his consciousness. All he did was continue to push himself to complete the regime.

Early the next morning, after Zhang Heng had finished breakfast, he went to the training ground. He saw that Gabi was already there and he was talking to his trainer.

"I don't know why you insist on staying here. So what you complete all the regimes before sunrise? A new set will begin soon after that. How are you going to push yourself to carry on with the new set of training?"

"Hatred," Varo wiped the sweat from his forehead. Something was burning in his eyes.

"There is no power stronger than hatred, right?"

Chapter 756: Who Will Be First To Draw the Lot?

Continuous high-intensity training would gradually cause people to lose their ability to think. Most of the trainees had even forgotten how long they had been here.

In addition to the training, the only other things Zhang Heng did were eat, sleep, and excrete waste from his body. And it had been a long time since he had enough sleep or food. No matter how much they ate, they would feel hungry again in no time. No matter how many hours they slept, their bodies would still be sore for two days...

Other than the unfortunate man who was dragged out of the training ground earlier, seven more people failed to withstand the training's immense pressure. Hence, they were forced to quit school.

Among these were four Roman citizens. They had chosen to terminate the contract with the gladiator school and return to where they came from. And the other three quitters were slaves. These ended up being taken to the mines the next day.

What surprised Gaby the most was Varo. He did not expect that the man could complete the training and survive. The latter had completed the first day of training before sunrise and devoted himself to a new regime the very next day without eating or resting. Having not much hope in him, Gaby had thought that he would not be able to continue with the intensive training. To his surprise, however, Varo miraculously completed the next round. Although Zhang Heng smuggled some water and bread for him during the training, the only decisive factor that made him press on was sheer willpower.

And Gaby was impressed by him. Fighting skills were important for a gladiator, but willpower was indispensable for them as well. When it came to resolve, however, Bach had the strongest when compared to other gladiator candidates. He had endured the highest volume of training, and apart from occasional expressions of anger, he never complained.

Gaby did not grant Varo an easy way out just because he was impressed by him. After all, Varo was no highly-talented newcomer like Bach, worthy of major investment. His willpower was the sole reason he could survive until now, and even if he failed to complete the training, the gladiator school would suffer no losses. After all, there would always be a shortage of manpower in the mines.

For now, Varo seemed to be doing quite well. Having fully completed the first and second day of intensive training, he managed to earn three hours for himself, primarily for sleeping and eating, allowing his body to replenish. On the third day, he completed his training slightly faster than before. In return, he got to rest even longer.

But his good luck ran out on the fifth day. He hurt his feet during the training. Gaby did not say a word about it, simply asking him to go carry on. So Varo dragged himself to the training ground with his injured foot and, as a result, almost failed to complete the day's training. To make matters worse, his ankle swelled up the next day thanks to the previous day's strenuous exercise, causing him to move sluggishly.

Varo managed to complete the task before the next sunrise. However, despair hit him hard on that day because he knew how bad his current situation was. It was not something that could be made up with sheer willpower. Considering the state his physical strength and injuries were in, it was impossible for him to complete a new training round.

But fortunately, Zhang Heng gave him something to help. The latter made a simple ankle brace out of bark and cloth. "Put it on," he said, tossing it to Varo.

Back in the real world, Zhang Heng and Wei Jiayang liked to play basketball, but Wei Jiayang kept spraining his ankle. Thus, he would buy an ankle brace to speed up his ankle's recovery. Obviously, the company that made it would not be delivering any ankle braces to its Roman customers in the second century, so Zhang Heng fashioned one out of whatever materials that were available around him. Luckily, he roughly remembered its structure.

Under Zhang Heng's guidance, Varo put on an ankle brace, had some bread and water, and finally managed to survive the most precarious day. Eventually, his bad luck seemed to be coming to an end. Although his injuries looked terrible, at least he did not hurt his bones. Thanks to the brace, he started to get better and finally recovered from his injury.

