

48 Hours 791

Chapter 791: Provocation

“What do you mean by letting loose sometimes?” The young emperor was a little puzzled.

Dior smiled, “You like gladiatorial fights, don’t you?”

“No, I just watch it occasionally to relax,” denied Commodus. “I am too busy and have a lot of things to do every day. In fact, I am thinking about issuing new coins before leaving. What I meant is that I want the people of Rome to get to know me through these gladiatorial performances. As for those living in more remote places, however, I’ll need to let them know that the empire has a new emperor. Hence, I plan to ask someone to cast coins with my head on them. The emperors of late have done similar things too...”

“Yes, yes, I can understand that you need to rule such a big country. You must be exhausted now. All the more you should loosen up and enjoy yourself in this rare time of leisure, right?” Dior said. He beckoned the servant to bring two more glasses of wine before taking one and handing the other to the young emperor.

“You need to relax. We won’t talk about politics tonight.”

The young emperor hesitated and took the glass of wine and drank it, “Okay, let us take a good look at the warriors here.”

The owners of the gladiator schools had been waiting a long time. After getting permission, they stepped forward to pay their respects to Dior and Commodus. After that, they began to introduce their gladiators.

“Your Majesty, this is the giant Terufelos. He is a Sarmatian. He was sold to the northeast of the empire when he was still a boy. I found him in a very remote copper mine and bought him over. At that time, he was so skinny because he did not have enough food every day. But I knew he was born to become a gladiator. Once fed and the iron pickaxe in his hand replaced by a weapon, he would become a great gladiator. And he did not disappoint me. I took him on tour, and no one could defeat him. His body contains infinite power, just like a beast,” said an old man that looked like a dried corpse. He then nodded to Terufelos, and the latter walked out of the crowd.

Admittedly, his gigantic figure must have exerted a great deal of pressure on the people around him. Seeing him making a move, Commodus’s guards immediately tensed and drew out their weapons one after another.

“It’s okay,” Commodus said, “Let’s see what he is going to do.”

Terufelos did not speak. Instead, he walked towards the fountain in the center of the front hall. He rubbed his hands, bent down, and with only one hand, he picked up the marble statue in front of the fountain, the height of a person.

Upon witnessing the scene, all the guests who had come for the banquet tonight exclaimed in amazement. His master was elated as well. On the contrary, the owners of the other gladiator schools had a solemn look on them. Since they had experience dealing with the gladiators, they knew that it was

easy for their gladiators to defeat him. There were many gladiators with outstanding strength, but they could not do what Terufelos just did. With this overwhelming power, he was slated to become a strong contender for that gladiatorial show's championship.

Terufelos then swung the marble statue twice and put it back to its original position, before returning to where he stood.

"If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed that such powerful people even exist!" Commodus exclaimed in excitement. "Your nickname is Giant, isn't it?"

Terufelos nodded.

"It suits you well. I wish you good results in the gladiatorial performance later."

Commodus seemed to have released his long-repressed interest. He then followed Dior to talk to the next gladiator.

"His name is Ellaxois, from Diatilla. He achieved a proud record of nineteen consecutive victories. And he is very good at using the trident..."

"Danaus, a Thracian gladiator. Everyone is aware that Thracians give birth to many outstanding gladiators, and among them, Danaus is the best one. He is especially good at slicing his opponent's throats..."

"Julicia, a Celtic. His body is amazingly flexible, and no one can beat him in close combat..."

"..."

As Dior and Commodus continued to walk, they saw more and more gladiators. All of them had their own legendary tales, and they were the trump cards of their respective arenas. Since they were a lot of them here, there was not much time to introduce themselves.

Except for the Sarmatian, who had a unique look, Commodus could not remember the names of most of the gladiators. He would only look at each one for a short while before moving on to the next. Zhang Heng knew that if this went on, he might just not complete the task assigned by the Balance Blade. Although he had made a name for himself during this period, coupled with the way Mark Reuss promoted him, lots of people in Rome now knew his name.

Zhang Heng was, however, still a rookie, and his battle record was nowhere nearly as glorious as veteran gladiators who had fought for many years. Strictly speaking, although he was the talk of the town, he wasn't even close to becoming a legendary gladiator. And his biggest disadvantage was that Commodus had just come back from the frontline, and he happened to miss the time of his rise to fame. The emperor also needed to attend to many things, so it was only logical that he had never heard of his name.

Zhang Heng knew that he had to find a way to attract Commodus's attention.

At present, Commodus had suddenly stopped in front of a gladiator, pointed, and gasped in surprise. "Are you Sartonillos?"

"Yes, your honorable majesty. I didn't expect you to know my name," Sartonilos bowed.

“Of course, I know your name! I went to see your gladiatorial show with my sister before leaving Rome. More than once, they said that Sethnets is old and that you are the strongest gladiator in Rome right now. What do you think? Are you confident enough to win the battle this time?”

“I will dedicate all the victory and glory to you,” Sartonilos said.

Just when the two parties were talking happily, Commodus heard someone speaking in disdain.

“I don’t think His Majesty would take a liking to someone that lies.”

Sartonilos’s face changed suddenly. He looked in the direction where the voice came from and found that the person who just talked was an Oriental man. Sartonilos did not remember that he had seen this Oriental man before. Earlier, when the gladiators were gathered at the front hall and were waiting, the latter made no moves that attracted attention. Sartonilos, too had no idea why Zhang Heng would provoke him now.

Sartonilos wasn’t the kind that allowed someone to provoke him. He respectfully said to Commodus, “Your Majesty, can I deal with this matter?”

Commodus figured what he was going to do. If it were placed in the past, he would probably reject Sartonilos’s request because his father was with him. This time, though, he remembered what Dior told him. There was no need to be too serious since he was here to have fun this evening.

So he smiled and said, “Of course.”

Chapter 792: Battle In The Front Hall

Nobody had expected that somebody would so brazenly provoke Sartonilos in such a blatant manner after witnessing what happened to the unfortunate gladiator.

The gladiators in the city had heard of Zhang Heng’s name before. They knew that Zhang Heng was the newcomer who claimed the twelve-man mixed fight championship at Victor Arena. However, he had completed too few battles; hence, no one knew too much about him. Those gladiators from outside the city had never even seen Zhang Heng before, nor did they know where he came from.

Sartonilos turned around immediately after getting Commodus’s permission and walked towards Zhang Heng. The gladiators who were present could feel the raging anger in his eyes, and he had the oriental man clearly in his sights.

Immediately, Habitus quietly moved a little away from Zhang Heng. Although the two belonged to the same school, Habitus did not like Zhang Heng very much. This was also completely normal. Initially, Bach was the only ace gladiator that competed with Habitus to become Victor Arena’s trump card. However, Bach was not fully mature yet. Hence, Habitus was confident that he could overtake Bach in the first half of the competition. If he managed to do that, he would have more chips in hand to negotiate with the gladiator school.

But now, his plan was ruined. The oriental man who had been keeping quiet had suddenly unleashed his entire force, and he managed to achieve a flawless victory in his first battle. After he killed Nasika, Mark Reuss began to pay attention to him. Since then, Habitus could clearly feel that the gladiator school no longer treated him as well as before. Besides, he came across another unfortunate matter after that. He

decided to accept Dadatis's proposal to fortify his position, but the latter told him that the plan was canceled.

Although Habitus had no evidence, his intuition told him that Zhang Heng had something to do with it. And that was why he hated Zhang Heng.

The other gladiators from the Victor Arena, save for Bach, were all old men. These men were closer to Habitus. Seeing that Habitus had made it clear that he did not want to get involved in this issue, they had all decided to do nothing. On the contrary, Bach was not afraid of him at all. He, too, had just arrived in Rome not too long ago, and he had never gotten the chance to witness Sartonilo's most glorious moment. He was all too ready to beat him up.

