

## 48 Hours 811

### Chapter 811: Exciting Performance

Zhang Heng took a relatively long rest after he eliminated the archer gladiator. After the rest of the gladiators watched him performed the magical move against the gladiator archer, all their hopes were shattered. And none of them wanted to become his opponent.

In the end, the Giant, Terufelos, decided to stand up.

He was a heavy-armored gladiator. Unlike the ordinary heavy-armored gladiator, his immense strength allowed him to move freely even though he carried a ton of extra weight on his body. His entire body was almost entirely covered in heavy armor. Besides, he was also holding a tower shield.

He looked exactly like a moving fortress.

Other than Zhang Heng, he was also one of the best performers in the arena. He had already killed two opponents, and he was unstoppable. However, in the next battle, he knew that he was about to face the biggest challenge of his gladiator career.

Terufelos's expressions turned solemn. Though he took the looks of a lumbering giant, he was certainly not dumb, and he knew exactly how powerful his opponent was. That being said, he did not think that there was no chance to defeat his next opponent. The audience in the stands also began to get excited at this time. Since Sartonilos and others were not performing well, Terufelos was probably the first heavyweight opponent Zhang Heng encountered. All the spectators looked forward to their battle, expecting some dramatic fight to take place.

Terufelos did not rush to attack his opponent as usual. He put on a defensive posture and said at the same time, "What have you done to Sartonilos and other gladiators? Why do they look so lifeless?"

"I did nothing to them," Zhang Heng said truthfully. "I had always thought that the truly terrifying thing is never the thing that brings fear, but the person's expectation of fear. This expectation will magnify the fear by hundreds or even thousands of times."

Terufelos might have actually understood what Zhang Heng was talking about, but he did not bother to dwell on this question. He squatted down and hid his body completely behind the shield, leaving only half of his head with helmet exposed. "Come on! Whether I win or lose in this battle, my trip to Rome will not be in vain as long as I get to fight with you."

Zhang Heng had always been very polite to whoever was polite to him. So, he replied, "The observation hole on your helmet is too big. My sword can pierce it, but rest assured that I won't be attacking your eyes. That's it. Other than that, your turning speed is too slow. So, I will focus on your back, especially the gap between your helmet and armor. You'd better be prepared."

Terufelos was left in shock when he heard what Zhang Heng said. He had participated in many battles and had never encountered anyone who told his opponents about their battle plan. It made Terufelos wonder if Zhang Heng was playing psychological games.

Before he had time to think about it, Zhang Heng had already rushed towards him.

Immediately, Terufelos put up his defense. He found out that Zhang Heng did not use his speed and agility to go behind him, as he had said but instead, charged towards his front.

Was this going to be a head-on fight?

Terufelos could not figure out what Zhang Heng was trying to do. His combat skills, agility, speed, and balance were all better than his. The only attribute that he had the advantage of was his strength. He could not understand why Zhang Heng would use his weakness to go against his forte. Could it be that the easterner in front of him was purely arrogant?

Although his heart was full of doubts, Terufelos was readied to take on Zhang Heng's attack. With his other hand gripping his weapon tightly, he leaned his shoulders forward and braced himself for the impact. He was going to attack Zhang Heng once Zhang Heng lost his balance.

Terufelos knew that he had a very short window to attack Zhang Heng. As long as he could seize this opportunity, however, he might take the initiative in the next round. The next second, he felt that the weight of his shield increased. Instead of attacking him, Zhang Heng jumped up from the ground, stepped on the edge of his shield, leaped over his head, and swung his Persian swords at Terufelos.

Zhang Heng's bold change caught Terufelos completely off-guard. By the time Terufelos realized what was going on, Zhang Heng was already behind him. Immediately, Terufelos's heart sank. But at this critical moment, he remembered what Zhang Heng had told him. At such a critical juncture, he wasn't bothered to figure out whether or not Zhang Heng was telling him the truth. Without any hesitation, he used his short sword to protect his neck.

After that, the spectators witnessed something that ultimately left them stunned. They saw Zhang Heng jump over the squatting Terufelos, and before they could cheer at the outrageous move, Terufelos blocked Zhang Heng's attack with his sword as if a pair of eyes grew behind his back.