Gradually, Varo caught up with the others, thus gaining more time to eat and rest.

On the forty-ninth day, Gaby canceled all the training sessions and gathered everyone together. He looked at every single gladiator candidate in front of him. The number of gladiator candidates had been reduced from 43 to 30. Due to various reasons, 13 of them had been withdrawn voluntarily or involuntarily.

Among them, the number of free men had dropped drastically. After all, Gaby suddenly doubled the amount of training without warning, reaching a stage where it was unbearable for most ordinary people. Since there was more than one gladiator school in Rome, it was unnecessary for them to cling to this particular school if they were still determined to become a gladiator.

So by the forty-ninth day, there were only two free men left, with the other twenty-eight all slaves.

This result was in line with Gaby's expectations.

The next thing that they needed to do was the final highlight.

It was a gladiator assessment.

Nearly one-third of the gladiator candidates had been eliminated so far. And not all thirty of the remaining candidates would pass the assessment and become gladiators. Certain schools in the city would take into account the cost of training and purchasing slaves. Hence, they would loosen the assessment standards. Gaby knew that he was responsible for the spectators' satisfaction, so he never had the intention to relax the requirements of the assessment in the two decades he was head of the school.

Only a good gladiator could give the audience the most exciting of performances.

It was precisely because of his strict adherence to this principle that the number of spectators who chose to enter Victor Arena had remained high.

Due to Mark Reuss's request, this assessment had another purpose.

"Congratulations, you have completed the first part of the training," said Gaby. "But don't be too happy just yet. Only by passing the final assessment can you become a true gladiator. And for those who fail the assessment, you should know the fate that awaits you without me elaborating."

Gaby paused and looked at everyone's expressions before continuing. "Relax. The assessment is fairly simple. It is not as tedious as your previous training. Gladiators are born to fight! So there is only one criterion for evaluating how good a gladiator is, and that is whether you can win battles."

Not only was everyone unafraid, but they were even eager to try it out. They had been training so hard for so long. Finally, it was time for the results of that training to show.

"Very well. Keep this excitement with you. I believe you have also inquired about the assessment before. After you draw your lot, you will fight with your assigned opponent, and the winner will pass the assessment. I will judge the loser based on performance. However, this time, we decided to change the way we carry out the assessment."

It was a twist for all the gladiator candidates. Suddenly, the training grounds fell eerily silent, and the joy of freeing themselves from the hellish training wiped-off from everyone's faces. On the contrary, everyone could feel that something terrible was about to happen to them.

Gaby continued calmly, "In order for you to understand better what a gladiatorial performance is, and the gap between you and an official gladiator, your opponent will be selected from the school's official gladiator list. The battle arrangement will be decided by lots drawing."

"Now, who will be the first one to draw the lots?"

Chapter 757: Battle Arrangement

They were supposed to fight with their peers. Many of them were left in fear when Gaby told them that they had to fight with the school's official gladiators. Undeniably, it was terrible news. Some, however, were not bothered by this change of rule. Among these was Bach.

He walked towards the spot where they were supposed to draw the lots, grabbed a wooden sign casually, and handed it to the trainer on the side. The latter looked at the name on the wooden sign. "Bach, play against Posthumus," he said.

After that, he wrote Bach's name on the other side of the wooden sign to mark the game arrangement for this round of the fight.

Bach grinned, "Tell that guy, wash up and wait for me!"

After speaking, he walked away from the lot-drawing table. When he stepped down from the stage, he did not forget to glance at Zhang Heng again. Gaby noticed that Bach kept on looking at Zhang Heng the whole time. He knew that Bach had fought Zhang Heng earlier and won the battle. What he did not know, however, were the specific details of the battle. He could not figure out why Zhang Heng irked Bach so much. For a while, Gaby was even a little suspicious of Bach's sexual orientation.

Bach then drew the lot, marking the beginning of the assessment for everyone.