But then he heard Zhang Heng's voice. "Stand still. It's none of your business."

Bach was furious when he heard what Zhang Heng said, and he almost started a fight. When he remembered that he could not beat him, however, he could only stand down. That said, he had made a lot of progress recently. Even Gaby praised him. It made Bach want to rechallenge Zhang Heng. But when Bach witnessed Zhang Heng's previous gladiatorial performance, he finally realized that it would be impossible to catch up with Zhang Heng for now.

After the two talked, Sartonilos walked up to Zhang Heng. The two were very close, and Zhang Heng could already smell the alcohol on Sartonilos. However, Zhang Heng knew very well that Sartonilos's alcohol addiction was not that serious. It was a disguise of his. The gladiator school that he was in placed great importance on this performance, and they started to use this strategy a month ago to lower his opponents' guard.

He might be able to fool others with this disguise but not Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng could see that Sartonilos was in his best condition after a month of intensive training. The second most powerful gladiator after Sethnets was actually quite strong. Now, Commodus and the entire Rome's ruling class were here. In such a case, Zhang Heng would not be able to use any weapons. In other words, Zhang Heng would not be able to make use of his Lv4 swordsmanship.

All he could do was rely on his physical strength and some boxing skills that he learned from the Deductive Reasoning quest. After Zhang Heng analyzed the situation, he felt that he should be able to cope with it.

Zhang Heng was left with no other option. It would be challenging to impress Commodus tonight with conventional means. Hence, he could only take advantage of Sartonilos. Although the method was old-fashioned, the stronger individual would eventually prevail. Such was the rule of the gladiator world. If a newcomer wanted to rise to the top, he had to first step on the veteran's head. If he could win in this battle, no one would say a word about him.

"Kid, were you the one that talked to me just now?" Sartonilos asked coldly, bringing his face closer to Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng did not rush to answer. Instead, he looked at Commodus that standing not far away from him. Unsurprisingly, the young emperor seemed very interested in Zhang Heng, and he was asking Mark Reuss about Zhang Heng's origins.

Mark Reuss was sweating profusely. Before he came here, he had prepared a speech to introduce his famous gladiators, especially Zhang Heng. Seeing Commodus walking toward him, he was ready to tell Commodus everything about Zhang Heng. However, he did not expect Zhang Heng to provoke Sartonilos.

But at this point, there was nothing he could do about it. He could only bite the bullet, introduce Zhang Heng to Commodus, and pray that Zhang Heng had the situation under his control.

But the thing that Zhang Heng said next completely shattered his dream, "Yes, I guess you are so old that you need me to repeat everything that I had just said to you."

Sartonilos then smiled slyly, "Interesting. I haven't shown up for a month. And some rubbish is bold enough to provoke me."

"Have you ever considered that such a thing happened because you are a garbage dump?" Zhang Heng wasn't intimidated by Sartonilos's gaze. Instead, he looked back at him calmly.

In the end, it was Sartonilos' fist that greeted him.

His fist flew at breakneck speed. Seeing how close the two were, Sartonilos did not expect that his first strike would fail to land on Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng dodged his fist by just turning his head. Right after that, he began to strike back. And Zhang Heng's fist accurately landed on Sartonilos' right cheek and knocked him to the ground. It was a very embarrassing scene for Sartonilos. Zhang Heng, however, knew that Sartonilos' injuries were not that severe. He still had enough strength to strike back.

Since they were not allowed to use any weapons, it was not easy to tell who would win this battle by swinging their fists.

Sartonilos, who had fallen to the ground, quickly stood up again. This time, he seemed furious. Without saying a word, he rushed towards Zhang Heng again. And Zhang Heng also moved his fist to prepare for the next round of battle.

The two were embroiled in a fierce fight in the front hall, and the other gladiators had to evade them whenever they got close.

On the contrary to what most imagined, Sartonilos seemed like getting more beat by the second. On average, Zhang Heng got to punch him three times before he could return the punch. Moreover, Zhang Heng, on the opposite side, seemed to be able to neutralize half of Sartonilos's strength whenever he attacked him.

Zhang Heng utilized a rather strange way of moving in this battle as if he could integrate his steps and his breathing. And he was incredibly agile.

After fighting for a while, the expression on Sartonilos's face had changed. He was calmer now. A veteran gladiator like him would rarely be affected by anger. Most of the time, his anger was just a disguise. When he calmed down, he immediately realized that he had encountered a formidable opponent.

Chapter 793: This Is It

Sartoniilos slowed his attacks, delegated more energy to his defense before finally managing to keep the battle under his control. But soon, he was struck by another piece of bad news. Zhang Heng's stamina seemed to be better than him. After the two fought head-to-head for so long, Zhang Heng's breathing rate did not change much. In other words, if he dragged the battle any longer, the situation would become even more unfavorable for him.

Immediately, Sartoniilos frowned. He did not expect that Victor Arena had quickly managed to cultivate such an annoying newcomer after Sethnets retired. Since Zhang Heng attacked him first, Sartoniilos would not hesitate to get back at Zhang Heng if he could choose again. After all, with so many big shots presented here tonight, backing down would be inappropriate.

Just like how a lion would defend its territory when it saw another lion crossing the line, so would a gladiator. No matter how strong you were before, in this world where the strong preyed on the weak, you would be torn apart by the hyenas that swarmed toward you once you showed your vulnerable side.

And the current battle situation was only slightly disadvantageous for Sartoniilos. In his long career as a gladiator, he had fought many battles that were unfavorable to him. He had the most scars on his body among all the gladiators here, and since he was still standing, those scars had become his past glory, symbolizing the epic battles that he had won and completed.

Hence, the battle tonight would be no exception for him.

Just then, Sartoniilos received another punch in his mouth. But this time, he retaliated with a kick. He then spat out a bloody tooth and sneered, "What now? Is that all you can do?"

At that time, Zhang Heng had also gotten up from the ground. He could have avoided this kick, but after calculating the damage that he would receive, he concluded that he would end up worse if he did not dodge. Therefore, Zhang Heng chose to take the damage. And the reason was that he knew what the audience liked. By avoiding the kick, Zhang Heng would be able to showcase his strength and agility. However, it was still not as attractive as using the blood-to-blood and fist-to-fist fighting methods.

For thousands of years, the spectators' preference had never changed in whatever competition. Everyone was always more inclined toward the so-called "tough guy."

Defeating Sartoniilos was never Zhang Heng's goal. All he wanted to do was to attract Commodus's attention. The young emperor was now watching the battle between the two with excitement. The guests spontaneously formed a circle to surround Zhang Heng and Sartoniilos. At first, Commodus seemed a little reserved. After a while, he took the lead to cheer for his favorite gladiator.

And the gladiator that he supported was Sartoniilos. After all, he knew the latter before he left Rome, and Zhang Heng was the first to provoke him. In terms of justice, Zhang Heng should not have the advantage here. However, as the fight continued, Commodus's perception of Zhang Heng had improved to a certain extent. He felt that although this Easterner was reckless, he was still a real man. Hence, when Zhang Heng performed well, he would cheer and applaud too.

And when Sartoniilos heard that the emperor was cheering for Zhang Heng, he was triggered. Sartoniilos knew that he had to make a decision.

As early as a month ago, the gladiator school and he had begun preparations for the gladiatorial show in the Amphitheatrum Flavium. For this reason, the gladiator school did not hesitate to let him stop fighting for a month, not to mention the tons of money they spent to create the image of a woman and alcohol addict. When the spies from other gladiator schools saw what he had become, they would surely let down their guard.

