

48 Hours 761

Chapter 761: Can't You Do Something New?

Unconsciously, Gaby's impression of Zhang Heng had turned up a notch.

So far, Zhang Heng's current performance was enough to pass the final assessment. However, Gaby did not stop his battle with Garba. Except for the battle that would become a stalemate, the final assessment generally allowed the participants to finish the battle. Besides, Gabi also wanted to see what Zhang Heng could do to elevate the battle further. So, he just stood at the side, said nothing, and continued to observe Zhang Heng.

This was not the first time Garba surprised Zhang Heng. Under pressure, Zhang Heng gave up defending, but it did not surprise him. However, his boldness and decisive attacks were not something Garba expected. Zhang Heng's attack moves were not that special, and his strength and speed were ordinary, but Garba was still at a disadvantage in this battle. And the reason was simple.

That was because Zhang Heng had two swords, but Garba only had one. Although the Dimachaerus had a relatively high mortality rate among gladiators, it was not without its advantages. Zhang Heng abandoning his defensive abilities allowed him to double up his offensive ability. Once Zhang Heng started to attack, Garba would have to focus on his defense. In other words, it would slow down his offensive moves.

Garba was not worried about it because the murmillo's strength was not offensive but defensive. As long as the tower shield was in front of him, all the attacks would miss him. Other than that, he still had a giant helm on him. The defensive abilities of a murmillo were comparable to a well-constructed wall.

However, that did not mean that the murmillo was invincible in the arena. There were only a few types of gladiators in the arena, and each of them had been studied thoroughly. Zhang Heng was now adopting a standard method to deal with murmillo.

The tower shield that the latter carried could provide him with many defensive capabilities, but it would also reduce the murmillo's agility.

During the battle, Zhang Heng kept circling Garba. The two swapped roles, and the person who was testing the opponent's offensive abilities were Zhang Heng. On the other hand, Garba was staring at his opponent through the gap in the helmet. When Zhang Heng moved, he would turn to ensure that the shield could protect him.

So far, although Garba had not been able to gain any advantage, he was still very confident that he could win this battle. After all, he had experienced many fierce battles and was good at handling this kind of situation.

But then again, Zhang Heng's calmness went way beyond his expectations. Still, Garba firmly believed that he would be the final winner in this battle.

Many people despised Garba because of his age, thinking that Garba's physical fitness had deteriorated. And they were not wrong. Technically speaking, only his strength, speed, and agility had gotten worse. However, his endurance had gotten stronger over the years. Besides, he also figured out a way to fully

utilize his stamina. If Zhang Heng thought that he could exhaust him just because he was young, it would mean that he had fallen into his trap.

However, Zhang Heng, on the other end, did not seem to realize this problem. He was still trying to circle Garba, trying to attack him from all angles and directions. All the attacks, however, were blocked by Garba's tower shield. In order to avoid being too passive, Garba would strike at Zhang Heng a couple of times with his short sword.

And Garba was very cunning. Zhang Heng was deliberately exposing his weakness to trick him into putting down his guard. However, Garba did not fall for it. He would take a step back every time after he delivered a blow to Zhang Heng. And he managed to slice Zhang Heng's arm when he tried to attack.

The trainer who served as the referee judged that even if they were using real swords, the wounds shouldn't be too deep. Hence, the battle raged on. This successful strike had also managed to convince Garba that there was nothing wrong with his strategy. He looked at Zhang Heng and thought, 'Boy, you're still too young to fight me.'

Sure enough, everyone thought that the battle would be over soon.

However, Zhang Heng's face still showed no expression. He figured it was almost time for him to put an end to the act. Next, employing every skill he had, he would need to create a memorable ending to this battle.

Zhang Heng's plan, after all, was to pass the assessment in a low-key manner. After putting a stop to his previous pretentiousness, it was time to show off his real skills in the final showdown. Gaby's current impression of Zhang Heng had changed from a non-talented, mediocre candidate to a cool-headed young gladiator with a promising future. He thought that it might be worth it for the school to invest in him.

That was more than enough for Zhang Heng. It was an impression he hoped to leave on others. He did not want to be a star-gladiator like Bach was but wanted to find a reasonable explanation on how he defeated his opponent in the arena in the future.

This was not a balance that one could easily achieve. However, it seemed like Zhang Heng had no problem in executing it. When all the gladiator candidates were thinking hard about how to pass the assessment, Zhang Heng was thinking about how to defeat his opponent as inconspicuously and reasonably as possible.

So far, he had done pretty well. Even Gaby, the well-informed man in charge of the gladiator school, could be deceived by him. He did not suspect that Zhang Heng deliberately concealed his strength, and he probably would not think that someone would be bold enough to hide their powers in the final assessment.

However, Zhang Heng did not manage to deceive some of them. Bach, as an example, who had fought against Zhang Heng, had kept his eyes wide open during the battle, afraid that he would miss some of the essential details.

Seeing Zhang Heng pretending to attack slowly, Bach could not help but criticize in his heart.

'Where are the furious attacks you used on me that night?!

And when he saw Zhang Heng getting hurt on the arm accidentally by Garba, Bach almost screamed out loud.

'How the hell did he manage to hurt you?' he thought. 'I didn't even get to lay my finger on you that night!'

Among many gladiators, Garba was considered a skillful gladiator, just not as capable as Zhang Heng. When Bach put himself in Zhang Heng's shoes, he knew Garba would admit defeat soon, or he would be split in two by Zhang Heng.

During that night, when Bach fought with Zhang Heng, he knew that he would never be able to defeat Zhang Heng. The pressure was on him from the beginning till the end of the battle. Now, he had to pretend that he was not much stronger than Garba. No matter how one looked at it, something was not right. That was why Bach paid full attention to the battle, already replaying the battle between him and Zhang Heng in his mind countless times. Still, he could not figure out whether Zhang Heng had deliberately lost to him or that he lost the battle for real. And today's contest might be able to answer this question that puzzled him for many days.

Other than Bach, another person in the corner was paying close attention to the battle. It was the old Persian trainer Zhang Heng met when he came to the school on the first day. He was not responsible for training the new people, and strictly speaking, this was only the second time he met Zhang Heng.

The old trainer seemed to be very interested in Zhang Heng. Since he was standing far away from the stage, Zhang Heng did not notice him.

Besides, the drama was about to come to an end. Zhang Heng had begun wrapping things up. After his left arm was injured, he changed his fighting style and became way more aggressive.

Garba was overjoyed when he saw Zhang Heng charging at him. Did the fish finally take the bait?

Gaby made the same judgment as well. He thought Zhang Heng had begun to lose his patience. Bach was the only one roaring in his heart.

'It's time! He is going to attack him now!'

Then he saw that Zhang Heng gave up on attacking Garba's other vital areas. Instead, he focused on Garba's eyes.

Garba was taken aback at first. After all, he was a murmillio with a giant protective helmet on him, never thinking the wooden sword in Zhang Heng's hand could hurt him. But he soon realized that something was not right. Zhang Heng would not use his sword to penetrate the helmet's tiny gap to hurt his eyes. Instead, he was actually trying to block his vision.

Although the almost fully enclosed helmet could effectively protect his head, it would also cause him to have blind spots. This was one of the reasons why Garba had to follow Zhang Heng's movements. Once his vision was blocked, Garba could only judge Zhang Heng's position based on his voice and position himself one second earlier.

But until now, Garba could still maintain his calmness because someone had used a similar tactic on him before. As long as he could defend himself well, Zhang Heng would not be able to hurt him. In fact,

Garba also managed to figure out Zhang Heng's intention. He knew that Zhang Heng was aiming at his left waist.

'Caught you!'

A glint flashed in Garba's eyes, and this time he did not put on his defense anymore.