The hellish training had allowed Gaby the pleasure of everyone's respect. Since he set the assessment, everyone could only bite the bullet and abide by the new rules. Not all were as talented as Bach. It seemed like he was not worried about the fight with the official gladiators. Without a doubt, the winner would pass the assessment. On the other hand, the losers might pass in the evaluation if they performed well during the battle. As long as they tried their best to fight their opponents, there was still hope for them.

Of course, this had a lot to do with their opponents as well. The best scenario would be fighting with someone who had just become an official gladiator. That would mean the gap of skill between both sides would not be that wide. Their win-rate would also increase if they fought with the gladiators that always lost.

Of course, the worst scenario was to run into venerable veteran gladiators who had rich combat experience. Usually, those battles would be over in a short time. The moment they found their opponent's flaws, there was no chance for the opponent to fight back. In other words, the gladiator candidate would be unable to showcase the result of their intensive training, and the probability of them passing the assessment would be very low.

Zhang Heng waited until half of the gladiator candidates drew their lots before going up the stage.

To the others, Zhang Heng was simply unlucky that he had to go against a veteran gladiator named Garba. Thirty-seven years old this year, he was considered to be the oldest among the other gladiators. If he was still allowed to fight in the arena, that meant he had to be very good at what he did. At his age, his physical fitness had drastically decreased. Basically, he was relying on his combat experience to fight his opponents.

Looking at Garba's record, he was a consistent fighter. Even though he could not defeat those grandmasters, he could rely on his combat experience to drag the battle and make it more exciting for the spectators. This kind of gladiator was usually known as the legendary newcomer-killer.

The biggest shortcoming of the newcomers was experience, or rather, the lack of. Whether it was control of the battle rhythm or the ability to react to critical moments, their trainers taught none of these. These were things they had to accumulate through battles.

Garba happened to be a gladiator with a lot of experience.

Unfortunately, he was about to meet a monster newcomer that would cause him to lose a battle. Let alone other aspects, even Garba with a lot of combat experience would be unable to defeat Zhang Heng.

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Zhang Heng did not care much about the result of his draw. It made no difference to him who his opponent was. After looking at the name on it, he handed the wooden sign to the trainer and stepped down from the stage.

Varo was more nervous than Zhang Heng. His combat level was considered below average, meaning his chances of defeating his peers were extremely low. He was now asked to fight a real gladiator from the arena, causing him to be extremely anxious. After all, he had worked so hard and survived the hellish training. All his effort would be wasted if he failed in his assessment.

Varo took a deep breath and waited until most of the people knew who their opponents would be. He then walked to the lot-drawing table and drew a wooden card with his trembling right hand.

When he saw the name on the wooden card, and his face started to turn pale, and he was in complete shock. His right hand trembled even more severely now. And that was not it. What he did next was throw away the wooden card, ran to the side, and vomited his undigested breakfast from his stomach.

The trainer picked up the wooden card on the ground and looked at Varo with a hint of sympathy. According to the rules, he had to announce his draw's result, "Varo's opponent is Habitus."

Everyone was left bewildered when they heard the name, and their eyes involuntarily landed on Gaby.

This had gone overboard. Let alone arranging for them to fight formal gladiators, making the gladiator school's trump card fight with a candidate was an act of a bully. It was no wonder Varo started vomiting.

Earlier, Habitus managed to defeat Bach and humiliated him by making him fall to the ground. If he had fought with other gladiator candidates, they would have ended up a lot worse.

"Don't look at me," Gaby said causally, "Habitus volunteered to join the battle."

That was only the half-truth. Habitus did mention to Gaby that he wanted to join the assessment and became the judge. And he pointed out that he only wanted to fight with Bach.

Habitus realized that the school had placed too much emphasis on Bach as their current trump card. Hence, Habitus felt that his status was challenged. So, he wanted to teach Bach a lesson, showing Gaby who was more worthy of the school's investment.