And Sartonilos used this month to heal the hidden wounds on his body and adjusted his mind and body to tip-top condition. Only a few people knew that he was now better than he ever was. Initially, Sartonilos wanted to hide his strength until he encountered a potent enemy. Still, he did not expect that he would be forced into a corner by an easterner that he had never seen before, even before the gladiatorial show started. Sartonilos was not being forced to make an important decision on whether or not to use his trump card.

After all, it was not a formal gladiatorial performance now. If he lost in this fight, it would not affect his odds of winning the grand battle later. But at this moment, the emperor and other powerful individuals were watching the battle. Sartonilos could not imagine the negative impact that might befall him and the gladiator school he attended.

Therefore, he gritted his teeth and decided to tear off his disguise. Anyway, even if he showed his true strength now, he could still win the gladiatorial championship.

The next moment, he wiped the blood from his mouth.

The spectators next to him had a vague feeling that Sartonilos's momentum seemed to have changed, and Zhang Heng, his opponent, could sense the change in him almost instantly. His expressions switched, and he knew that Sartonilos was desperate. Since Zhang Heng was one of the few people who knew that Sartonilos was using a disguise, he had been expecting him to reveal his true strength. And he was prepared to deal with it.

However, Zhang Heng realized that he had underestimated Sartonilos. Seeing that his chest was exposed again, Zhang Heng subconsciously punched it. However, Sartonilos blocked his fist with one of his hands. The spectators were shocked when they saw what happened in their battle.

Zhang Heng tried to swing his hand, but he could not retrieve his fist.

"You were jumping up and down like a monkey before. It's time for you to have a taste of my fist," Sartonilos said while swinging his other fist to smash at Zhang Heng's head. However, Zhang Heng managed to squat in time, dodging the attack. Right after that, Zhang Heng hurriedly clamped Sartonilos's arm with his legs before Sartonilos could throw the second punch.

The two fell to the ground together into a cloud of dust. Unfortunately, Zhang Heng had not learned the locking technique from Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. Otherwise, he would be able to lock Sartonilos and restrict his movement while the chaos took place. Hence, the two could only step away from each other again.

Sartonilos did not expect that Zhang Heng would almost get to control him. Not too long after they were separated, Sartonilos wanted to use the same trick to attack Zhang Heng again, but Zhang Heng did not go on a head-to-head battle with him this time. Instead, he used the newly learned assassin's steps and slipped behind him like a phantom.

This change in the rhythm had obviously made Sartonilos a little uncomfortable. After that, he felt a chill under his left neck, but fortunately, he did not suffer any major injuries. Zhang Heng managed to use his nails to leave a blood mark on Sartonilos's neck. Immediately, Sartonilos turned around and wanted to fight Zhang Heng again. To his surprise, Zhang Heng took two steps back and said, "Let's stop here today."

Sartonilos was startled when he heard the words. What did that mean? Did the Easterner just surrender? But the battle was not over yet. He had just begun to use his full force. For now, the two sides were tied.

So Sartonilos said no without hesitation, "It's still early. Next time, you won't be lucky enough to escape me."

But it was then that he heard another voice.

"I think what he said makes sense. Two of you gave us a wonderful performance tonight. Let's wait until the gladiatorial performance to compete against each other again."

Chapter 794: I Have A Good Nose

It was the emperor of the Roman Empire, Commodus, who spoke. Hence, Sartonilos could not disobey the order. He then glared at Zhang Heng with his murderous stare and returned to where he stood helplessly.

Sartonilos felt that although Commodus stopped the battle, it seemed he was leaning a little more towards Zhang Heng. However, he was not an idiot. He quickly figured out why Commodus stopped the battle. At the last moment of the fight between the two, Zhang Heng transformed his hand into a hand knife. And he slit his neck with it. If he held a knife or a sword in his hand, Sartonilos would have been dead by now.

Sartonilos suspected that Zhang Heng used a dirty trick on him just now. After all, the two were only fighting with their bare hands. Naturally, Sartonilos would not guard against any bladed weapons. Although Zhang Heng might inflict more severe injuries on him if he did not use that trick on him when he was not paying attention, it was still difficult to cause any lethal attacks. In other words, the two would have to fight for a long time before someone would claim the victory.

And he could not say anything about it. On the contrary, Zhang Heng succeeded in changing Commodus's first impression of him. Earlier, he provoked Sartonilos recklessly, but he fought well during the battle. While he had the upper hand, Zhang Heng stopped the battle decisively. This was indeed a rare quality for a gladiator.

After the battle, Commodus patted Zhang Heng's shoulder and said, "Your name is Zhang Heng, right? I heard that you are from the Far East, the ancient empire that produces good quality silk. You fought well. I'll be remembering your name. I look forward to your performance in the arena during the upcoming gladiatorial performance."

"As you wish, your majesty," Zhang Heng said.

Commodus seemed to want to say something, but he hesitated and decided not to say it in the end. After witnessing such an exciting battle, he felt satisfied. Afterward, he was a little absent-minded and

lacking in interest when he heard the introduction of other the new gladiators. Dior noticed his reaction and waved his hand to signal all the gladiator schools' owners to retreat.

"I asked someone to prepare desserts and fruits, and a group of outstanding dancers is readied to perform for us..."

"Oh," Commodus raised his eyebrows, "I have been out for a while. Thank you for your generous hospitality, and Christina is not feeling too well tonight. I think we should make a move first."

"Of course," Dior said, "It's important for the queen to get well soon." Upon that, he personally sent Commodus and Christina out of the door. After that, he stood at the door and chatted privately with the young emperor for a short while.

Zhang Heng tried to eavesdrop, but he could not hear what they said because he was standing quite far away. In the next moment, he heard a slightly hoarse and lazy voice, "Heh. So, you are the Easterner who gained fame in the Victor Arena some time ago?"

When Zhang Heng looked up, he saw a woman who looked like she was in her thirties. However, her skin was well maintained, like a teenage girl in this era. She had slightly cherub cheeks, which made her look like an innocent teenage girl. From time to time, she had this ruthless aura exuding out from her eyes. And her slightly curved lips showed that she was of extraordinary status. It could be seen from the way other female guests treated her.

While watching the game earlier, the other female guests were standing beside her and Queen Christina. She wore a skinny metal mesh on top of her head. It helped to lift up her hair. Apart from the metal mesh cover and the wedding ring on her right hand, she had no other body accessories.

Zhang Heng had figured out the identity of this lady. It was not the best idea to get involved with her. However, the thing did not go as Zhang Heng wished. The lady did not leave Zhang Heng alone even after seeing that Zhang Heng had no intention to talk to her. She then moved closer to Zhang Heng. Immediately, Zhang Heng could smell the scent of rose petals on her body, and the heat exhaled from her mouth landed on Zhang Heng's ears.

"Hehe... do you really think that all of us here are idiots? I can see through your thoughts. Tell me, easterner, what is your purpose of approaching my brother? Be careful, don't lie. Or I will ask the guards to drag you out and behead you. You should know who I am, right? Then you should also know that I am not trying to scare you."

Zhang Heng was helpless, and at this point, he could only answer, "Yes, dear Augusta."

The woman that stood in front of Zhang Heng was the noblest in the entire Roman Empire. She was the eldest daughter of Aurelius, and the sister of Commodus, Lucilla. She was also the only woman given the title "Augusta" after her mother's death.

The title Augusta was related to Augustus. Its meaning was roughly similar to a queen. And it was also the highest title that a woman in the entire Roman Empire could get. Lucilla was the wife of Lucius when she got this title. During that time, Rome was ruled by Lucius and Aurelius. Lucius, however, died of illness not long after that, and Aurelius arranged for Lucilla to marry Pompeio.