Instead, he took the initiative to make himself vulnerable to attack. The training sword in his right hand was ready to strike at Zhang Heng. Before Zhang Heng could attack his left waist, he went and stabbed Zhang Heng's neck first.

This battle was not going to end up a tie. Based on Garba's calculations, he knew that his sword would reach Zhang Heng's neck first. And he was right about that. However, what he did not expect was that the goddess of luck favored Zhang Heng at this moment. When Zhang Heng saw that his plan was about to fail, his other hand made the final struggle and gave up blocking his vision, but instead, he used his wooden sword to stab his helmet. And it went right into the observation hole in front of his helmet.

From far, Bach was about to curse Zhang Heng.

'Another coincidence? Sure! Why not?! It's just another coincidence! Can't you do something new?!

Chapter 762: An Excited Bach

The helmet of the murmillio was designed to protect the head of the gladiator. Weighing about four kilograms, it was air-tight, just like an iron can. There was a hole in front of the helmet that allowed the gladiator to look at his surroundings.

Usually, it was hard for the opponent to stick his sword into the observation hole because it was tiny, not to mention that the gladiator would be moving around too.

This required keen observation and precise power control to carry out such a feat. Looking at Zhang Heng's previous fight with Garba, Zhang Heng had not possessed abilities like that just yet. In other words, it was simply a coincidence that Zhang Heng managed to strike his sword into the observation hole.

The referee checked again and confirmed that Zhang Heng's training sword did pierce at Garba's eye first, so he announced that the final winner of the battle was Zhang Heng.

After a moment of silence, the rookies started to cheer for him. Although Griff, first to step onto the stage, had passed the assessment, he still lost to his opponent. Until Zhang Heng defeated his opponent, the rookies had their first official victory.

And Garba was not just a random gladiator. He was a well-known gladiator in the Victor Arena. Zhang Heng's victory had given a huge morale boost to all gladiator candidates.

At the same time, Garba took his helmet off. Although he shook his head regretfully, he was not very angry. At his age, he had seen all kinds of weird things in the arena. It was not a good feeling for a veteran gladiator to lose to a gladiator candidate, but fortunately, this was not a formal gladiatorial performance.

And until now, he did not think that there was any problem with the strategy he adopted earlier. In the end, he was unlucky that he lost the battle. He did not think his defeat was unacceptable because the probability of him encountering such a defeat was one in hundreds of battles. After the battle ended, he congratulated Zhang Heng.

“Congratulations, the next time we fight again, we will fight in an arena.”

“I am looking forward to that day.” Zhang Heng replied and then looked at Gaby, who nodded at him, “You pass the assessment. You can now go to the room at the west and wait.”

Although Zhang Heng’s luck played a big part in his victory, Gaby was quite satisfied with Zhang Heng’s performance. He then added, “Well fought. Keep up the good work.”

Zhang Heng returned the two training swords to the trainer on the side, stepped off the stage, and saw Bach and his Germanic brothers staring at him with their eyes wide open, and their breathing intensified.

They were the rare ones who had the privilege of witnessing two coincidences happening in front of them. No matter how ignorant they were, they now knew what happened in Zhang Heng and Bach’s previous match. One might call it a coincidence if it happened for the first time. However, if it happened again and again after that, it could no longer be considered a coincidence. There was a high chance Zhang Heng was withholding his strength and skills during the battle.

Although the process and outcome of the two battles were different, the way Zhang Heng turned the tide around was similar. If this was not intentional, then what was?

Seeing Zhang Heng walking into the hut on the west side, Bach secretly clenched his fists. He knew that there was still a big gap between him and Zhang Heng. Although he was confident that he could defeat Garba, he could never manipulate the battle in such a dramatic way.

Bach had lost in the battles before. For example, he lost to Habitus when he first entered the gladiator school, but he later realized that Gaby deliberately asked Habitus to beat him up when he was weak. The reason was that he wanted to put some fear in him.

And Bach had to admit that Habitus was very strong, but he did not think Bach was much stronger than him. If it was a life-and-death fight without being restricted by the arena’s problematic rules and referees, Bach did not think that Habitus would live.

As for Zhang Heng, he was the first person to make Bach aware of how large the gap between him and Zhang Heng was. No matter the rules and location, Bach did not think he could defeat Zhang Heng with what he had now. With the way Zhang Heng moved in the battle, Bach smelled something familiar from it.

It was like a beast meeting another beast in the jungle.

Although Bach knew nothing about Zhang Heng’s background, he could sense that Zhang Heng was just like him—a warrior that fought hard to survive on the battlefield. And the war that Zhang Heng had experienced was more cruel and intense. Bach, who experienced a cruel childhood, believed that only blood and fire could make a real man.

According to his standards, Zhang Heng was undoubtedly a real man.

Of course, Bach was not discouraged. The Germanic now felt that they were full of energy. Before that, he had no rivals among the newcomers in the gladiator school. He was the focus of the school. The moment he was demoted from a warrior to a prisoner and later forced to become a gladiator, he had lost all of his goals in his life. And now Zhang Heng's appearance had just filled the gap for him.

So Bach felt that his blood was boiling.

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After Zhang Heng won the battle "accidentally," he did not stay at the assessment venue for too long. He followed the order and walked into the hut on the west side. This was originally a place to store weapons. Griff, who had just passed the assessment, was the only one in the hut. He was still drowning in the excitement. He was walking up and down in the house, and when he saw Zhang Heng came in, he greeted him enthusiastically.

"Did you also pass the assessment?"

Zhang Heng nodded, and he looked for a place to sit down. He and Griff were not that close with each other, so the two did not talk much. After waiting for about a quarter of an hour, a third person finally walked into the hut. He, too, had an ear-to-ear smile on his face. After that, the fourth and fifth gladiator candidates entered the room... As more and more people completed the assessment, fewer and fewer people were left on the training ground.

Those who were asked to enter the west room were extremely lucky. On the contrary, the fate of the people in the east room was not that great.

After a while, Bach also entered the hut.

No one was surprised that he passed the assessment. However, when his tall and burly figure appeared outside the hut, everyone could not help but be impressed him.

The main reason was that he passed the assessment too fast. The person before him had just entered the hit not too long ago. And now Bach was standing outside the hit. In other words, he did not take too long to defeat his opponent. And the most impressive part was that his opponent was an official gladiator.

And Gaby was very pleased with Bach's outstanding performance. Judging from Mark Reuss's smile on the second floor, it could be seen that he was very satisfied with the training that Gaby tailored for him. When Bach defeated his opponent, he was the first to stand up and applaud him. However, Bach did not look at him and walked to the west room before the referee announced the result.

This move was undoubtedly very rude. Surprisingly, Mark Reuss was not bothered by it. He even stopped Gaby from scolding Bach. He squinted his eyes and smiled, "It's okay. It doesn't matter. After all, he is our trump card, and it is only right that his attitude is different from others. Who do you think is more appropriate to fight with him in the opening match?"

Gaby then reminded him, "Master, the assessment is not over yet."

Mark Reuss knew that he was a little too anxious. So he nodded and sat down again, "Then we will talk about it when the assessment is over."

Chapter 763: Oath

Bach's fight was arranged when the assessment was coming to an end. After him, only three people hadn't yet participated in the assessment, including Varo.

Varo was supposed to fight Habitus earlier. Something unexpected happened during the assessment, and the main reason why he was still waiting for his turn was that Habitus was not here yet. Hence, Varo could only wait on the side. It was a rather embarrassing situation.

Fortunately, Habitus came to the training ground in the end. After all, Mark Reuss was here today. Even if Habitus was dissatisfied with Gaby's arrangement, he still had to show up for the sake of Mark Reuss. Although he was late, he still decided to come to the training ground.

Seeing that his opponent was a random gladiator he had never heard of before, he had no intention to change his clothes. He then picked up a training sword and said to Varo, "Come on, hurry up. I need to go to Thermae later. I hope you can make me sweat a little before taking a bath."