The first round of the match between the two was a very delicate affair. When Zhang Heng realized that he had missed the hit, he took the initiative to step away from Terufelos. After that, the Giant, now drenched in cold sweat, quickly turned his body with his large shield. And now, both sides had entered the standoff stage.

Although it was only a brief moment, the audience in the stands applauded for this epic scene. The emperor and the other powerful people did not hesitate to express their appreciation for the smooth battle that they witnessed. This appreciation was not only meant for Zhang Heng, but it was also dedicated to his opponent, Terufelos.

The applauding turned Terufelos's face red like a little girl getting complimented. On the other hand, Terufelos knew very well the move that he just performed was not something he thought of. Without Zhang Heng's reminder, he would have never kept up with his movements. In other words, he would have lost the battle just now if he failed to block the attack.

At this moment, Terufelos finally understood why Sartonilos and others were so afraid of Zhang Heng. Earlier, it was already very stressful for him to watch Zhang Heng fought from a distance. When Terufelos fought him personally, he knew how powerful Zhang Heng was. Both of them were on a completely different level.

He felt ridiculous for thinking that he could defeat Zhang Heng. He felt that as long as he went all out and with a little luck, there was still a chance for him to win. However, the cruel reality told him that this was just his dream. Terufelos no longer wanted to fight Zhang Heng anymore. All he wanted to do was toss his weapon aside and surrender.

However, Zhang Heng suddenly said, "You want to surrender? You wouldn't be so weak, right?"

"Of course not," Terufelos replied angrily, "but it doesn't make sense for the fight to continue. I admit that I can't beat you, but I don't need your mercy to make my defeat look good."

"Do you think I gave you the advice to make your defeat look good?" Zhang Heng asked rhetorically.

"If not, are you trying to make fun of me?" Terufelos asked angrily.

Zhang Heng shook his head, "Look at your surroundings and the audience in the stands. They waited for so many days to watch a wonderful show. If we can't satisfy them, they won't let us go. Initially, I expected Sartonilos to be a little more courageous, but now it seems hopeless to rely on them. So, I can only rely on you now. Come on, let us join forces and give the audience a wonderful performance."

### **Chapter 812: What Do You Mean By Dramatic?**

Zhang Heng was willing to guide Terufelos because he had a good impression of him. That was why Zhang Heng wanted to help to grow his reputation. Other than that, he needed a heavyweight fighting performance to help him ascend to the throne of champions.

Although getting consecutive victories was an enjoyable thing, the audience might get bored if nothing exciting was presented to them. When that time came, the audience would wish for a challenger powerful enough to pose a threat to Zhang Heng. And now Terufelos was playing this role.

And more importantly, Terufelos found that he could not say no to Zhang Heng's plan. It was not because he could not let go of his fame. Still, Zhang Heng also told him frankly that if he chose to concede when they were evenly matched, the audience would be disappointed by him. There was a high chance that they would be asking the organizer to execute Terufelos.

Therefore, Terufelos was now left with no other option. He could only continue to cooperate with Zhang Heng to complete this epic battle. The audience in the stands finally got to feast their eyes and appreciate the duel between these two outstanding gladiators. Among them, Zhang Heng's combat skills were outstanding, and he was incredibly agile. On the other hand, his opponent, Terufelos the Giant, could not keep up with Zhang Heng's rhythm, but his battle instinct was extraordinary.

No matter how Zhang Heng changed his footwork, the large man could always complete the defense setup before Zhang Heng could land his sword on him. Sometimes he did not even need to look back, and he could somehow block the attack with his shield. And the audience was bewildered by what they saw. Some even felt that there was something wrong with this battle. The owner of Terufelos's school, for instance, had heaps of unanswered questions about this battle in his mind.

He knew Terufelos's strength better than anyone else. Seeing that he took the initiative to pick Zhang Heng as his opponent, his master was furious. Ever since Zhang Heng showed his true strength in front of everyone, he had given up on claiming the championship. He just wanted Terufelos to take advantage

of this final battle to accumulate his game and reputation. If his popularity rose, he would be able to sell more tickets in the future. It seemed like the goddess of fate had started to favor him.