However, rumors were saying that Lucilla was not very satisfied with the second marriage. Although her current husband was an influential figure in the military, her status was still incomparable when she was married to Lucius. Lucilla's current status was downgraded from a queen to the governor's wife. Fortunately, she got to keep her Augusta title.

And she seemed to value this title very much. When she heard Zhang Heng calling her Augustus, her face finally showed a smile, and her tone was eased. "You haven't answered my question yet, gladiator."

"What do you think a gladiator wants most?" Zhang Heng asked rhetorically.

"Freedom?" Lucilla raised her eyebrows, "All gladiators want freedom, but no, I don't think this is your purpose in approaching my brother."

Zhang Heng's eyelids twitched. He almost thought that something must have gone wrong with Dadatis, and it caused his identity to be exposed. But Lucilla quickly continued, "People who come here tonight, rich or poor, only have one goal," she paused and slowly spat out the two words, "Power. Admit it.

"You want more than freedom. You must have heard about my brother's story. Hmph! He always has some unrealistic expectations for the people at the bottom, and now the two most trusted advisors around him are not even nobles."

"You have a pair of sharp eyes," Zhang Heng admitted.

"No, I just have a good nose, and I can sniff out the scent of people who want more power." Lucilla exhaled, "But, there are a lot of people around my brother now. If you want power and freedom, you might need to change your plan."

Chapter 795: Amphitheatrum Flavium

Seeing the intimate conversation between Zhang Heng and Lucilla, the other gladiators were envious of him.

After all, she was the most respectable and powerful woman in the entire Roman Empire. Although she had hit her early thirties, Lucilla's face and figure were well maintained. Although some gladiators were somewhat hesitant to sell their bodies, no one would be able to resist it if the woman was Lucilla.

However, Zhang Heng was careful while dealing with the beauty in front of him. And the reason was simple. According to history, Lucilla would be involved in the assassination of her brother, Commodus, in a little over a year's time.

The later generations were puzzled by the assassination. Lucilla was the former emperor's daughter, the current emperor's sister, and the only blood relative of Commodus. She had everything that she could ever ask for. The assassination that she led did not bring many benefits to her.

And in terms of planning, there were many flaws. For example, she did not include her husband in her plan. One should know that the latter was a powerful figure in the military, and if he were included in her plan, she would have a way out of whether the plan succeeded or failed. Her husband Pompeo Nuss, however, was kept in the dark from beginning to end. Lucilla chose her cousin Omidius Kuvatratos to work with her.

The latter was a senator, his position in the senate second only to Dior. He also had influences on more than one hundred seats. Technically speaking, he was indeed very influential in the political field. However, the assassination plan that came up by him and Lucilla was not that great.

The two hired Quintianus, Pompo Nuss' nephew, as the killer. This was also the biggest mistake of the whole plan. This man was an absolute idiot. Before executing the plan, he spoke to Commodus and shouted, "The senate wants you dead..."

As a result, he alarmed the nearby guards, and they caught him red-handed. And he did not manage to survive the cruel interrogation. During the interrogation, he told Commodus that Omidius and Lucilla were the masterminds of this assassination. After that, one of them was executed, and the other, exiled to Capri Island and executed not long after that. This was also the real reason why Zhang Heng did not want to be close to Lucilla.

Not only was this woman a lunatic, but she was also brainless. Getting too close to her would most likely result in him getting dragged into her problem. That being said, after Zhang Heng talked to her for a while, he figured that Lucilla might not be as stupid as how history described her. On the contrary, this woman was actually very smart and somewhat unpredictable. These characteristics suited her identity more.

She was, after all, the daughter of the former emperor, married to the emperor, and a powerful figure in the military in two separate marriages. All this while, she had been staying at the top of power. How could such a woman be stupid?

Zhang Heng could not figure out why she planned that stupid assassination more than a year later. That was why Zhang Heng did not want to have anything to do with this woman.

The dinner lasted until late at night. In addition to the gladiator display, there was singing, dancing, and bard recitations. The thing that happened after that had nothing to do with the gladiators. Considering that the gladiatorial battle would begin tomorrow, all the gladiators returned to where they stayed after visiting the place. They needed to recharge and prepare for tomorrow's battle.

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Early the following day, before dawn, Zhang Heng, Bach, and others were awake, and they took a donkey cart to the Amphitheatrum Flavium, where the gladiatorial battle was performed. In the future, the people could only admire the remains of the Amphitheatrum Flavium. Half of the outer ring structure had been destroyed, and only some arch ribs made of bricks and weeds all over the ground inside remained. The tourists that visited this place would imagine the past glory that happened in this building. Right now, Zhang Heng was standing under it, looking up at the complete Amphitheatrum Flavium.

Spectacular! This was everyone's first impression when they saw this building.

The early morning sun shone on the gold-plated bronze Nero statue. Reflecting the light, it looked like it was shining bright. The bronze statue was located in the center of the square, where it was filled with colorful flags. And behind it was the Amphitheatrum Flavium that looked like a great mountain.

The Flavian Amphitheater consisted of four floors, with a height of forty to fifty meters. The bottom three floors had huge arcades. Statues of different looks were in the arcades, and each statue was bigger than the statues in Dior's front hall. Besides, countless shields and ribbons were hung at the arches as if welcoming the heroes that had claimed victory from the war.

Of course, the most attractive thing was the top of the Amphitheatrum Flavium. A bunch of poles was inserted there, at least hundreds of them. These poles were tied with long cables and propped up the giant circle at least one hundred meters above the ground. Tarps made of thin linen cloth were placed on top of this giant circle, creating a huge cover to shade the spectators from the sun.

Considering its size, the roof alone weighed at least twenty to thirty tons. In order to control the height of the roof, the empire had to mobilize a thousand well-trained sailors to do it.

The stones used to build the arena had been transported from the Albrille quarry in the outskirts of Rome. Each piece had an astonishing weight. During that time, the Romans adopted some really extreme methods to build the arches. Unlike the pyramids, the Amphitheatrum Flavium was hollow, and its skeleton was like a bridge, supporting each other. More than two thousand years had passed, and it still magically stood strong.

Interestingly, the Bernabéu Stadium could only accommodate eighty-thousand people, and the Amphitheatrum Flavium that was built two thousand years ago could accommodate ninety-thousand people.

"No wonder they called it the gladiator's temple," Bach murmured. "You have to admit that these Romans are quite good at construction," the Germanic complimented his enemies reluctantly.

It was still early in the morning, and no spectators had entered the arena yet. One could imagine how grand the scene was when this arena was completely filled with people. While fighting under the watchful eyes of ninety-thousand people, the not-so-brave gladiators would feel their calves and stomachs trembling. As long as one claimed the victory, the winner could enjoy the waves of cheering from tens of thousands of excited audience.

Such a sight made the gladiators feel extremely excited just by thinking about it.

In fact, this did not just apply to the two newcomers like Zhang Heng and Bach. Even the veteran gladiators like Habitus were in awe when he saw the Amphitheatrum Flavium. A series of desires flashed through his eyes. Except for Zhang Heng, no gladiator could resist the temptation of fame and fortune.

It had been more than a year since Sethnets retired, and although the gladiator school had pushed out many powerful newcomers during this time, it was still impossible to create a second Sethnets. Not even Sartonilos could recreate Sethnets's legendary achievements. And now, every gladiator was presented the fair opportunity of becoming the best gladiator in Rome.

Chapter 796: Mark Reuss's Worry

The person responsible for welcoming the gladiators from various gladiator schools was a disabled Slav.

He led the crowd to gather in the arena to let them familiarize themselves with the venue. After everyone arrived, he reiterated the battle rules. In the morning, the beastmaster's performance would be held first. The arena had collected all kinds of exotic beasts from all over the country. During the

performance, the beastmaster could showcase their beast-taming skills on those exotic wild beasts, or they could showcase their appetite to the audience.