Gaby, however, told Habitus that the final assessment would be based on a lot-drawing system. It had been done to ensure fairness and that there would be no predetermined opponents for the candidates. Gaby did not believe that Bach was ready to challenge Habitus after completing forty-nine days of training.

Habitus thought this matter was over. He did not expect that Gaby would mess with him by including his name in the lot-drawing box. Just when he was about to find a place to have a good drink, Gaby had sent someone to break the news to him about him having to fight someone during the assessment tomorrow. Also, his opponent was a rookie named Varo.

Habitus was furious when he heard the news.

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Meanwhile, the last gladiator candidate had drawn the final lot, marking the end of the lot-drawing session.

Everyone's mood was different when they saw the opponents they had to face during their assessment.

Gaby then clapped his hands again to attract everyone's attention. "The assessment will begin tomorrow morning, and the master will come over to witness your training result. I hope you can perform well. And you can ask your trainers about your opponent's information. Everyone needs to be ready to face the battle tomorrow. Do not let the master down."

Chapter 758: Do You Want To Listen To the Truth?

Gabi had much to deal with, hurriedly leaving the training ground after arranging for tomorrow's match.

The rest of the gladiator candidates were gathered in front of their trainers, inquiring about their opponents. After they knew about their opponents' fighting styles, they quickly turned around, looking for people with similar combat styles to spar with them, thus simulating their upcoming battle.

Varo was the only one sitting on the ground alone, motionless.

From the back, he looked really lonely. This time most people could understand his frustration. He was truly unlucky to get Habitus as his opponent. There was a massive gap in strength and skills between the two of them, which also meant that Varo was destined to be defeated by Habitus tomorrow. That could only mean that he would fail his assessment.

Zhang Heng also asked his trainer about Garba, including his chances of winning and losing and his fighting style. The trainer had a good impression of Zhang Heng, even reminding him that he had to pay extra attention when fighting a cunning veteran like Garba.

Upon expressing his gratitude, Zhang Heng walked to Varo's side.

Without even looking, Varo knew who was approaching him. "Don't worry," he said, "I haven't given up on myself yet. You asked me what made me make up my mind to become a gladiator, right?"

"Are you willing to tell me now?" Zhang Heng sat down beside Varo.

"I saw him that afternoon, the same afternoon I went to help in the arena." Varo clenched his fists.

"Who?"

"My best friend, or... rather, ex-best friend." Varo laughed sarcastically. "I trusted him fully... gave him all my money so he could help me invest in the textile business in Egypt. Not too long after that, he told me that he had been robbed. The authorities told me that he was dead and all the money was gone. They did send the body back to Rome, though. There were no problems with his height and body shape, but his face was disfigured."

"He's back?"

“Yes, and he is with my wife now. They sat in the stands, enjoying the gladiatorial show. I don’t think they saw me. After all, even I didn’t pay attention to the slaves in the arena when I watched the shows back then.”

Varo’s ex-best friend’s arrogant behavior surprised Zhang Heng. Initially, Zhang Heng thought the man would leave Rome, moving to a new place forever with the wealth he had robbed from Varo. By doing that, there was no way to prove that this whole thing was a hoax. Nobody expected him to have the audacity to settle down in Rome with Varo’s wife.

“Can you sue him and get your wealth back?” asked Zhang Heng.

Varo shook his head. “Julia Basilica only accepts lawsuits from Roman citizens, and slaves are not allowed to sue anyone. Besides, I don’t have any money to hire a lawyer. And I know he would find all kinds of reasons to defend himself. For example, he could claim that he did encounter a robber but managed to run away. And others had mistakenly identified the dead body as him. After all, I was the one that signed the contract voluntarily at the beginning. No matter what the reason was, I did breach the contract.”

Varo was now a lot calmer than when Zhang Heng first met him, which was why people said hardship was the best way to mold a person. However, the problem Varo had experienced so far was too outrageous.