On the other hand, Sartonilos and the other gladiators were saddened by what they saw. During this crucial final battle, their performance had deteriorated severely. Some of them were still stuck in their first battle. Therefore, Terufelos's owner wished that he would not meet Zhang Heng as his opponent so early. It would have been perfect if he could defeat a few more opponents and show off his strength. By doing that, his reputation would bump up in Rome. However, he did not expect that Terufelos would be insane enough to challenge Zhang Heng voluntarily. He did not avoid Zhang Heng like everyone else.

This posed a huge problem to Terufelos's owner. He was worried that Zhang Heng would defeat Terufelos within a few moves. All the fame and reputation that he accumulated for such a long time would be in vain if that happened. It was a shame that this matter had to turn out this way. The owner had no other choice but to pray that Terufelos would not be defeated so quickly.

In the end, Terufelos gave him a pleasant surprise. Up until now, Terufelos was the only gladiator who got to do a real fight with Zhang Heng. Here came the question: was this Terufelos still the same Terufelos he knew?

He knew his ace gladiator, Terufelos, all too well. From the moment he bought him, then found him a teacher and helped him discover his potential and talent, it took him a lot of effort and time.

In other words, he was the only person that watched Terufelos grow to become such a powerful gladiator. His skills and strength were always better than him. For the first time, the Terufelos in front of him looked like a stranger. Whenever he thought that Zhang Heng would defeat Terufelos, the giant somehow managed to crush his pessimistic prediction with his outstanding performance.

Did that mean that the giant in front of him had suddenly awakened, or he had been hiding his true strength all this time? Maybe he was always stronger than he appeared to be. The question was, why did he hide his true strength? Could he have been planning to escape from the gladiator school? Was he going to kill his master? The more he thought about all these questions, the more terrifying it became for him.

While Terufelos's owner was dwelling in all those questions, the battle between Zhang Heng and Terufelos became fiercer. When Terufelos took on Zhang Heng's attack with a flashy move again, he finally could not help but ask, "Are... Are we good now? We have been fighting for a long time. I think the audience should also be satisfied by our performance."

And the next moment, he finally heard the reply that he had been waiting for a long time. Zhang Heng nodded and said, "Well, it's almost time to stop."

Terufelos felt a sense of relief when he heard the words.

There was never a gladiatorial performance that could tire him out so much. Though it looked like he was as powerful as Zhang Heng, he no longer felt that he was a gladiator, but a troupe actor, holding the script in his hand and performed. It was hard for him to get through the whole thing. After the performance was over, he could think about where he wanted to reward himself.

When the battle had almost come to an end, he realized that his nightmare was not over yet. He heard Zhang Heng saying, "We need to make the ending more dramatic to impress the audience."

"Wh...What do you mean by dramatic?" Terufelos had now wholly transformed into Zhang Heng's obedient student. He just wanted to end this honorless battle as soon as possible.

"I will attack you later. I was hoping you could use your shield to block my attack. An accident will happen at around the eleventh strike. My sword will stick to the inside of your shield. At that time, it will be your chance to fight back."

"What? I still have a chance to fight back?" Terufelos almost cried when he heard that.

"Yes, please control the battle first."

"How should I fight back?" Terufelos asked humbly for advice.

"Just follow your usual fighting style."

Terufelos wanted to say that Zhang Heng had guided him during the entire battle, and he almost forgot his usual fighting styles. Fortunately, he held back his words and only replied with an "Understood."

"Don't worry. It will be over soon," Zhang Heng reassured.

"That would be great." Terufelos doubted Zhang Heng's integrity. After all, he was forcing him to put on a show. He was probably not the most honest or trustworthy person.

Zhang Heng then started to do a beautiful combo to end the battle finally. Terufelos also had to stay sharp again and used his large shield to block Zhang Heng's storm-like attack. He initially had some doubts about Zhang Heng's words, but when he counted the eleventh strike, Zhang Heng's Persian sword was indeed stuck on his shield. So Terufelos seized this opportunity and charged at Zhang Heng with his shield instead of attacking him with his sword. This was the kind of decision that a top-tier gladiator would make during an intense fight like this. It was because it would take him longer to swing the sword. And his shield was closer to Zhang Heng. So, he planned to knock Zhang Heng out of balance first. After that, his sword attack would be more effective.