Come afternoon; it was the gladiators' turn to present themselves. Like the show Zhang Heng experienced in the Victor Arena earlier, the Amphitheatrum Flavium was divided into different types of fights. No matter the kind of fight, only the victorious gladiators were qualified to advance to the next battle.

For the final battle, the arena would select seventy-two best gladiators to participate in the final mixed-fight. The situation was very similar to the twelve-man mixed fight that Zhang Heng participated in at the Victor Arena earlier. This time, however, instead of fighting in pairs, the gladiators were asked to do a one-on-one fight. And the ultimate winner would be the champion of this gladiatorial show.

On the surface, this looked like a fair way of fighting, but in fact, that was not the case. As we all knew, there were many types of gladiators. Even the most popular twelve-man mixed fight in the Victor Arena did not include all kinds of gladiators. That was because certain gladiators were more powerful than the rest. For example, Andabata and Eques would generally overpower the other types of gladiators. The former was equipped with a horse, and the latter was given a chariot. Other than that, Sagittarius could use bow and arrow to kill their enemies.

Under normal circumstances, these special gladiators would only fight against the gladiators with the same professions, such as andabata vs. andabata and eques vs. eques.

However, in order to increase the enjoyment, the gladiatorial performance would, for the first time, bring in all types of gladiators to fight against each other. In other words, if the popular gladiators who were previously favored by the public were to fight against a profession that bettered his, the famous gladiator might lose the battle. However, if they somehow managed to beat the gladiators with a more powerful profession, the fame that they received would surely multiply.

When Zhang Heng was familiarizing himself with the venue, he met several old acquaintances. One of the gladiators was given the nickname Giant. His real name was Philos, and he possessed immense strength. The second gladiator was Thracian Danaus from the Isaiah Arena. And the third one was the gladiator that he just offended, Sartonilos. The latter had been glaring at Zhang Heng coldly. Zhang Heng believed that he would not hesitate to kill if he came across an opportunity in the performance later.

Also worth noting were also some special gladiator professions.

After Zhang Heng and others did some warm-up exercises, they were taken to the lounge on the side. There, they were asked to wait until it was their turn to fight. Fortunately, the arena had prepared breakfast and lunch for them, and they could also make use of the two small training rooms next to them.

Afterward, Mark Reuss arrived at the Amphitheatrum Flavium to boost the morale of his gladiators. "Everyone, it's time to test the promises you made and uphold the honor of the Victor Arena. When you stand in the arena, you are not just representing yourself but the arena behind you. So no matter who your opponent is, don't be afraid. Show your strength and courage. Nemesis, the goddess of revenge, will always look after you!"

After Mark Reuss finished speaking, he took a special look at Zhang Heng, who also nodded at him.

When Mark Reuss saw that, he felt a little relieved. And he wiped the sweat from his forehead. Although he was not the one about to fight these gladiators, he realized that the battle tomorrow might affect the gladiator schools for at least ten years. In other words, his income would be significantly affected if his gladiators lost in the fight tomorrow. That was why he did not even sleep well last night.

And now he finally understood what Gaby told him earlier. It wouldn't be easy to control Zhang Heng.

Last night, the conflict between the latter and Sartonilos was definitely something he did not want to see. Fortunately, the outcome was a tie, with Zhang Heng having a slight upper hand. When Mark Reuss weighed the risk-benefit of that battle, he thought that the unexpected battle was completely unnecessary. Winning would bring him little benefit. However, if Zhang Heng lost the battle, Sartonilos would definitely smash his head to a pile of mush. In this case, before the gladiatorial performance began, Victor Arena would be losing a lot of money since their trump card was gone.

Besides, he could also see that Zhang Heng wanted Commodus to favor him, which was in line with his interests. Mark Reuss hoped that the young emperor, Commodus, would notice his gladiator school and visit Victor Arena to watch performances more often. The fact that the emperor visited his arena would be more effective than any publicity attempts so far. However, Zhang Heng did not discuss this matter with him beforehand. He improvised the whole incident instead. At the same time, Mark Reuss felt that Zhang Heng wanted to get close to Commodus and quit his gladiator school. And it made Mark Reuss a little uncomfortable.

But now, he needed Zhang Heng to win this battle for him. He had to suppress all the thoughts and doubts that he had in mind right now. As for other things, they could only be dealt with after the show was over.

If Zhang Heng won the championship, he would be able to step further away from Mark Reuss's control. Mark Reuss thought that this was the kind of trouble that he was happy to deal with.

Mark Reuss did not stay in the gladiator's lounge for too long. After encouraging his gladiators, he made a move to the stand reserved for him. And he would watch the gladiatorial show from there.

As soon as Mark Reuss left, another man appeared in front of Zhang Heng.

When Sartonilos got up and walked toward Zhang Heng, the guards in the lounge immediately drew out their weapons and warned Sartonilos. It was strictly forbidden for the gladiators to engage in a fight in the arena lounge. No matter the grudge between the two, they were only allowed to sort it out on the battlefield.

However, Sartonilos ignored those warnings. He walked towards Zhang Heng and said, "I will pray for you, easterner. I want you to win the battles and get promoted to the final brawl. As long as I get my hands on my weapon, whatever happened last night will never happen again."

"This is true," Zhang Heng nodded. "If we all had weapons, what happened last night would have never happened."

The lounge guard was forced to call his companion not far away due to the pressure brought by Sartonilos. However, when the other guard arrived in the lounge, Sartonilos had returned to his seat and had stopped glaring at Zhang Heng.

And it did not take long for everyone to hear the footsteps and noise coming from above their heads. They knew that the audience had begun to enter the arena.

This time, the gladiatorial show was funded by the royal family and prepared by the senate with the goal of entertaining the people of the city of Rome. Hence, they did not charge any fees from them. Although the arena had ninety-thousand seats, it was still not enough to fit all the people in Rome. That was because the population of Rome was 1.5 million.

Among them, the nobles had their own designated seats. The commoners, on the other hand, would be given a domino block with their seat number, gate number, and zone engraved. It was somewhat similar to the concert tickets of later generations. It was to ensure that everyone could enter the arena in an orderly manner.

Chapter 797: Bet On Him

The first person who showed his face in the arena was the Roman Emperor, Commodus, who also happened to be the gladiatorial show's main sponsor. He stood on a carriage, wearing a flower crown, and wore his glamorous emperor costume. He walked around the arena, and at the same time, the servants and guards around tossed bread and copper coins at the stands. His generous gesture quickly triggered tsunami-like fanfare from the tens of thousands of spectators.

Commodus's face was filled with excitement because at this moment, he could intuitively feel that the people were with him, and they supported his rule. So he frequently waved his hands to greet the audience in the stands.

And his wife, Christina, who was at the lower-level stands had her eyes filled with excitement and admiration at the scene. Every woman wanted their man to become a hero that everyone admired, and here, her husband was the emperor of the entire Roman Empire.

On the other hand, Lucilla's expression in the other box was worth pondering upon.

Although she was smiling, too, the corners of her mouth showed a hint of sarcasm. She then said, "He is quite enjoying the moment, isn't it?"

"Huh?" With all that noise around, her husband sitting beside her could hardly hear what she said.

Instead of repeating herself, she yawned, "Is the show going to start any time soon? I've been waiting for so long."

"Oh, should be soon. We have to wait for our emperor to finish with the parade. After that, the gladiators would step into the arena," said Pompeo Nuss with a smile. He knew his wife's temper well enough.