Varo did not say a word after hearing what Habitus had to say. He just lowered his head and grabbed his trident and fishing net. After that, he walked onto the stage and recalled the instructions that Zhang Heng gave him yesterday and the special training.

Now, it was all up to him, if he could pass the assessment or not.

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The hut on the west side where Zhang Heng was located had no windows. Hence, he could not see what was happening at the training ground. In fact, Zhang Heng would not go and watch Varo's battle even if there was a window in front of him. He had taught Varo everything that he knew. Now, Varo had to rely on his skills and luck.

Unlike Zhang Heng, who had deliberately put on a show, Varo needed the goddess of luck by his side this time.

There was too large a gap between the Varo and Habitus and as Zhang Heng had said, even if Habitus underestimated him, Varo's chances of defeating him were slim to none. All Varo could do was make the fight difficult for Habitus. After that, it was up to Gaby to grade him.

And the strategy that Zhang Heng taught Varo was very simple. He asked Varo to try his best to reenact the scene where Bach and Habitus fought no matter the method he used. He taught Varo four moves, all of which were to overcome the tricks Habitus used against Bach and possible outcomes that he would face after that.

The day before the assessment, Zhang Heng explained Habitus's character in detail to Varo after an analysis of him. Usually, all the attacks he performed were very fancy, which was how he became famous. During the battle, he would make sure that his attacks would embarrass his opponents. There were pros and cons to everything, however. Habitus's combat methods might look fancy, but they were quite easy to counter.

About ten minutes had passed since Bach entered the house on the west side, and no one came in after that.

Most of them thought that the eleven people left in this room were the only ones who passed the assessment.

Since they were from the same gladiator candidates, they developed friendships with each other compared to the school's veteran gladiators. At this time, whether they were familiar with each other or not, they were trying to introduce themselves. Bach, especially, was surrounded by those who passed the assessment. Because of his outstanding strength, the gladiator candidates were treating him like their leader. In the future, whether they would be teammates or opponents, it was better to be a friend than an enemy.

It seemed that they were right about being the only ones that passed the assessment. After a while, Gaby appeared outside the hut. The latter still had that stern look on him. "Everyone, don't let your master wait for you. If you are done with talking to each other, come out and take an oath. Only after taking the oath will you be treated as a true gladiator."

After he finished speaking, he turned around and walked back to the training ground.

Zhang Heng frowned. He thought Varo must have failed the assessment. When he came up with this plan for Varo, he knew that the possibility of him failing was higher than success. Technically speaking, this outcome should not be a surprise for the rest of them. And this could be seen from the faces of other people in the room.

But Zhang Heng still felt it was a shame that Varo couldn't pass the assessment. After all, it was not easy for Varo to survive until now. One more step and he would have been an official gladiator. If Bach hadn't come to this school, Varo would never run into Habitus. He would have at least stood a chance to prove himself when he faced other opponents. When Zhang Heng followed those who passed the assessment and walked out of the house, he saw Varo on the training ground.

A school doctor was examining Varo to make sure that he had broken not his ribs. And Varo grinned when he saw Zhang Heng.

At that time, Zhang Heng knew that the battle plan he had discussed with Varo must've worked wonderfully. And Gaby decided to keep Varo.

"Okay, don't linger." Gaby said, "Let's hurry up." While he spoke, he thought of something and put on a smile for the first time. But it was gone the next second.

At this time, the people who had just passed the test, Varo included, stood in a row at the training ground. There were a total of fifty gladiator candidates who took the assessment in the beginning, and now, only twelve of them were left. Only less than a quarter of them were still standing on the training ground. The elimination rate was cruel—all those who failed the assessment were either forced to discontinue the contract with the school or sent to work nonstop in the mines.

"All those that passed the assessment are here, my dear master." Gaby bowed at Mark Reuss on the second floor.

And Mark Reuss was still keeping his eyes on Bach. He did not even try to hide the joy on his face. He then nodded and said, "Yes. You did well. I didn't make a mistake when I entrusted the gladiator school to you. Let the oath-swearing session begin."

All of them had recited the oath last night, but some were destined not to get to use it today.

Soon everyone started to swear their oaths at a different pace, "...I swear, whether we are burned by fire, slashed by the sword, or spill out blood on the battlefield, we will fight till the end—all for the glory of Victor Arena and the dignity of the gladiator. We will fight like real warriors and dedicate our soul and body to our master, Mark Reuss..."

The moment they finished the last sentence, the trainers around them picked up a hot red soldering iron and branded a Latin letter V for Victor Arena on their arms. The female slaves who were holding the amphora then walked towards Mark Reuss.

And Marco Reuss, who had been sitting down, finally stood up at this moment, took the wine glass from the slave girl beside him, and raised it, "Welcome, welcome everyone to my gladiator school. As everyone knows, I am an exceptionally generous man. As long as you can bring victory for me and the arena, I will not hesitate to reward you with money or women. In order to celebrate all of you here passing the test, I have prepared wine for you. When you return to your room, there will be another gift waiting for you. Just have all the fun you want today, my warriors. And if you want more of that, remember to bring more victories to me. Finally, may the goddess of revenge, Nemesis, always look after you!"

After saying this, Mark Reuss left the balcony with the help of the two female slaves beside him.

Chapter 764: The Hot Bath That Went Viral In Rome

Gaby explained some rules that they had to pay attention to after Mark Reuss left. After that, he hurriedly left and caught up with Mark Reuss to discuss the opening game with him.

Bach did a good job in the final assessment, allowing Gaby to complete the task given by Mark Reuss. And he even received his compliments. Gaby, however, wasn't too happy. In fact, he was frowning.

He was responsible for Bach's training, and he knew Bach's true strength quite well. And he felt that it was not a good idea to push Bach to perform in the arena now. Based on Gaby's original plan, Bach would have to receive at least half a year of special training before he could truly become the trump card of the Victor Arena. It was not wise to make him fight with other gladiators now. However, Mark Reuss was not as patient as Gaby. After watching Bach fight with the official gladiator today, all he could think of was how to make full use of him, earning as much money as soon as possible.

Gaby did not know how to convince Mark Reuss to do the right thing.

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The people in charge were all gone, and only a crowd of gladiators who had just passed the assessment were left at the training ground. The atmosphere around them became very lively all of a sudden.

Although they had still not gotten rid of their slave status after becoming an official gladiator, the treatment they received from the arena was way better than before.

First of all, the hellish training that they had gone through was now gone. Although they still had to train constantly to improve their fighting skills, its intensity would not be as scary as before. Considering the care they received and the recovery method they had in this era, all those gladiators would have been abandoned by the school if they continued with the hellish training.

Other than that, everyone's accommodation was now upgraded. Before that, few of them had to sleep in a small room. Presently, only four were required to sleep in the same room. That would mean the snoring wouldn't get as loud at night. And the other perk of being chosen as an official gladiator was that they got to enjoy free baths and massages. Among them, the gladiators with Roman citizen status were allowed to leave the school at any time.

They could even stop participating in the school's training. As long as they participated in the battles assigned on time, they could do whatever they wanted. For example, Griff was told that his wife had just given birth to a son. He barely drank any alcohol and left the school in a hurry to go and check on his wife and his child. Other than unmarried men like Habitus, most of the gladiators with Roman citizen status would go home to sleep at night.

As for the slaves, they did not receive such good treatment from the arena. However, they were told that if they performed more than a year in the Victor Arena, they could ask Gaby if they could step out for some fresh air from time to time.

Besides, Gaby had also promised them that as long as they could obtain a certain number of wins, they could regain their status as free men. Nonetheless, even if they did regain their freedom, their social rank would still be lower than an ordinary Roman citizen. On the good side, their status would be higher than the foreigners that lived in Rome.