Everything that he expected happened right before his eyes. Zhang Heng was knocked down by the shield, and the audience fell into a hushed murmur, worried for him. Immediately, Zhang Heng let go of the Persian sword, fell to the ground, and dodged Terufelos's attack.

Terufelos reacted quickly and immediately smashed Zhang Heng with his shield on the ground. Before he attacked Zhang Heng, he gave a polite reminder, "I will smash you now."

He then swung the shield in his hand. At the same time, his body was wide opened for Zhang Heng to attack. The next moment he saw Zhang Heng got up from the ground quickly. Not only did he escape his shield attack, but he also managed to get closer to Terufelos. This time, Terufelos was truly frightened by him. He then slashed at Zhang Heng subconsciously. However, he was still half a beat slower than Zhang Heng. When he finally got to move his short sword a few centimeters away from Zhang Heng's arm, Zhang Heng has already placed his Persian sword in front of Terufelos's neck.

The judge looked at their final postures and finally ruled that Zhang Heng was the winner. A burst of suppressed cheers broke out from the stands. As for the loser, not only did Terufelos was not disappointed and sad, but he showed a long-lost smile as if he was the winner.

### **Chapter 813: Do You Know What I Like Most About You?**

The contest between Zhang Heng and Terufelos was undoubtedly the most exciting performance of today. Both top-tier gladiators, the battle between them was intense and exciting. And the twists and turns had fully satisfied the audience's strong desire to watch an earth-shattering battle. In the end, Zhang Heng made a critical move in time to turn the tide around and neutralize his dangerous situation. And it caused all 90,000 spectators to cheer for him.

Although the performance was not over yet, there was no doubt in the audience's eyes that Zhang Heng would claim the championship this time. Even Terufelos could not beat Zhang Heng with his "hidden strength," and the audience would not expect the weakened Sartonilos and other gladiators to come up with something to defeat Zhang Heng. And the final result was indeed what they expected.

After solving the only "tricky and powerful opponent," Zhang Heng decided to deal with the rest of his opponents as quickly as possible. And finally, he won the championship of this gladiatorial show. When the judge announced Zhang Heng as the final winner, everyone, including Commodus, stood up from their seats, cheered, and gave their blessings to the champion.

A shower of rose petals came raining from the sky. After that, the judge presented Zhang Heng palm branches and laurel crowns that symbolized his victory. Under the gaze of 90,000 people, he put on the laurel crown, raised the palm leaf in his hand, and circled the arena.

"Congratulations. You made a lot of money this time. You made me a little jealous."

Pompeo Nuss looked at Lucilla next to him. Since she was one of the first ones who bet on Zhang Heng, his odds were still relatively high at that time. Thanks to that, Lucilla could almost earn twice as much from what she bet on Zhang Heng. In other words, she had just doubled her investment in only three days.

"We have to take risks sometimes." Lucilla smiled.

Pompeo Nuss smiled and nodded. "You are right."

"Do you know what I like best about you?"

"Hmm?"

"Even if you disagree with a point of view, as long as your interests are unaffected, you'll never go against that person. Instead, you will pretend to agree with them. But, deep inside your heart, you think that there's an 80% chance that person is acting like an idiot."

"What caused my beautiful wife to misunderstand me?" Pompeo Nuss smiled bitterly. "I really envy you. You view people and the world so uniquely and courageously. This courage even surpasses those men around you. You've just made an income that even I would be jealous of. How could I..."

Pompeo Nuss hadn't yet finished talking when all of a sudden, Lucilla tapped his lips and planted a kiss on him. Unlike the other women that Pompeo Nuss had met, Lucilla's kiss was quite powerful, just like herself—bold and open without hiding her charm.

The two smooched like there no other people in the stands. While Lucilla kissed Pompeo Nuss, her eyes were staring at Zhang Heng in the arena. And at the same time, a playful smile appeared at the corners of her mouth. She looked like a little girl who suddenly found a new toy.