Many people admired him for marrying the daughter of Aurelius to become the son-in-law of the previous emperor and the brother-in-law of the current emperor. Lucilla was a famous beauty. Although this was her second marriage, she was still young and beautiful enough to become every men's dream.

However, Pompeo Nuss knew very well that the bond between the two served the political means. When they were at home, they seemed estranged, rarely talking to each other. Their relationship was

more like host and guest. Lucilla inherited her mother's seductive temperament and charm. Pompeo Nuss, on the other hand, had relationships with other women.

Pompeo Nuss was completely fine with the way they lived right now. A man of his position knew very well what he needed the most. After marrying Lucilla, his position in the political field was further fortified. Hence, he had no complaints about his current circumstance.

"How much did you bring?" Lucilla asked afterward.

"Now? I only have some change, maybe forty or fifty Aureus?" Pompeo Nuss searched his pocket and said.

Aureus was a Roman gold coin. One Aureus was roughly equal to one hundred Sestertius. In other words, Pompeo's change was equivalent to four or five thousand Sestertius. He paused and asked, "You need more money? If it's not enough. I can ask the servants to go home and get more."

"No. It's fine. I'll go and look for a money lender." Lucilla waved, and immediately a maid went to look for the moneylender.

Gladiatorial performances were always paired with gambling. Hence, the moneylender was like a shark that scented blood in the arena. One could always count on them showing up.

Soon a moneylender with a mouthful of yellow teeth came over and bowed respectfully, "Is there anything I can do for you, Dear Augusta?"

"I need to borrow money to bet on my favorite gladiators. I can return the money to you after the show is over. How does the interest work?" Lucilla asked.

"How much do you want to borrow?"

"Let's start with five thousand gold coins first," Lucilla said lightly.

The money lender's face changed slightly when he heard the amount. He had been to hundreds of gladiatorial performances and never encountered someone who asked to borrow such a tremendous amount of money. This alone would even exceed what he lent to the entire audience that attended the show.

However, he was relieved when he was reminded of the woman's identity in front of him. The other party was Augusta, the emperor's sister. This would be a considerable amount of money to anyone, but for the royalty, it was no more but small change they used for gambling.

"Since you will return it after the performance is over, the interest will be a hundred gold coins." the lender said, "But I can't lend you so much money alone. I have to look for other money lenders to gather five thousand gold coins for you."

"Whatever." Lucilla waved her hand, "Hurry up and write up a contract for me. Don't delay me from watching the show."

"Yes."

The moneylender quickly put together all the gold coins before coming to Lucilla with the contract. At that time, the gladiators had already begun to enter the arena one after another while holding their heads high. And the tens of thousands of spectators were cheering for them.

And from the cheers, one could also tell how famous a gladiator was.

The spectators cheered the loudest, for instance, when Sartonilos appeared on the stage. Habitus, too, enjoyed the screams of many female audiences. As for Zhang Heng and Bach, the cheers were not as much as those famous gladiators. It was totally normal. Take Zhang Heng as an example. He had only completed a couple of performances. No matter how outstanding he was, he could not compare with those veteran gladiators who have accumulated popularity for several years. Bach did even worse than him.

Lucilla's eyes lit up when she saw Zhang Heng. She then pointed at him and said to the maid beside her, "Bet on him."

"How much?"

"Everything."

This time, Pompeo Nuss could not help but look at Lucilla. Even for people like them, five thousand gold coins were not a small amount of money. He did not expect Lucilla to bet all of them on one gladiator. He then asked curiously, "Are you confident that he can win?"

"Have you not seen his performance last night?"

"What performance?" Pompeo Nuss was a little lost when he heard what she said. Last night, he was busy talking to a few veterans about the placement of the armies. After all, now that the war between the Roman Empire and the Germanic tribes was over, the Roman Empire's border was relatively peaceful. After moving the armies away from the border, they needed to think of a place to place them. The final solution was the result of a decision made by multiple parties.

Pompeo Nuss had been busy with this matter recently. The banquet last night was a perfect opportunity for him to look for some partners to work with him and exchanged information. Hence, he did not watch the fight between Zhang Heng and Sartonilos.

"A boring man. All you can think of is politics all day." Said Lucilla while holding her chin.

Pompeo Nuss was not bothered by what she said. He just shrugged slightly, "This is who I am. I can't change it. But I believe in your decision since you think he can win the final championship, then I'll bet on him too. But not that kind of money. I'm only willing to bet forty-six Aureus."

"Don't blame me if you lose the bet." Lucilla stared at him.

"You don't even care about your five thousand gold coins. My forty-six Aureus is just the amount of money to bet for fun. If you win, I will pay for your interest." Pompeo Nuss grinned.

Chapter 798: Thanks, But I Don't Need That Kind Of Thing

The morning performance had nothing to do with Zhang Heng and the others. After showing up, the group of gladiators returned to the lounge, waiting for their turn to fight.

Blood and death were stirring the nerves of the spectators in the stands all the time. The spectators' shouts and cheers made the wooden planks above their heads creak, where dust escaped the gaps and fell on everyone's hair and shoulders, not unlike ashes from a raging fire. The lounge, however, was extremely quiet, as if it were another world.

However, if one thought that the beast was asleep, the person would be making a grave mistake.

There they lay in the dark, grinding their teeth and sharpening their claws, waiting for their turn to kill. But until the last moment, no one knew who the prey or hunter was.

With continuous bursts of cheers and screams, the beastmasters' show finally came to an end. The excellent beastmasters slaughtered one hundred grumpy bison. Some, however, were gored by the bison's horns, and some were trampled to death by them.

The blood of humans and beasts stained the arena's yellow sand. Before the audience could admire the heroic posture of those beastmasters, the next event had begun. The moment that belonged to the gladiators had finally arrived.

The vendors shuffled through the stands, peddling snacks such as pine nuts, walnuts, figs, olives, and small bread. In addition, they sold comfortable cushions and rose water with a charming fragrance. After shouting for a long time, the vendors' voices became hoarse. During this short break, the spectators would visit the nearest fountain to relieve their thirst so that they could continue to cheer for their favorite gladiators.

Out of the seven players from the Victor Arena, the first gladiator that fought the first battle was Habitus. He did not look too happy. Being the first one to fight was actually quite important. If he won the first game, he would be able to inspire and boost the gladiators' morale after him. However, since he was one of the strongest gladiators from the Victor Arena, it was not his role to do such a thing. He should be in Zhang Heng's position, which was to fight last. If he was not allowed to do that, he should at least take Bach's position.

Instead, Mark Ruess had arranged for him to fight first by Mark Reuss. In other words, he was only the third most crucial gladiator to Mark Reuss. Naturally, this insulted Habitus. The most important thing for him to do right now was to claim the first victory. Even if he did not care about Victor Arena, he had to take care of his reputation at least.

Earlier, Habitus had gone to look for his trainer for a warmup and a mental state adjustment. Until his name was called, he followed the person in charge of the elevator under the arena. The whole battle lasted for about fifteen minutes. From time to time, the crowd would cheer until the end of the battle. After that, Habitus walked back to the lounge alone. His left arm and chest had a stab wound, but it was not that severe. After he dealt with his injuries, he returned to his seat.

His return caused many to look at him enviously. One had to know that the gladiators who qualified to participate in this battle were not weak. Since Habitus managed to end the battle in such a short time and only suffered some minor injuries, it reflected his extraordinary strength.

After Habitus sat down, several gladiators from the Victor Arena also congratulated him. Right now, the gladiators that he cared about the most were Bach and Zhang Heng. And he found that Bach had gone

to the training room long ago. As for Zhang Heng, he was holding the two Persian swords that Mark Reuss gave him and was taking a nap in the corner.