This was undoubtedly the most exciting perk for them. As compared to other slaves, gladiators held more honor. Many girls and noble ladies were attracted to these famous gladiators. However, no one wished to stay as a slave all the time, allowing their fate to be determined by others and being sold around like goods.

Zhang Heng and Varo returned to their new residence without drinking too much wine. They opened the door and immediately saw what Mark Reuss was talking about. They saw four female slaves sitting quietly in the room. They were naked, but didn't seem abashed. Instead, they perked up their bosoms as if sending a silent invitation to them.

However, Zhang Heng and Varo did not react much when they saw it.

After completing so many games, it was hard to attract Zhang Heng with physical bodies anymore. He was not going to say no to them, but it was hard for him to get any happiness from sleeping with someone who had no feelings for him.

Varo was a married man. He used to have many slaves working for him. Hence, he was not unfamiliar with this kind of culture. Unfortunately, his mind was currently not on this sort of thing. So he turned to Zhang Heng and said, "I plan to make a batch in the school bathroom. We haven't cleaned ourselves for so many days. I feel like I smell bad. How about you?"

"I'm with you," Zhang Heng nodded.

Other than Caesar and the gladiators, ancient Rome was famous for its obsession with taking baths.

Ever since the wealthy businessman, Gaius, invented the first hot water equipment set in the early 1st century, hot baths quickly went viral in the entire Roman Empire at an unimaginable speed, becoming a part of the Romans' daily life. Regardless of men, women, children, nobles, or slaves, none could resist the hot bath.

However, even for the wealthy men that lived in Domus, most of them would choose not to build an individual bathroom. Ancient Romans were more accustomed to bathing in public bathhouses.

There were hundreds of large and small bathhouses in the entire city of Rome. Among them, the largest and most famous Trajan Bathhouse could accommodate three-thousand people at the same time. And the admission fees for these bathhouses were usually very low. Take Trajan Bathhouse as an example; its admission fee was only one Quadrans (sixteen Quadrans equaled one Sestertius). One could not even buy half a bowl of thick vegetable soup with one Quadrans. According to Varo, Trajan Bathhouse was like a small city. Those who entered it for the first time might even get lost.

However, Zhang Heng was not allowed to go there for the time being. They could only use the bathhouse in the gladiator school, one specially built for the gladiators and wasn't open to the public.

From far, they could see the plume of steam coming from the top of the bathhouse. It could never be compared with a public bathhouse in terms of size, but everything a bathhouse should have could be found in the gladiator school's bathhouse. For example, upon entering, they could see a big pool in front of them. It was cold water in the pool, and they could swim in it. When they walked past the cold-water pool, they arrived at a small courtyard. This place was like a gym. Two pairs of gladiators sparred with each other, and the rest of the people were watching the fight. Other than that, there was another man punching a bag of flour. He looked like the boxer of the later generations practicing with a sandbag.

Zhang Heng and Varo did not stay and watch them. They walked through the courtyard and came to the destination of their trip. The three rooms behind the small courtyard were the room with the hot bath, the warm bath, and the cold bath.

Varo quickly took off his clothes, leaving only a belt around his waist. It made him look like Tarzan. He then put the clothes in the cabinet on the side and then turned to Zhang Heng. "Come on, my Eastern friend, I bet you will fall in love with it."

"You'd better not say words that come out so wrong when you are dressed like this," Zhang Heng chuckled as he took off his clothes.

The two of them walked into the hot water bathroom on the left, one after another. As soon as they opened the door, Zhang Heng felt a heatwave rushing at him. And he saw the room filled with steam. He could barely see the stone pillars in the room.

Chapter 765: Can You Describe Her Look?

It was probably only in a bathhouse where everyone was equal could Varo temporarily forget his status as a slave and reminisce about his past life. Especially when he walked into the pool and completely soaked his body in hot water, every single pore on him was loosened up. Varo could not help but let out a sigh of satisfaction.

He then closed his eyes in the pool, but he saw that Zhang Heng had still not gotten in after waiting for a while. So he opened his eyes again, "Come on. It can be quite hot at first, but you can feel that the hot water will take away your tiredness after getting used to it. When I was still operating the antique shop, I used to invite my regular customers to the bathhouse and strike a deal with them..."

Varo seemed to think of something as he spoke, and a look of nostalgia appeared on his face. But soon, the pain from the bruise on his chest pulled him back to reality.

He got the bruise when he fought with Habitus earlier. Although the plan that Zhang Heng came up for him worked wonderfully, Varo had also managed to anger Habitus. Afterward, the latter did not reserve his strength anymore. He struck at his chest with his wooden sword and won the battle. Fortunately, the doctor confirmed that his ribs were not broken after the battle.

Zhang Heng did not continue on Varo's topic. Instead, he pointed at a corridor on the south side and asked, "Where does that lead to?"

Varo poked his head out and looked at it. "It should be a sudatorium."

The sudatorium was similar to a modern sauna. It was the hottest spot in the entire bathhouse. The temperature over there could reach a whopping 60 degrees. A continuous flow of heat came from the gap between the wall and the floor, and it was easy for someone to get burned if they weren't wearing a pair of sandals.

"Did you see anything suspicious when you came in?" Zhang Heng asked afterward.

"What do you mean by something suspicious?" Varo was puzzled.

There were not many gladiators who had come to the bathhouse to take a bath at this moment. Except for Zhang Heng and Varro, only two other people took a hot bath, but Varo knew that Zhang Heng was not talking about them.

Zhang Heng wasn't bothered to give much explanation either. Seeing the other two gladiators closed their eyes and resting, Zhang Heng did not ask them the question either. All he did was walk towards the sudatorium.

His observation ability had greatly improved ever since he lived with Sherlock Holmes. However, this was the first time he doubted what he just saw. Earlier, when Varo opened the door, Zhang Heng saw a woman disappearing in the passage leading to the sudatorium.

According to Varo, the Roman bathhouse was designed in a way that men and women would not share the same space to bathe themselves. However, not many people followed the rules. The famous politician and orator Cicero even satirized this kind of phenomenon. He mentioned that it was moral corruption. That being said, it still did not stop the passionate men and women from bathing together.

Usually, such a thing would not happen in the gladiator school. According to the regulations, this was the place where the gladiators and trainers take their baths. And the female slaves working in the gladiator school would have to bathe at the public bathhouse.

Therefore, it was theoretically impossible for Zhang Heng to see any woman here. And the woman's attire was rather strange. She was wearing a black robe that covered her entire body. It was clear to Zhang Heng that she was not from this school.

How did such a person pass the inspection of the janitor who guarded the gate of the bathhouse? And how did she pass through the swimming pool and the courtyard without being spotted by the gladiators who were sparring with each other?

Zhang Heng could not figure out how she did it.

If she were an ordinary person, Zhang Heng would not be bothered by her. However, Zhang Heng instinctively sensed that she was here for him. That was why he did not enter the pool after Varo. Instead, he walked towards where the woman in the black robe headed earlier.

"Are you going to the sudatorium right away? Don't you need to get used to the heat in the pool first?" Varo shouted behind him, "Beware of fainting because of the heat."

"Thank you for the reminder. Enjoy your bath first, and leave me alone for now," Zhang Heng said as he walked towards the corridor on the south side.

Once he moved forward, he could clearly feel that the temperature around him was rising. Compared with the steam coming out of the sudatorium, the steam from the hot pool was colder.

It was no different from a sauna. The function of this room was similar to the previous fitness therapies in the courtyard. The ancient Romans seemed to believe that sweating could drain the body's toxins and diseases. Therefore, whether it was wrestling or sudatorium, they wanted to make sure that the people could sweat more when they were in the bathhouse.

Zhang Heng walked through the long and narrow walkway and entered a round room. Since the floor was overheated, he would suffer from a mild burn if he laid down here. To let the people rest, the person who built the bathhouse constructed many niches in the wall's middle.