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When the audience's cheers started to subside, Commodus cleared his throat.

"Come forward, brave gladiator. Let me take a good look at you," Commodus said.

"Yes, Your Majesty." Zhang Heng acted as if they never had the one-on-one training last night. He then walked towards Commodus's pedestal.

Zhang Heng was becoming more and more pleasing to Commodus' eyes. He thought that his easterner was very powerful, and it was extremely rare that he was brilliant too. Zhang Heng could somehow always figure out his intention. And now, he so happened to be lacking such an employee.

To be more precise, Commodus lacked all kinds of talented people around him. Although his father left him a group of experienced individuals to assist him, he always felt that it was not as easy as using his own people. Besides, Commodus could feel that although they were very respectful towards him, they did not think that he had the ability to rule the empire.

All those old-timers kept following the traditions and regulations left by the Aurelius era. Instead of assisting Commodus, they were actually making sure that Commodus would carry out Aurelius's legacy. For that reason, they would order Commodus to carry out specific demands.

Earlier, when Commodus wanted to make peace with the Germanic tribe, the higher-ups from the military attempted to stop him, feeling that such a deed would insult the empire's honor. Since they could defeat the Germanic tribes in just a few years, it did not make sense for Commodus to make peace. And, they were going to pay them as well.

On the other hand, Commodus felt that the empire had used too many soldiers in recent years. Since he was born, he had witnessed his father declaring war in one region after the other. Once he completed a war, a second war would always break out. Those barbarians were like weeds that choked a field. After they were eliminated, another batch of the insufferable plant would somehow sprout up.

In other words, there was actually no point in eliminating the Germanic. They would always come back to fight again after they had recuperated at a different place. It was simply better to just end the war now. Besides, Commodus felt that after they fought for so long, the military had earned many merits. The people of Rome, however, were getting increasingly tired of the war. Hence, Commodus was trying to give what Rome truly wanted.

Simultaneously, the military had been attempting to use Aurelius's legacy to pressure the new emperor. If Aurelius were still alive, Commodus would have chosen to listen to his order. However, now that he was the Roman emperor and tasted the sweetness of power, he realized that it was hard to get anyone to execute his orders. It made him feel how pointless it was Rome's new emperor.

Hence, it was not his top priority to form a team of talented people willing to follow his orders to assist him in ruling Rome.

Right now, an exceedingly talented young man was standing in front of him.

“My people, please tell me. How can I reward him for his wonderful performance?!” Commodus pointed at Zhang Heng in the arena.

At first, some shouted “money,” and others shouted “women.” Everyone was giving out different opinions, but in the end, their voices finally unified. And the word they shouted terrified Mark Reuss.

“Freedom!!!”

This was the thing that every slave gladiator dreamt of. Without freedom, everything that they possessed would never truly belong to them. However, according to typical rules, an ordinary gladiator had to fight in the arena for quite some time and provide the audience with dozens of exciting battles. Only then would the audience ask the arena to grant the gladiator the freedom he had been dreaming of.

However, Zhang Heng’s epic performance had caused the majority of the audience to ask the arena to grant him freedom. And the other reason was that Zhang Heng was not their property. That was why they did not mind that Zhang Heng would become a free man again. Mark Reuss was the only person that was going to suffer from this matter.

Although Zhang Heng had won the championship on behalf of Victor Arena and captured the hearts of Rome’s entire city in one fell swoop, the problem was that Mark Reuss did not have the time to cash out all these honor and attention that Zhang Heng earned. The hen who had laid the golden egg was about to run away.

#### **Chapter 814: Winner**

Although Mark Reuss was now frightened and angry, there was nothing he could do to the spectators, and neither did he dare stand up and interfere with Commodus’s decision. He could only sit in the stands and glare at the people around him.

He could only hope that Commodus was fair and would take his loss into consideration. After all, he was still Zhang Heng’s master. All he did was let his gladiators perform in the Amphitheatrum Flavium. Although the organizer had the right to decide if the gladiator lived or died or if they should grant them their freedom, they had to compensate the school that owned the gladiator after doing so.