“Is he underestimating his opponents?” Habitus sneered. The one thing that a gladiator should avoid was carelessness. No matter how strong a gladiator was, he would eventually lose the battle if he let his guard down.

Sartoniilos shared the same thought too. As of now, he had also ended his first battle. The trump card of a small gladiator school, the opponent that he fought against was quite powerful. After some twists and turns at the end, Sartoniilos still managed to defeat him without much hassle. His opponent was lucky enough to surrender in time, and the spectators decided to spare his life because he fought well. Immediately, he left the arena. The battle after that had nothing to do with him.

But unlike Habitus, Sartoniilos did not want Zhang Heng to be eliminated before he fought him. He wanted to face him again and redeem himself from the shame he experienced from the battle last night.

As time went by, fewer and fewer people were left in the lounge.

Except for Zhang Heng, the other six fighters from Victor Arena had already completed their first battle. Four of them won their first fight, and the others suffered great losses. One of them managed to keep his life, and the other was killed on the battlefield. Apart from that, one of the winners was seriously injured. At the moment, he was receiving treatment in the medical room. No one knew if he could participate in the next battle.

Mark Reuss was somewhat satisfied with this result. After all, the participants in this competition were the elites of the gladiator school. It was quite a huge achievement for Victor Arena to achieve more than 60% of the winning rate. He was pleased to see that Bach and Habitus defeated their opponents easily.

However, the gladiator that he paid the most attention to was still Zhang Heng and his performance. To wait for Zhang Heng to appear on the fighting ground, Mark Reuss even forgot to drink water, and the corners of his lips were blistered.

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“Zhang Heng, Cincinnati, it’s your turn.”

When Zhang Heng heard someone calling his name, he woke up, yawned, and walked towards the elevator with his two Persian swords. A kind gladiator behind him reminded, “You forgot your helmet.”

“Thank you, but I don’t need it.” Zhang Heng waved his hand.

His figure then disappeared outside the door.

Such brazen arrogance caused the quiet lounge to come alive again. However, it did not take long for their noise to be overwhelmed by the burst of cheers from the stands.

Sartoniilos frowned, and he was a little puzzled. Looking at the time, the two should have just stood in the fighting ground not too long ago. With Zhang Heng’s current popularity, it would be impossible that he could get so much support during his introduction. Even if the audience was cheering for him, it was not possible for the cheers to last for so long.

However, the shock in his heart at this moment was not as great as Zhang Heng's opponent, Cincinnati.

The latter was now kneeling on one knee, looking at the broken trident in his hand, with a look of fear and disbelief.

Just when the judge was to introduce the two of them to the audience, Zhang Heng interrupted him. Cincinnati then heard Zhang Heng spoke, "You can do it when the fight is over."

After he finished speaking, he rushed towards Cincinnati, and what happened next was something Cincinnati would never forget.

Zhang Heng's feet stepped on the ground, bent his calves slightly, and he leaped into the air. He then bent his body like a crescent moon, his strength and balance well-calibrated. Cincinnati, however, did not have the time and the mood to admire him.

Zhang Heng's swords were about to land on top of his head. Cincinnati slid half a step back in accordance to his previous fighting habits, and then blocked the attack with his trident.

A few seconds later, he saw Zhang Heng's swords cut his trident into half, and stop in front of his forehead.

After that, Zhang Heng put away his sword, ignored the dumbfounded referee, turned around, and walked towards the lounge.

The audience went silent for a while before letting out a deafening roar, the craziest applause since the show's beginning. No matter which gladiator they had been supporting, all of them were awe-inspired by the easterner and his arrogant way of ending the battle.

Chapter 799: He's Good

Everyone in the lounge could only hear cheers and screams outside, but they did not know what happened out there. Fortunately, they weren't left hanging for too long because Zhang Heng had reappeared at the lounge's door.

"Are you... Are you back here to take your helm?" the gladiator who kindly reminded Zhang Heng to take the helmet asked innocently.

"No, the battle is over." Zhang Heng said as he sat back in his seat.

"Ended?"

All the gladiators were in an uproar upon hearing this. They had imagined all kinds of possibilities, but they had never expected that the battle would end so soon. Habitus had been considered to have completed his battle quickly when he took a quarter of an hour. However, when compared to Zhang Heng's performance, it was as if Habitus had taken a century to complete his battle. Zhang Heng's time spent fighting was just enough for a gladiator to enter and exit the arena.

This meant that his battle with Cincinnatus had ended in an instant.

Cincinnatus was no stranger to gladiatorial battles. Hailing from the Hunahpu Arena, he might not be as strong as quasi-ace gladiators such as Habitus, but he was considered a first-class gladiator in Rome.

However, not even a strong gladiator like him could survive Zhang Heng's first strike. Everyone was wondering how powerful Zhang Heng really was.

All the other gladiators' hearts, Sartonilos included, sank.

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The cheers and screams from the audience stands did not go away as Zhang Heng left. On the contrary, the shouts and cheers only got louder and louder, causing the gladiatorial performance to be put on hold temporarily. When it came to how they fought, the fight between Zhang Heng and Cincinnatus was not as exciting. There was no muscle-to-muscle collision, no blood-spill, and no dramatic way to end the battle. With a single sword and Zhang Heng's non-delay fighting style, he managed to conquer 90,000 spectators by walking off the arena after the battle was over.

All the gladiators who stepped into the arena today were masters from various gladiator schools. They all had unique characteristics and signature skills. And they were here to present a visual feast for the audience. However, most of the audience had gotten used to watching different kinds of dramatic fighting scenes. Any ordinary fighting could no longer stimulate their nerves.

Even Habitus and Sartonilos received only slightly more fanfare than an ordinary duel. Right now, the arena was completely overwhelmed by the continuous cheers. Today, Ancient Rome and its people had seen the minimalist fighting style for the first time in this arena. The audience could not wait to hear the judge's verdict. They had been asking the people around them about the origins of this mysterious oriental man. As for those who had witnessed Zhang Heng's previous battle, they started to describe Zhang Heng's heroic posture in those battles to their companions. And they were still trying to figure out his mysterious origin.

It seemed that Commodus was also infected by this fanatical atmosphere. Although he was still working hard to maintain the emperor's majestic aura, the flash of appreciation in his eyes could not be concealed, especially after Zhang Heng broke his opponent's trident into half. He was the first one that stood up and applauded.

On the other hand, Lucilla was calmer. It seemed that this outcome was something that she expected. Even if all the people around her stood up when Commodus stood up, she still sat on her seat, held her chin, and muttered, "If this were to go on, how am I to make money?"

"This man is amazing." Pompeo Nuss was also applauding at this time, with a look of surprise on his face, "If I had known it, I would have taken out all the money I saved and bet it on him. With that, I don't have to work hard to make more money for three years.

"No, you won't. He hasn't won the championship yet. As long as he hasn't won the championship, there is a risk, and you won't bet all your chips on something as risky as this."

"Am I this kind of person?" Pompeo Nuss was surprised. After he thought about it for a while, he nodded. "It seems like this is the case. My wife knows me best. So, what about you? If it was you, how are you going to make the decision?"

"I am different from you. I trust my instinct. My instinct tells me that he will be the ultimate champion of this gladiatorial show. So no matter how much money I have, I will bet it all on him. Women are born emotional."

Pompeo Nuss tutted, "But you have never lost, have you?"

"Yes, probably because my luck has been good," Lucilla snorted.

Seeing that the audience was still unwilling to calm down, the subsequent gladiatorial performance could not be carried out, and there was a possibility of riots in the stands. Commodus had to wave his hand to signal everyone to calm down. But this was only a temporary solution. Commodus knew that if he could not come up with a solution to satisfy everyone, it might cause an even greater commotion.