After experiencing his wife and his best friend’s betrayal, then losing his freedom, he finally snapped out from his miserable phase. He then went through a hellish training period that was almost impossible for him to survive, only to find out that he would fight with Habitus in his final assessment.

Varo hesitated and asked, “What are the odds that I will win against Habitus?”

“Do you want to hear the truth?”

“Of course.”

“Not even 10%.” Zhang Heng told him the truth. “He a gladiator at his golden age. His physical fitness, combat skills, and combat experience are a lot more advanced than you. This gap cannot be made up by sheer willpower. Even after the hellish training, Bach has a very slim chance of winning against him.”

“What about you?” Varo asked.

Zhang Heng smiled, and he did not answer his question. Instead, he turned around and said, “Your goal is not to beat him. You need to focus on passing tomorrow’s assessment.”

“As you said, his physical fitness, fighting skills, and combat experience are all above me. It will be a one-sided battle tomorrow. How can I pass the test?” Varo smiled bitterly, “I don’t even know how long I can last in that battle. Ten rounds perhaps?”

“I think you overestimated yourself, my friend,” replied Zhang Heng euphemistically. “Defending or running away allows you to drag the battle, but that’s pointless.”

Spectators were known to not treat gladiator deserters very well. Once the weaker gladiator was defeated before the audience got to watch the exciting performance, they would urge the organizer to execute the loser. To please the audience, the organizer would not hesitate to do it in front of them.

Thus, even a cunning gladiator veteran like Garba would have to fight hard when he encountered an opponent who was way stronger than him.

“The key to passing the assessment is not the number of rounds, but whether or not you can cause Habitus a little trouble.”

“Causing Habitus trouble? What kind of trouble? Will my blood be spilled on his sword?”

“It has to be something bigger than that,” said Zhang Heng. “If you are fighting someone else, I don’t think I can help you. Since we have seen Habitus’ fight with Bach, I think I can give you some suggestions.”

“Really?” Varo asked in surprise. He looked at Zhang Heng again as if looking at the incarnation of Jupiter.

Zhang Heng had rescued him more than once. He bought him three days to prove himself to Gaby, made his protective gear, and now, he was even telling him how there might be a way to take advantage of Habitus.

“Don’t be too happy. I’m not too sure about it as well. After all, it has to depend on your on-the-spot performance and Habitus’ attitude towards you.”

Zhang Heng continued after a pause, “Logically speaking, he should not participate in this sort of entry-level gladiator assessment. We don’t know why he is on the list now, but my guess is that he has some conflict with Gaby. After all, Bach’s growth will threaten his current position. Gaby is probably taking this opportunity to bring him down. Therefore, Habitus is not in a good mood. Other than that, he is a very proud individual as well. Here is your chance. I can play his role and do some sparring with you. We have the whole day to ourselves. If you can do what I say, you can probably cause him some trouble. Even if everything goes well, you only have about 40% chance to execute the plan.”

“Enough. 40% is better than 10%.” Varo gritted his teeth. “From the moment I was sold here, I have only one way to get out of this place. I have to do whatever it takes to regain my freedom.”

“Very well. Let me tell you what to do.”

Chapter 759: Your Turn

After forty-nine days, Mark Reuss appeared at the balcony on the second floor again. This time, the two female slaves that came with him had been replaced by a Persian and a Parthian. They were doing their best to serve him as he sat in a chair.

Mark Reuss, however, didn’t seem too happy because the arena’s attendance rate had dropped again in the past two months. He had to increase the number of battles Habitus had to execute every month, and even that only managed to bring back some audience to the arena. Simultaneously, the greedy Habitus had also taken the opportunity to ask for a larger share and his commitment to growing him as the school’s trump card.