The question was, how much should Zhang Heng cost?

To Mark Reuss, Zhang Heng was priceless. After Sethnets, he was the strongest gladiator in the entire history of Rome. No one could put a price on him. However, that was just his opinion. Generally, this kind of compensation was determined based on the gladiator’s first price tag and with reference to how long the gladiator had been performing. However, it appeared that Zhang Heng had been bought for a low price and hadn’t performed much in the arena either.

According to Gaby, the money he spent purchasing Zhang Heng was what an ordinary gladiator would cost. One of his selling points was his unique race. As for the number of times that he performed, Mark



Reuss would suffer the most here. Zhang Heng grew at such an alarming rate, transforming from the unnamed gladiator to one that everyone knew overnight. According to all these factors, even if Commodus was generous, he would only need to pay him a few thousand Sestertius.

This time, Mark Reuss had suffered from a significant loss. It was estimated that Zhang Heng could bring more than 30,000 gold coins to the arena in a year. Even if he only worked for three years, he would bring 90,000 gold coins to Mark Reuss. Comparing such a large sum of money to only a few thousand copper coins, Mark Reuss felt that he had lost a massive part of himself.

Hence, Mark Reuss was now the most nervous person in the entire arena. The only hope that he had in his heart was shattered when he saw what Commodus did next. He had only organized this gladiatorial performance to win the hearts of the Roman people, so wouldn't it make no sense if he went against the people's will? Moreover, Commodus was actually trying to figure out a way to take Zhang Heng away from Mark Reuss. It was rare to come across such a good opportunity. After turning Zhang Heng into a free man, he would hire him to assist him.

Of course, letting a gladiator become his confidant would definitely spark massive protests among the senior senators. However, this was not the first time he had done such an absurd thing. The two consultants that he had now weren't from prestigious families. His aggressive recruitment of new people had proven that he wanted to fight against those senior senators.

The empire was like an old man entering his twilight years, and it needed some fresh blood to rejuvenate it. Commodus had always believed that it was for the greater good. Hence, he could not be bothered by the feelings of the poor owners of the gladiator schools.

After that, Commodus took the training sword symbolizing freedom from his entourage and threw it in front of Zhang Heng. At the same time, he announced loudly, "This is what you won for yourself."

His moves had also triggered a new round of cheers. The people seemed to be happy that their voice was taken seriously. The empire now had a good emperor who loved his people like they were his children. Mark Reuss was so angry that he fainted after he heard what Commodus said to Zhang Heng. When he opened his eyes again, Zhang Heng had already picked up the wooden sword.

This also meant that the latter had regained his freedom, and he had nothing to do with Victor Arena from now on. Mark Reuss, who had just opened his eyes, fainted again. A second ago, he was the biggest winner of this gladiatorial show, and he was looking forward to the new future of Victor Arena. And now, he had become its biggest loser.

Although Sartonilos and others did not perform well in this performance, most of them survived. After this whole thing ended, their reputation would be severely damaged. However, they could still find a way to repair it. Besides, the giant obstacles that stopped them from climbing to the top were now gone. In other words, they would have a chance to get to the throne again in the future. On the other hand, Mark Reuss was in great despair. Although his gladiator school claimed the championship, he had now lost Zhang Heng permanently.

Life was riddled with ups and downs, and this was a prime example. Perhaps the only comfort Mark Reuss had was that Bach performed exceptionally well in this gladiatorial performance. He barely made

any mistakes, placing him second only to Zhang Heng and Terufelos. However, Bach could never compare with Zhang Heng in terms of popularity.

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Zhang Heng was also a little surprised when he picked up the wooden sword because he knew the arena's rules. There were hardly any gladiators like him who were granted freedom after only a few battles. That was because the people of Rome would like to watch more of his performances.

It seemed the time and place where he acquired his freedom was unique. Just as everyone discussed what to reward him, the value of those rewards continued to increase as the crowd descended into a frenzy. It was then that freedom, the most valuable prize, was suggested by them.

The crowd subconsciously followed along and shouted together. In other words, this was premeditated coercion and the use of public opinion.