Commodus discussed with several consultants around him. Someone proposed to distribute gifts or coins again. However, Commodus felt that this method was not going to be effective. It would make it seem like the only thing he knew was to use money and bribe his people. Commodus wanted to come up with a solution that could showcase his charm and wittiness.

Clint bowed and said, "Your Majesty, to solve this, you must look for the person who caused this commotion. If you can persuade Zhang Heng to fight again, he might just meet the needs of the people."

"Fight again?" Commodus raised his eyebrows, "But according to the regulations, the winner of a gladiatorial fight shall not be asked to fight again until the second round of competition. Isn't it unfair to him?"

"This rule is to let the gladiator have enough time to rest and recover. However, he did not use much strength in the previous battle. Hence, there will be no problem for him to continue to fight," Clint said.

"That sounds logical. But let's send someone to ask him for his opinion. If he doesn't want to fight, we can't force him because it will destroy fairness. I want people to know that under my rule, fairness and justice will be maintained."

"Of course, your majesty." Clint hurried back to the lounge to look for Zhang Heng after that.

On the other hand, Commodus asked the band to perform to calm the audience stage down. Fortunately, Zhang Heng decided to come to the center of the arena with the elevator. He had agreed to fight again. And Clint had not gotten back to his stand.

Seeing Zhang Heng reappeared, the cheers from the audience became even louder. Zhang Heng then bowed at Commodus. Next, the audience started to cheer for the emperor. Commodus felt good when he heard the cheer that was meant for him. At the same time, Zhang Heng became more and more pleasing to his eyes. He began to think that it would be perfect if Zhang Heng belonged to him since he was highly skillful at fighting and knew how to put himself into others' shoes.

Chapter 800: Opponent

The previous battles had all been arranged by the arena long ago. To ensure that the final battle's excitement and popularity could be kept up, the most powerful gladiators would not meet during the early phase of the battle. But now, Zhang Heng had appeared in front of the audience while they were cheering for him. It also brought out a new problem. His opponent hadn't yet been decided. The

organizer did not know what to do at a time like this. Zhang Heng, however, walked to the judge and talked to him, to which the latter looked very surprised. He repeatedly asked, "Are you sure?"

"Of course, I won't play around with my life," Zhang Heng said.

The judge then hurriedly told Zhang Heng's proposal to Commodus in the front row. And the young emperor also had a strange look on his face when he heard what Zhang Heng said, "He said that?"

"Yes, Your Majesty, I asked him twice." The judge affirmed.

Commodus thought for a while, "Then we should trust him. He is a man who can always perform miracles, and I think this time is no exception."

Commodus gave the order, and soon, more and more people in the stands knew which opponent Zhang Heng would face in the next battle.

The results shocked the audience, especially when they saw Zhang Heng handing over his two Persian swords. They started a fervent whispering to each other. Although Zhang Heng had presented overwhelming strength in the previous battle, not many people were optimistic about his next. Considering the opponent that he was going to face, his fighting skills, strength, and speed would not give him an advantage in this battle. And the worst part was that he actually planned to fight his enemy with his bare hands.

Of course, this was just what the audience thought about him. Not planning to use any weapons, Zhang Heng, who proposed this fight, did not feel that his decision would cost him his life. The only item that he requested was only a rope.

He first tested the strength of the rope before tying it into a knot to make a noose. He felt like he was back in the 19th century wild west of the United States with the lasso across his shoulder.

Next, his opponent was released from the cage.

He was met with a full-grown adult bison. With a length of more than two meters and a weight of around one ton, it was no wonder the audience thought Zhang Heng couldn't win this battle. With its weight, it was impossible for a regular human to stop its attack. If it did run into someone, the poor soul's bones would probably be crushed and shattered.

Moreover, the bison's skin was thick and tough, and its pair of horns was almost indestructible. If it felt that a group of lions threatened its life, the bison would risk its life to fight against the lions. A lot of times, when a pride of lions went on a hunt, the bison would plant its tusks into the lion's stomach and kill it on the spot.

Reality was different from the movies. In reality, gladiators and beastmasters were two completely different professions. Under normal circumstances, the two professions would not exchange opponents. The fighting skills that a gladiator learned and trained for were used to deal with another gladiator, which also meant they had never learned how to deal with beasts. On the other hand, the same applied to the beastmasters as well. These two professions would never cross paths with each other.

That was why the judge was taken aback when he heard that Zhang Heng was about to challenge the bison. After that, the judge got even more shocked when he heard that Zhang Heng did not need any

weapons other than a strong rope. The audience in the stands could not imagine how he was going to defeat the bison. With his fists and teeth?

But just when everyone was puzzled, the battle had already begun. The beastmaster poked a sharpened rod into the bison to provoke it. Immediately, the bison locked on Zhang Heng with its pair of big copper bell-like eyes. After that, the bison lowered his head and revealed the deadliest weapon on its head before rushing toward Zhang Heng.

On the other hand, Zhang Heng did not rush to throw the lasso at the bison.

When he was a cowboy, he tended to many bulls and had dealt with many disobedient ones. However, this was his first time dealing with such a large bovine, and there was no horse for him to ride either, so he had to be more cautious. Fortunately, the method that one used to capture a bison was the same method used to tame a bull. All the experience that he had accumulated earlier could be put to use right now. Zhang Heng did not rush to lasso it because the beast was so powerful that even if the lasso landed on its neck accurately, Zhang Heng would probably be the one that dragged around.

So he chose to dodge the bison's attack for the time being. He rolled on the ground to avoid the bison's tackle. However, the bison had locked on to him, and it was determined to kill Zhang Heng. Once it realized that it missed, it quickly turned around and ran towards Zhang Heng's back, seeming as if it was ready to deal a lethal blow.

Seeing that the bison was less than half a meter away from Zhang Heng, the audience began to worry about him. And Queen Christina could not bear to watch the performance anymore. She quickly plunged her head into her husband's arms. Commodus's heart sank. Although he said he wanted to believe in Zhang Heng, he was also skeptical about dealing with the bison empty-handed. Seeing that Zhang Heng's life was at stake, he could not help but suspect that the gladiator would meet his end here.

It would be a pity if this oriental man really lost his life here. Commodus had started to like Zhang Heng, and he wanted to look for an opportunity to chat with the latter. After the previous battle, Zhang Heng's odds soared in the betting business. It meant that everyone was very optimistic that he would win the championship. If his arrogance caused him to lose his life here and failed to join the final battle, his flawless victory in the first round of his battle would become a joke.

Pompeo Nuss, on the other side, also shook his head while watching and said to his wife, "It seems like your five thousand gold coins are about to disappear soon. How are you holding up? Is your private money enough to pay for the loan? Do you need me to help you to pay some of it first?"

"What a caring man." Lucilla smiled upon hearing this, "but the battle is not over yet, isn't it?"

As if he had a pair of ears growing behind his head, Zhang Heng knew what was going on behind his back. Instead of looking back, he moved a little to the left and dodged the brutal sneak attack. The two sharp horns touched his arms, and the bison would plant them into Zhang Heng's body if he made the wrong move. After that, Zhang Heng did something so crazy that no one had expected.

Soon after he had escaped death's claws, he took the initiative to reach out to grab a horn and lightly tapped his toes on the ground. The next moment he leaped onto the back of the bison, and there was a burst of applause from the stands. The audience was shocked, bewildered by what they saw.

However, Zhang Heng's plan also fell through. The bison's back was so bumpy that he could not string the lasso around its neck. After that, the bison charged at the rope net at the edge of the arena, trying to throw Zhang Heng off his back. Fortunately, Zhang Heng managed to figure out its intention in time. Leaving with no other option, he had to jump down from the bison's back, roll on around and escaped another round of trampling.