On the other hand, Mark Reuss had also got some political news from the front line. It seemed like the new emperor, Commodus, was unwilling to take over the mess left by his father, Aurelius, and he was preparing to negotiate with the Germanic. This was not good news to Mark Reuss because prisoners of

war played an essential part in his gladiator's pool. Most of the highly-talented gladiators were prisoners of war, not to mention that he had been busy looking for Sethnets's successor. Mark Reuss could only pin all his hopes on Bach.

According to the tradition, a great gladiator show would be held each time a new emperor was crowned. In order to win the hearts of the people, this show was admission free and would be held in the Flavian Amphitheater, the largest arena in the entire Roman Empire. The arena funded by the royal family took 80,000 slaves and eight years to build and could accommodate up to 90,000 spectators. Considering its age, it had to be said that this was one of history's greatest architectural wonders.

An arena without gladiators would be pointless, seeing how they were the highlight of the show.

Although the royal family also owned a gladiator school, it was not large enough to support a grand performance like this. It required the cooperation of several gladiator schools from the private sector to supply them with their gladiators. Of course, that didn't come free of charge. After all, growing and training gladiators were known to be costly. However, since this performance's nature was to win the hearts of the people, there would be no income, and the organizers had to bear the cost.

And asking money from the nobles and emperor was no easier than asking for money from the commoners.

Mark Reuss would lose a lot of money if he asked for too little money from the organizer, but he was afraid it would offend the powerful or the emperor if he asked too much. If that were to happen, he would not be able to stay in Rome anymore. Usually, Mark Reuss would choose to overlook the slight loss. By doing that, not only did he get to show his goodwill to the emperor, but he would not lose too much money too.

Still, this was something genuinely annoying to him.

Marco Cruz came to inspect his goods with all those troubles and dissatisfaction for the new emperor. He had spent a lot of money on this batch of slaves and had to know if the money he spent on them was worth it.

The order of the battle was decided by the lots drawn yesterday. After Gaby paid a respectful salute to Mark Reuss, he began to organize the assessment. The rules of the battles were the same as the gladiator performances, except that they would be using wooden weapons this time. In a one-on-one battle, each gladiator could only use one weapon. A sneak attack from the back was an act that the audience would despise. The other side could not attack his opponents if he admitted defeat. Besides, a trainer would be there to act as a referee during the battle.

After confirming that everyone understood the rules, Gabi started the roll call.

The first gladiator candidate that stepped on the stage was Griff. A Roman citizen, it seemed he was in luck. His opponent was a young man who had just become a gladiator for half a year. He was a little younger than the gladiator candidate, and his combat experience was not as rich. Nonetheless, the young gladiator won after a rather lengthy battle. The gladiator candidate didn't fight back, but he managed to catch Griff's weakness, eventually defeating him.

Gabi then commented, "You should concentrate more on the battle. You did fine during the first half, but later, you seemed distracted. And your attacks were not decisive enough. It is good to be cautious of your opponent, but sometimes, the situation requires you to make quick decisions. Even a wrong decision is better than hesitation."

Griff looked a little frustrated when he heard the comment. He knew that Gaby was telling the truth. The fact that he was a newcomer, and this was the final assessment that determined his fate, it was inevitable that he would overthink everything. Sometimes he would hesitate to attack when he saw his opponent's flaws, worried that it could be a trap. Hence, he missed a lot of good opportunities.

After Gaby watched Griff for a long while, trying his best to fight his opponent, he announced, "You pass the assessment."

Griff's expression instantly turned from worry to joy, and Gaby did not say anything after that. He let him stay in the room on the west side.

After Griff was a slave named Galata's turn. His opponent was a well-known gladiator with three years of combat experience. If Griff was cautious of his enemy, Galata acted like he was going to face an invincible nemesis.

As soon as his opponent made a move, Galata quickly took a few steps back. And Gaby was displeased by his response. Fortunately, Galata soon realized that his action was going to cause him to lose some points. In order to make up for his big mistake, he ditched his defensive posture and started to attack his opponent.