But on the other hand, these niches would also block the person from looking at the people outside the sudatorium. Fortunately, Zhang Heng could judge whether there was anyone in the niches from the outstretched legs.

He walked to the first niche and saw a gladiator sitting there. The latter probably thought he had enough of the steam treatment. Before Zhang Heng could get to him, he got up and left the niche. The gladiator then wanted to head to the hot pool. When he walked past Zhang Heng, he nodded slightly at him to greet him.

Zhang Heng nodded back and walked to the next niche.

However, the legs sticking out from the niche this time did not seem to be what Zhang Heng was looking for. They were a pair of skinny and shriveled legs, indicating that its owner was an old man. And Zhang Heng could not figure out why he was certain that it was a young woman even though he had not seen the face under the black robe.

Zhang Heng frowned. He felt that something must have gone wrong, and he seemed to have missed something.

Suddenly, Zhang Heng heard the old man talking to him, "Did you leave anything here?"

Zhang Heng walked a half step forward and finally saw the person in the niche clearly.

It was the old Persian trainer he met when he first entered the gladiator school. The latter was also dressed in the same way as him, wearing only wore a corset and sat in the niche. It looked like he was integrated with the stone wall at the back.

Since the old man talked to him, Zhang Heng asked politely, "Have you been sitting here for some time? Did you see a woman in a black robe?"

It was not possible for others not to spot the black-robed woman if she entered the sudatorium. No one would turn a blind eye to her. And if others did not see her, it could only mean that the woman did not exist.

However, the old trainer in the niche reacted very strangely. He did not say that he had seen the woman or doubted Zhang Heng. Instead, he said calmly, "Can you describe her look?"

"I can't see her face."

"What about other noticeable places? For example, what is she holding in her hand? Is there anything else on her body besides the black robe?"

Chapter 766: Goddess of Murder and Assassination

Although it was only a short glance, Zhang Heng's astute observation still granted him some information. After the old trainer asked him the crucial questions, Zhang Heng also recalled more details.

"She... seems barefooted. She has a dagger in her hand. There is an eagle head carved on the handle of the dagger. Other than that, there is also a bunch of keys strung on rattan hanging around her waist."

"How many keys are there?" the old trainer continued to ask.

"I didn't count, three... no, it should be four," Zhang Heng paused. "Apart from the corridor that connects the hot pool and the sudatorium, are there other exits?"

"I often come here to take a bath. As far as I know, there is no second way out," replied the old trainer.

"So, you are saying that she just disappeared out of thin air?"

The old trainer did not answer Zhang Heng's question this time. Instead, he uttered an unfamiliar name, "Kreis."

"Who is this?"

"The black-robed woman you met," the old trainer said, "According to your description, she should be Kreis. She is known as the goddess of murder and assassination. And she is in charge of the delicate balance between everything. She spends most of her time balancing chaos and order. You seem to be in luck. Kreis seldom shows up in front of mortal beings. There are only a handful of people in this world seen her before. As for her face, it's better for you not to see it. Those that had seen her face are no longer in this world."

“Why haven’t I heard of her name before?” Zhang Heng frowned.

To figure out the old man’s identity in the Tang suit, he had spent some time studying ancient myths. Hence, he knew a thing or two about the beliefs of the ancient Romans. The kind of gods that they worshiped here was rather complicated. Many old Roman gods came from Greek mythology. With the continuous expansion of the territory, other beliefs spread into ancient Rome. For instance, Jewish Christianity and some ancient religions in Egypt even worshiped the barbarian’s ancestors. Among them, however, Zhang Heng had never heard of the name Kreis.

“As I said, not many people can see her.” After the old trainer finished speaking, he stared at Zhang Heng again.

However, contrary to his expectation, Zhang Heng did not show awe or doubt when he heard what he said. Instead, it reminded him of something, “I remember now. This is not the first time I saw her.”

“Huh?”

Considering the historical background of the game, there was usually a god hidden behind each quest. For a brief moment, Zhang Heng wondered if he had really met the goddess in charge of his dungeon. He then recalled where he met her before.

“I saw her on a long-necked wine bottle during the celebration when we became official gladiators of this arena,” Zhang Heng said, “Interesting. So, the people have already started to play around with ideomotor phenomenon in the second century AD.”

Zhang Heng had used this psychological trick once in the Whistleblower quest. He used it to implant the idea of going to the ski resort in Léa’s mind. He did not expect that someone would use this trick on him.

And the other party’s ideomotor phenomenon was undoubtedly more stealthy and advanced.

“Kreis is just a made-up goddess, right? The figure I saw outside the door was you. Judging from how much you sweat, I think you just entered this niche not long ago. I should have thought of it. Since this place has only one exit, after eliminating all the irrelevant people, the only person left would be my answer... But the simple ideomotor phenomenon is enough to make me hallucinate. There must be other means to make me hallucinate.”

Zhang Heng lowered his head and thought for a while, “It’s the wine. Someone must have put something in my wine, right?”

Zhang Heng recalled the female slave holding the amphora. She was the one that served him earlier. At that time, only Varo and he were standing there. Varo wanted to drink the wine from the amphora, but soon, another female slave fetched him a new bottle of wine. So, in the end, Zhang Heng was the only one that drank the wine from that particular amphora.

At that time, he felt that the taste of the wine was a little strange. It seemed like it was mixed with some kind of herb. However, that was also his first time drinking wine from the second century AD. Hence, he did not think much about it at the time. After what happened to him afterward, Zhang Heng quickly found the source of the problem.

The old Persian trainer quietly listened to Zhang Heng's analysis. "I didn't find the wrong person. You are the one we are looking for," he said after a while.

"We? Oh, so you do have an accomplice." Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

"I prefer to call them companions," the old Persian trainer said. "Also, after watching the battle during your final assessment, I think you were concealing your true strength in the battle, right? You even managed to fool Gaby. He was the one that discovered Sethnets back then. And he turned Sethnets into the trump card of the Victor Arena. However, it seems he has failed to discover your true form."

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

Since there were no witnesses or physical evidence, Zhang Heng would never admit to it.

"Don't worry. I won't tell Gaby about it," said the old Persian trainer. "You don't need to be so wary of us. We are not hostile."

"You guys just drugged me, and now you are telling me that you are not hostile?" Zhang Heng said, "To make me believe in what I saw, you even went as far as making up the god of murder and assassination."

"I didn't deceive you." The old Persian trainer blinked. "At least not Kreis. She is indeed the goddess we worship."

"But you say she is the god of murderers and assassins."

"Yes. We are killers and assassins," The old Persian trainer said, "I come from an ancient and mysterious organization. Our history is longer than Rome. It wants all the back to thousands of years, but we have been laying low during this period. In this regard, I think we still have some common language... If you want to ask me why I am here, the answer is simple. I am a friend of Gaby's, and he invited me to train those gladiators for him. Most of the time, I'm only responsible for Habitus's training."

"You are the one that taught Habitus's footwork?"

"Most of it, yes. But he also made some improvements to meet the needs of gladiator performance."

"Then I suggest you continue training him because I heard that he wants to be the trump card of the Victor Arena," Zhang Heng said politely, "You should focus on him instead of disturbing me."

Chapter 767: Nothing Is Free

"Habitus can't be the trump card of Victor Arena." The old Persian trainer shook his head. "I told Gaby that his potential had reached its limit."

"Is his potential fully developed, or are you unwilling to help him to develop further?" Zhang Heng asked.

The old Persian trainer smiled slyly and asked, "Is there any difference between these two questions?"

"Hmph. I knew it."

"It's not our fault," the old trainer said sternly, "but this time, I did miscalculate the whole thing. We had an agreement with him. He is supposed to help us get what we want, and we will help him get what he wants. However, he suddenly turned his back on us."