However, his opponent keenly noticed the flaws in his attack and evaded Galata's attack easily, managing to place his training sword on the latter's neck in the next second. The battle did not last very long, and he won easily. Immediately, Galata's face turned pale.

He looked at Gaby with an imploring gaze, but the latter remained unmoved. Gaby then announced in a merciless voice, "You've made bad decisions during the battle. You attacked your opponent without any plan, and your ability to respond to attacks is worse than a pig. You fail the assessment. Go to the house in the east."

"For the sake of the hard work that I put in my training, please give me another chance. I wasn't well prepared this time. Next time... the next time, I will not make this kind of mistake again," pleaded Galata. He knew all too well what going to the house in the east meant. Since he failed the assessment and wasn't a Roman citizen like Griff, the only fate that awaited him would be getting sent to the mines.

"But death will never give you a second chance, my child," Gaby continued coldly. After that, he blinked, and two trainers pulled Galata away, who had almost collapsed on the ground.

On the second floor, Mark Reuss had not said a word, eating a fig peeled by a female slave next to him.

Having not much interest in the previous battles, the only thing that he really cared about was Bach. Today was the deadline he gave Gaby. He wanted to see how much improvement Bach had made after the hellish training given by Gaby. After all, he was the appointed successor of Sethnets. However, Bach's battle was arranged almost at the end of the assessment. Hence, Mark Reuss could only wait patiently.

Once Galata was dragged away, Gaby spoke again.

“Zhang Heng, Garba, it’s your turn.”

Chapter 760: Victor Arena’s Evergreen

Zhang Heng walked out of the crowd and took the wooden weapon handed to him by the trainer.

Immediately, everyone focused their sights on him.

Although they had gone through forty-nine days of hellish, high-intensity training, everyone had improved a lot compared to when they first came to the gladiator school. However, judging from the results of the first two rounds of battle, the newcomers were still not as promising as the official gladiators.

If Griff suffered from a terrible defeat, then Galata’s defeat could only be categorized as purely miserable. At present, the rookie’s score was zero to two, with the official gladiator on the winning side. After witnessing Galata’s fight, the atmosphere on the rookie side had become a whole lot more tense.

As for the upcoming battle, Zhang Heng was still on the unpopular end. Apart from the fight with Bach, he had left hardly any special impression on the others; his performance during the training merely satisfactory. Among the newcomers, he was considered average and not very eye-catching. On the other hand, his opponent Garba was a veteran gladiator.

With his age came heaps of combat experience.

He became a gladiator when he was twenty-eight years old. After that, he worked as a gladiator for nine years. Considering that a gladiator’s average age was only twenty-five years old, Garba’s career could be regarded as a miracle. His situation was similar to Varo’s, where he became a gladiator to pay off his debts.

In his third year of being a gladiator, he managed to pay off his debts. After that, he went on retirement for half a year. Due to personal reasons, he returned to the arena half a year after his retirement, and he had been a gladiator since then.

In the past nine years, he had witnessed the rise and fall of countless heroes, even getting to witness the legend of Sethnets. He did not have too many glorious battle records, but with his conscientious working attitude and the time he spent working as a gladiator, he managed to attract a group of regulars that would come and watch him fight no matter what.

And he was also known as the evergreen tree of the Victor Arena. There was also speculation among the audience if Garba would die fighting or retire. Always one of the hot topics in the Victor Arena, some people had even started to bet on it.

Garba and Zhang Heng then came to the stage together, where Garba gave Zhang Heng a smile. In turn, Zhang Heng smiled back politely.

Garba was a little surprised by how Zhang Heng reacted. He was there to watch the performance of the two newcomers earlier. Once a rookie himself, he knew the importance of the final assessment to them, and it was inevitable that they would feel nervous. However, when he looked into Zhang Heng’s eyes, he saw no nervousness in them. In fact, he could not see through him at all.

The latter's eyes were as calm as the starry sky at night.

Garba did not have time to overthink it because the trainer had signaled them to start the battle. Zhang Heng did not make the same mistake that Galata made. He did not take the initiative to retreat before the battle began, and he did not put on a defensive position like Griff did either. Instead, he took the initiative to approach Garba at the beginning of the fight. He did not attack him immediately, though, changing into a defensive posture right when he was about to enter Garba's attack range.

Gaby nodded unconsciously when he saw this.

This was the best move a clear-headed gladiator candidate would make during a battle. Although the gladiatorial performance required both gladiators to fight against each other, it was still a form of entertainment. A good gladiator would not merely focus on pursuing victory, but he also needed to consider the spectators' preference. Sometimes, they could even use this to open a way to their victory.

On the surface, Zhang Heng and Griff had the same combat strategy. They both defended first and fought steadily after that. However, the two steps that he took earlier were enough to build the audience's excitement.

The former looked like he was going to drag the fight, but the latter passed on this trouble to his opponent. As the oldest gladiator in the Victor Arena, Garba certainly realized that he had to attack now no matter what. So, he decided not to wait any longer. Initially, he had planned to stay and figure out Zhang Heng's strength before attacking.

Compared with the newcomers, this group of official gladiators who were tasked to evaluate their opponents had a downside as well. They knew almost nothing about their opponents. There was nothing strange about this. After all, they were newcomers with no combat record, save for Bach, regarded as the school's future trump card. Since none of them were famous, the official gladiators had no way to check out their backgrounds.

Zhang Heng's fighting style, his strengths, his weaknesses... these were all unknowns to Garba until the moment he attacked Zhang Heng. Hence, he became very cautious when two of them were asked to fight. Most of his attacks were mainly aimed at probing Zhang Heng.

As the opponent, Zhang Heng also responded with the standard moves taught by his trainer. Although there was nothing too impressive about them, at least he did not make any mistakes. After that, Garba began to increase his aggressiveness as his plan gradually failed, attempting to pressure Zhang Heng into revealing his weaknesses.

This was also the method used by veteran gladiators to deal with the newcomers. Many newcomers could deal with their opponent better if their opponent took their time to attack them. However, if their opponents started to attack them aggressively, they would have a shorter time to think, and it would cause them to panic. At such a time, the veteran gladiator could rely on his survival instinct to take over the body. This was something the newcomers could not do.

Besides, Zhang Heng was a gladiator that used two swords, and he was not good at defense. As for Garba, he was a Murmilo, and the only weapon that he had was a short sword. Other than that, he was given a shield the height of half a man to defend himself.

And with Garba's rich combat experience, a short sword was enough for him to defeat the young man before him. Sure enough, when he started to put pressure on him, Zhang Heng also gave up on his defensive position and started to attack him.

Their battle was not that exciting so far. Mark Reuss was so bored that he did not even bother to eat the figs on the second floor. Gabi, on the other hand, was paying full attention to the battle. An amateur would see this as an ordinary fight, but only an expert would know this battle's quintessence.

Gaby saw that Zhang Heng had not made any mistakes so far. In fact, he seemed to have managed a calm and clear mind when faced with different scenarios. This was an extremely rare advantage. Such an ability was not something newcomers usually achieved.

Griff and Galata were the best examples. Compared with the two, Zhang Heng's opponent was Garba, the arena's living fossil with ages worth of combat experience. However, Zhang Heng did not allow himself to be affected by Garba's fighting rhythm.

Suddenly, Gaby started to have a slight interest in this eastern man that he had not paid much attention to. And he also remembered the scene when the two met for the first time. He wanted to scare Zhang Heng with a whip, but Zhang Heng seemed to know that the whip wasn't long enough to reach him. So, he did not even blink.

A gladiator with outstanding psychological quality?

Gaby felt it was expected that he did not pay too much attention to him earlier.

Maybe Gaby finally had something to look forward to?