"You want me to believe that Habitus broke a contract between an ancient assassin organization? Why would he do that unless he doesn't want to live anymore?"

"Although we are an assassin organization, we always stick to our principles, unlike some self-proclaimed nobles in this world. And we will not kill innocent people. Besides, we haven't signed an official contract with Habitus," the old trainer said helplessly.

"I understand now. You threw the bait to make him believe that you can help him improve his combat skills. Then he took the bait and learned that set of footwork from you. After he mastered it, he has no intention to work with you guys anymore. I have to say that he is brilliant. Here are my questions. You chose me as a substitute for Habitus. Why do you believe that I will take the bait? What kind of bait did your organization prepare for me?"

Since there was hot steam constantly coming out from the gap, Zhang Heng was now covered with sweat, and the old Persian trainer experienced the same thing as well.

"There is no bait this time, and I have no plans to use you as a substitute for Habitus because Habitus wasn't the most suitable candidate for us from the beginning. During that time, we couldn't find someone better than him. That was why we were left with no other options but to choose him."

"What do you mean? Are you planning to ask me to take the bait without giving me bait?"

"No, I want to invite you to join us. I am not asking you to have a partnership with me like Habitus. I want to include you in our observations list and become our core member in the future. Or, to be more precise, we want you to become my successor. As I said before, we are an ancient organization. And we have our own principles and traditions. There are only a couple of core members in the organization. When the elderly retire, the organization will search for more young blood to replace them. However, the young blood must first pass the test."

The old trainer paused, "Don't say no to me first. Tell me, what do you want the most now?"

"My freedom?"

"If you can pass the test and become one of us, you will become a free man," promised the old trainer.

"How about helping my friend to become a free man as well?"

"The slave named Varo? I sympathize with what happened to him. It's not difficult for us to make him free again."

"Thirty thousand sesterius?"

This time, the old trainer hesitated. "This... Although we can give you this amount of money, we must adhere to the rules first. I can say yes to it first, and if you really pass the test, I can personally give you the money."

“You are actually quite rich. And... I want to become a Roman senator once I become a free man,” said Zhang Heng, revealing the last thing he wanted.

The old trainer shook his head as soon as he heard Zhang Heng’s request. “This is impossible,” he said. “Although our organization does have strong political allies, it would be absurd to let a newly liberated slave become part of the senate.” Suddenly, he stopped abruptly and realized something. “You don’t really want to become a senate. You are just saying that to size up our forces. If this is the case, you will be disappointed. As I said, there are only a handful of core members, and they are mainly civilians, which cannot affect the daily operation of the Roman Senate.”

“That’s a shame,” said Zhang Heng, “Because I can obtain my freedom by my own strength. Thirty thousand sestertius sounds like a lot, but it’s not impossible for me to earn it. Joining the Roman Senate was the only interesting request, but it seems your organization is not powerful enough to grant my wish.”

“You can indeed obtain your freedom with your strength, but it will take at least three years,” replied the old trainer. “Novices with average strength have only a few opportunities to perform at the beginning. We can help you to solve this problem. At the right time, we can get you out of this place. Other than that, I can also teach you how to fight.”

“I know how to fight.”

“Yes, but what you know is the combat style of warriors. I can teach you the combat styles of an assassin. We have turned killing into an art. We don’t engage ourselves in a fight, but once we get into a fight, we will surely claim someone’s life.” The old trainer then looked at Zhang Heng. “Well, the set of footwork I taught Habitus is just a basic skillset. The really powerful skills are only accessible to the core members.”

Even Zhang Heng had to admit that the old trainer’s last proposal was very attractive. Until now, the nine rounds of quests had given Zhang Heng a good amount of gains. The game items were not as important when compared to the skillsets that he acquired—something that took him a lot of time to learn—and was the most valuable thing that he could gain from each game he played. However, if he could only learn the fighting style of a gladiator, there wasn’t too much to be gained.

After all, his swordsmanship had reached Lv.4, and the combat experience he had spent ten accumulating from the Black Sail quest was enough for him to dominate the arena.

In contrast, an assassin’s combat skills were more valuable to him.

As for what the old trainer said about taking him three years to regain his freedom, Zhang Heng did not take it too seriously. He had to admit that he never expected it would take such a long time to acquire his freedom from the arena. According to the old trainer, that was the average time for a gladiator to work his way up to become a free man. However, if the gladiator defeated someone impossible for him to defeat, the audience in the entire arena would cheer for the gladiator, and they would unanimously demand the master to make the winner a free man. At that time, even the master of the gladiator school could not say no. That was because the ancient Romans cared a lot about public opinion, at least for those that operated an arena.

Zhang Heng concealed his true strength because he did not become Mark Reuss's money-earning machine. Other than that, staying out of the spotlight would also allow him to leave this place faster. Of course, if the old trainer had a way to get him out of the gladiator school, Zhang Heng would not say no. If there were an easier way out, after all, he would definitely not deliberately cause trouble for himself.

However, Zhang Heng knew about one cold-hard truth that would remain unchanged, and that was that nothing in this world was free.

The old trainer was hiding something from him. For example, why was he working with Habitus? Why did they break off their partnership? And the reason why the old trainer came here was not as simple as Gaby inviting him here to help him to train Habitus. Other than that, Zhang Heng also wanted to know about the core member's test.

Zhang Heng did not ask those questions because he knew that the old trainer would not answer him. At least for now, both sides had something that each other wanted. And Zhang Heng had one of the biggest advantages too—he did not need to worry about his future. This was just a quest for him. Counting the extra time he had, he would leave this dungeon in a year and a half.

This was also the reason why he was more than willing to swear the gladiator's oath. As long as it wasn't something that would bring him an immediate danger, he could always agree to it first. So Zhang Heng asked, "What do you need me to do?"

Chapter 768: Massages and Herbs

The old trainer wanted to say something, but he suddenly decided to shut his mouth.

Not long afterward, Zhang Heng also heard someone talking and the faint sound of footsteps coming from the corridor. A large group of gladiators walked in from outside. It seemed like they had just finished their training. They were talking and laughing while walking. The old trainer then said, "I will go to you, and we can discuss more then."

After he was done talking, he got down from the alcove and went back to the hot pool.

And Zhang Heng decided to enjoy the hot steam for a little longer before returning to the hot pool.

"As someone who's experiencing such hot steam for the first time, I must admit you lasted quite long," said Varo after seeing Zhang Heng coming out of the sudatorium. Varo seemed to have recuperated after soaking in the pool for a while. He then got out and said, "It's my turn now."

"I will wait for you here," replied Zhang Heng.

When Varo came out of the sudatorium, the two went to the cold pool next door. The ancient Romans had a bizarre bathing habit. They seemed to like to alternate between hot and cold baths. Actually, this kind of bathing method was very likely to cause them heart problems. Other than that, staying in a cold and humid environment for a long time might even cause sailor syndrome and hearing loss.

As compared to the men, the women in ancient Rome were healthier since they hardly took cold baths.

Zhang Heng tried it once and decided not to do it again in the future. And he also advised Varo not to alternate hot and cold baths in the future. The latter listened to what Zhang Heng told him and immediately nodded obediently without asking why.

After that, they ended their bathing session with a massage. According to Varro, although the public bathhouses had a very cheap admission fee, services such as storing clothes, buying snacks, and getting massages were all charged separately. However, the bathhouse in the gladiator school was served to protect the valuable assets of the school owners. Hence all the services for gladiators were given free of charge.

This was also one of the few perks of being a gladiator.

When Zhang Heng and Varo returned to their residence, the “battle” over there was already over. The four female slaves had left the room, leaving the two drunk gladiators lying on the bed. Looking at the smiles on their faces, they seemed to be having good dreams.

Today was the day when they passed the assessment. Gaby also knew that they had worked hard for a long time, so he did not ask them to train today. Everyone was allowed to savor this victorious moment to the fullest.

Varo, on the other hand, was very disciplined. After his mind and body fully recovered from their exhaustion, he returned to the training ground and began to train. He knew that it was sheer luck that he could pass the assessment this time. Even if he did not face Habitus during the final assessment, his combat skills were still below average compared to other new gladiators. Hence, to regain his freedom in the future and carry out his revenge plan, his fighting skills needed to improve to survive the next few battles.

As for Zhang Heng, he took a nap and then wandered in the gladiator school until it was dark.

After they became official gladiators, the areas that they could go to had expanded a lot. As long as they did not leave the gladiator school’s premises, they could wander anywhere they wanted. Zhang Heng first talked to a few gladiators to learn more about the gladiator schools and staff. Especially the information of some trainers; he wanted to know what they were good at. In the near future, he would love to learn all those skills from them.

Zhang Heng paid close attention to the old Persian trainer’s information, but from the information collected so far, it was almost the same as before.

His name was Dadatis, and he joined the gladiator school half a year ago. The school assigned him to train a group of newcomers. After that, he was asked to focus on Habitus’s training only. His origin was very mysterious. It was said that he knew Gaby many years ago. Other than that, no one knew much about him.

Many gladiators consulted him about their training, and Dadatis was always willing to give them advice. However, his answer was not much different from other trainers. In the end, fewer and fewer people came to him.

After that, Zhang Heng went to the medical bay. Almost every gladiator school would be equipped with a medical bay, where all wounded gladiators would receive medical treatment. This place could also help the owners reduce their losses.

In all fairness, the doctors in this era were quite skillful. Take the gladiator school where Zhang Heng worked as an example. There were retired emperor doctors who worked here, especially good at

dealing with external and bone injuries, and they were even equipped with stainless steel or copper surgical tools. Their had a very similar shape to modern surgical instruments—except having no effective means of anesthesia other than alcohol and opium. And, of course, disinfection was something the people of that era had no knowledge of.

Other than that, they had no good way to deal with internal injuries or organ damage. Hence, they could only wait for the reapers to harvest their patients' life.

When Zhang Heng entered the medical bay, he saw a doctor with half-white stubble bandaging a gladiator with a leg injury. Zhang Heng stood by the door to wait for the doctor to finished treating the injured gladiator. After he told the injured gladiator about what he should be really paying attention to, he raised his head and looked at Zhang Heng.

“Where did you hurt yourself? Let me see.”

“I am not injured,” said Zhang Heng.

The doctor frowned, “Then why are you here?”

“Oh, I simply wanted to seek your advice. I wonder if I can buy any herbs here?” Zhang Heng explained his intentions.

He spent the remaining time in the Alien's dungeon to learn more about herbal medicine. It could come in handy in an era where medical treatment was not as advanced. Zhang Heng picked a few commonly used herbs to treat inflammation, diarrhea, fever, and bruises. Most of them could be found in the Mediterranean. But even so, it took him a long time to describe what the herbs looked like to the doctor.

The doctor seemed skeptical after listening to what he had to say. Fortunately, Zhang Heng met a doctor that was willing to open to new things. Some of the herbs were widely used in this era. Except for these surgeons, herbal medicine and prayer remained the most popular treatment for internal diseases.

The doctor promised to help Zhang Heng look for the herbs that he wanted. If it worked, the doctor did not plan to charge him. The school would bear the cost of all the gladiators' treatment anyway, which was why he was willing to accept the invitation to be a doctor here. Besides the generous income, he could also get a lot of opportunities to verify his medical theory.

After that, Zhang Heng returned to his residence in the evening.

During this period, the old Persian trainer did not come and look for him again, as if he had forgotten about him.

Chapter 769: Not Fighting Anymore

The two gladiators woke up when Zhang Heng and Varo went for a bath. They were no longer in the room when Zhang Heng returned. When the sky finally turned dark, they returned to the room with their hands on each other's shoulders and a strong smell of alcohol on them.

It was understandable that they would go all out and enjoy themselves on this day. Although the gladiator school promised gladiator slaves like Sethnets and Garba their freedom back, the vast majority of the slaves would die fighting in the arena before they could regain their freedom.

Although the death rate of current gladiators had dropped significantly compared to gladiators from BC, the average survival age of twenty-five still posed many problems. If they chose not to enjoy themselves while they were able to do so, it was likely that they would not be able to do it in the future. Not to mention that they were only allowed to go all out to enjoy themselves on this day.

After a while, Varo also came back from the training ground. Upon a brief chat with Zhang Heng, he went to bed.

...

Late at night, the entire Roman city became really quiet except for the Domus and temples that had their oil lamps lighted. Most of the places were plunged into darkness.

Zhang Heng then closed his eyes and soon fell asleep until someone pushed his body. When he opened his eyes, he saw the old Persian trainer standing in front of his bed, signaling him to leave the room. The old man walked out of the room first. Zhang Heng immediately put on his sandals, followed the old trainer from behind, passed the three people who were still sleeping soundly, and came to the courtyard.

At least for now, Zhang Heng knew that the old trainer did not lie to him.

Having endured quite a few quests so far, many of them were extremely dangerous. This forced him to develop the habit of staying alert when he slept. Usually, when someone or something moved, he would quickly wake up from his sleep. However, he was sleeping in a room where everyone was snoring. It meant that this habit would not be as effective as before. Still, Zhang Heng felt that it posed many problems when he failed to hear the old trainer's footsteps.

If the other party had a murderous intent towards him, his head wouldn't have been attached to his body anymore.

So... was this how an assassin fought?

Zhang Heng saw the old trainer walking towards the small training ground in front of him, quickly following him. However, when he entered the training ground, the old trainer was gone.

The place wasn't as lively as it was in the daytime. It was so quiet that one could hear a pin dropped on the ground. But soon, Zhang Heng was alerted, and he could feel that someone would attack him from his back. The person's movements were very light; the air currents created by the person when he moved almost non-existent.

However, Zhang Heng's rich combat experience had come in handy this time. He twisted his body and dodged the blow at the last moment. Other than that, he also had a clear view that the person was attacking him with a small wooden dagger.

The old trainer was a little surprised when he saw Zhang Heng dodging the attack.

By coming to Zhang Heng's bed without him realizing it and disappearing without a trace, he intended to let Zhang Heng feel the power of the assassins. However, the ending was not what he expected. He knew that Zhang Heng concealed his strength during the final assessment, but he did not expect the latter to be that powerful.

Besides, he had gotten older. His skill has indeed deteriorated as compared to his younger self.

Time was the greatest enemy a human would face; impossible to defy. Whether it was an assassin or a gladiator, it was only logical that the person's physical fitness would deteriorate as the person aged. As someone who partnered up with death all year round, he could clearly feel that his body was failing him and could no longer do what he did last time.

Zhang Heng, on the other side, had already moved away from the old trainer. He looked around and was trying to find a weapon. Unexpectedly, the old trainer gave up the attack the next moment, turned, and ran towards the training ground.

Zhang Heng did not go after him immediately. Instead, he went to the room where the weapons were stored. He could also see that the old trainer had no malicious intent towards him, so he only took a wooden training sword.

As soon as he stepped out of the room, a dagger was struck at his throat.

"Pay attention to the spots that can block your line of sight. These are the best places for assassins to attack," whispered the old trainer.

But this time, Zhang Heng was prepared, and he was able to stop the dagger with the wooden sword in his hand.

To be fair, the old trainer's attacks were still very effective. This one was faster than his previous attack. The angle was more unpredictable, and it was stealthy. But unfortunately, his opponent was Zhang Heng, whose swordsmanship had reached Lv 4. Once he had a sword in his hand, even the best assassin in the world could hardly break his defense.

The old trainer was still using the hit and run strategy. He had no intention to stay and fight after he landed a strike on Zhang Heng. This time he jumped directly onto a wall that not far away from him. And Zhang Heng quickly followed closely behind him. They went over the wall to enter the courtyard. In that short time, the old trainer disappeared from his eyes again.

Zhang Heng soon thought of something. He raised the wooden sword in his hand and blocked an attack that came from the sky.

"Your eyes can deceive you. Learn to observe your opponent's attack pattern."

The old trainer looked like he just came out of Zhang Heng's shadow. It was terrifying and stealthy. He then stopped Zhang Heng from continuing to attack him and lean on the dirt wall beside him, "Wait, let me catch my breath first."

Zhang Heng then put away the training sword.

The old trainer rested for a while and managed to regain his strength, but he did not intend to continue the battle. He waved his hand with joy and said, "No more fights. Let's end it here."

"Okay." Zhang Heng wished that the battle would last a little longer. Although the old trainer showed only three moves, they were something that Zhang Heng had never seen before. It did broaden his view of this world and he could gain something from it.

Since Dadatis had already surrendered, it would not be nice for Zhang Heng to continue to attack and bully him.

“Actually, an excellent assassin would not attack the same target more than three times. If he fails to kill the target in three strikes, it means that Kreis does not want to take the target’s life. As an assassin, no matter how good the reward is, he would allow his target to live.”

The old trainer paused and continued, “I have to admit that I have underestimated you. Even if I’m still my young-self, I’m not completely sure that I’m good enough to kill you in the three sneak attacks just now. However, it is too early for you to feel happy about it. The top-class assassins will have more than one way to eliminate their targets.”

Zhang Heng did not say a word after he heard what Dadatis told him. It seemed like he was disappointed by himself. According to the original plan, he should quietly use the wooden dagger to stab Zhang Heng’s heart. After that, he would use his deep voice to tell Zhang Heng that he was dead. If his plan worked, it would be more convincing for him to say to Zhang Heng his glorious past.

Chapter 770: Have You Been To The Market?

The old trainer found a step in the yard and sat on it. “The assassin is one of the oldest professions of humankind. When the person causing your troubles is gone from this world, all your problems would be automatically solved.”

“That’s something hard to refute,” agreed Zhang Heng.

Dadatis continued, “No one knows who the first assassin was because people who do well in this line are those without names. Once they become famous, they are basically not far from death. We differ from martyrs. The only thing that we go after is the monetary reward. Before we can claim the reward, we have to learn how to stay alive first. Although we are not known in history, I can tell you confidently that we are everywhere. For thousands of years, we stay hidden and committed ourselves to help to solve problems of the commoners, serve the emperors, generals, and change the course of history with the dagger in our hand.”

“Well, it sounds like you guys must be quite busy.”

“Of course, in the early days, assassins would only fight for themselves, and they would not take the initiative to talk to other assassins. Everyone had a different customer scope, something that has certainly brought us unparalleled freedom. However, the lack of faith and belief has caused us to lose the sense of unity. This situation lasted until about a thousand years ago when a retired senior received the Kreis’s oracle and began to think of a way to unite the power that belongs to the assassins.”

“So this is the origin of the Assassin’s Creed: Brotherhood?” Zhang Heng interrupted.

The old trainer was startled. “What is the Assassin’s Creed: Brotherhood?” he asked with a cocked eyebrow.

“Sorry. I just quoted something from Ubisoft. Please continue,” Zhang Heng said.

The old trainer frowned since he didn't understand what Ubisoft meant. However, considering that Zhang Heng was from the far east, it was only natural that they communicated differently. As long as the information was not too important, Dadatis had no intention to dwell on it.

"The senior found the six most powerful assassins at the time and conveyed Kreis's will to them. However, it didn't go well at the beginning. That was because the assassins didn't like the feeling of being restrained by someone or something. The senior then told them that joining the organization would not have much impact on their daily lives. On the contrary, the organization could become a bridge for them to exchange information, share resources, and help each other."

The old trainer paused. "Although assassins prefer to act alone, it doesn't mean they can do everything by themselves. A middleman is required for getting different kinds of jobs. The middleman will usually have a rich network of contacts to find the right customers for the assassins. The assassins, on the other hand, could avoid direct contact with their employers. This was also implemented to protect the safety of assassins. After all, assassination is not a glorious feat. Some employers want to eliminate all the potential threats, including the assassin itself after they finished the job assigned to them."

"When the assassins want to find out more about their targets, they would need the help of others help as well. These people could be the thugs or thieves on the street, or sometimes they could be sociable nobles and merchants. They can help the assassins approach different targets and find out more about them. Other than that, sometimes the assassins would need someone's help when they want to get away from a crime scene. In short, a perfect assassination requires detailed investigation, countless rehearsals, and a good clean-up after the job is done. After all, we are also humans, not gods."

"This sounds like a craftsman's spirit to me," said Zhang Heng.

"To sum up, I believe you can also see the benefits of the establishment of the organization. The resources in the hands of other members can be pooled to form an intelligence network, which will eventually serve the members of the organization. Besides, when the organization members encounter a threat that they fail to overcome, the other members can also assist. After all, dealing with an assassin and provoke a group of assassins are two completely different scenarios."

"It's reasonable, but the question is how does this benefit the convener? You mentioned that he was a retired man. Why did he come back and spend so much effort to form an organization he will get nothing out of?"

"As I said, for thousands of years, the assassin business has always been a mess. The root cause is their lack of belief. A common goal could unite them, though. This was what the founder of Balance Blade had in mind. We worship Kreis. She is the goddess of murder and assassination, in charge of the balance of everything. And all we have to do is to maintain this balance for her through assassination."

The old trainer looked into Zhang Heng's eyes and said thoughtfully, "The balance is essential because only through balance can everything maintain its perfect form. It aims to benefit everyone in the world, especially the lowest-class civilians and slaves. Of course, the Balance Blade pays close attention to everyone's interests from a different social class. That is because we all are a part of this world, and together we form a delicate balance. But what we care about most is the lower class. The reason is simple. Because they have the largest number of people."

“You want to benefit the slaves; why don’t you just free them?” Zhang Heng asked.

“We release the slaves, and then?” the old trainer asked rhetorically, “Have you been to the market?”

“Yes.”

“The market is like a microcosm of the world. There are all kinds of people in it, from blacksmiths to farmers, carpenters, tailors... Everyone tries to sell their things. We all have something to sell and buy. And all these come together to create a balance. Now, if you take the farmers out of the market, what will happen? The tailors will have no fabrics to sell, pubs will have no ingredients for winemaking, and women can’t buy food. If that happens, it means the balance is broken, and everyone will suffer.

“This applies to slaves as well. As I said, the Balance Blade has existed for thousands of years. We have seen too many things, the rise and fall of countries, the change of dynasties, the prosperity and destruction of cities, and we have also seen the slaves killed those who enslaved them. Will the slaves be liberated after they kill their master? No, they will become a new batch of slave owners. The people at the bottom of society often don’t realize that no matter how society changes, there will always be people who live at society’s bottom. Just like you can’t remove farmers from the market. This is part of the balance.”

“So you tend to maintain the rule of the current ruler?” Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

“No, we only maintain the balance,” said the old trainer. “We believe that a stable ruling structure can maximize the benefits of all classes, but we also know that no one can rule forever in this world, just as chaos is the path we must cross before we establish any order. We do not reject chaos.”

“Then what is your stand?” Zhang Heng frowned.

“Let everything be in balance,” replied the old trainer. “If the nobles become too powerful, we will cut off the wings of the nobles. When the emperor becomes too powerful, we will try to limit his power. When riots break out between the commoners and the slaves, we will assist the army in suppressing the riots in the shortest possible time to avoid greater losses. When the chaos comes, we will also help the true king ascend to this throne and rebuild the balance.”