The question was, who was behind this plan? Zhang Heng then looked at Commodus. He knew that Commodus wanted to recruit him into his team. All this while, Zhang Heng has been deliberately guiding Commodus to act according to his will. He was undoubtedly a beneficiary of this incident. However, based on Zhang Heng's understanding of Commodus, he knew that Commodus should not be able to pull such a highly devised plan.

The plan turned out to be flawless. Whoever had planned and carried it out must have possessed a superb political skillset. They were good at manipulating their strengths and knew how to fully utilize them. Clearly, a new ruler like Commodus could never come up with such a delicate plan.

Zhang Heng thought about it, and the only organization that was politically powerful enough to do something like was the Balance Blade. According to the agreement between the two parties, Zhang Heng was required to help Balance Blade complete specific tasks, and Balance Blade had to make sure that Zhang Heng could regain his freedom. Although Zhang Heng was supposed to get his freedom after he helped them complete the task given to him, he could not rule out that the Balance Blade saw a good opportunity to help him regain his freedom. So, they decided to pay a part of the reward in advance. At the same time, it would also allow him to get closer to Commodus.

If this was the case, Zhang Heng had just managed to prove some of his previous conjectures. The Balance Blade was not as pure as it claimed. Maintaining the balance of the world was not its only mission. It was also a tool in the hands of a certain political force. The members within the organization might not know about it. Or maybe only members like Dadatis did not realize such a hidden agenda. They thought that the political force was to their advantage, but they did not realize that the relationship between the two parties was actually reversed.

Other than that, Zhang Heng also received two system prompts. One of them was the 100 game points reward for winning the gladiatorial performance, and another notification was about the 50 game points reward for restoring the status of a freeman.

### **Chapter 815: Not That Bad**

Although Zhang Heng had won the gladiatorial performance, he had more things to do next.

Earlier, Commodus awarded him a training sword symbolizing freedom under the eyes of more than 90,000 people. After that, he would need to go to the “Freedom House” on Trajan Square with Mark Reuss. There, Reuss was supposed to help Zhang Heng change his status from a slave to a Roman citizen.

After doing that, he would be considered a citizen of Rome. He had to go back to the place where he lived before to pack his things, bid farewell to a few acquaintances, and move out of the gladiator school. And in the meantime, he had to negotiate with Mark Reuss.

Before Commodus left the arena, he signaled Zhang Heng with his eyes. Since he wanted Zhang Heng to meet him right after he settled down, it was undeniable that he tried to recruit Zhang Heng to be part of his team. Other than that, Zhang Heng also wanted to meet up with Dadatis to determine if Balance Blade had planned the whole thing. If they had nothing to do with it, it could mean that other forces were targeting him.

In other words, he would have more problems to deal with. Fortunately, all those things could be solved one by one. After the performance, Zhang Heng first returned to the lounge, where the other gladiators were gone except for Bach and Terufelos.

It seemed the show that Zhang Heng forced Terufelos to put on had caused him a nervous breakdown. Terufelos was a little afraid to see Zhang Heng. After a short moment of hesitation, he decided to stay to express his gratitude.

He was no fool, knowing how much he had gained this time. With his previous wonderful performances, he had also left a deep impression on the audience’s hearts. Now, his status was second only to Zhang Heng. Especially when Zhang Heng regained his freedom, it would mean that he would become the most famous gladiator after this performance.

Until now, Terufelos still felt that he did not earn his rank fair and square. And Zhang Heng seemed to know what he was thinking. He then said, “What’s wrong with you? You are now the second-best gladiator after me.”

Terufelos was taken aback. It was a fact he was unable to deny now.

He was one of the candidates expected to claim the championship. And it happened that Satonilos and other gladiators did not perform well. Some even failed to pass the first round of battle, and the angry spectators demanded their execution. Terufelos counted the remaining gladiators with his fingers. Probably no one there would pose a threat except for Bach that was sitting next to him.

And Bach’s combat style was very similar to his. Both of them relied a lot on their immense strength. However, he was obviously stronger than Bach. If he was asked to fight with Bach, he was confident that he could beat him.

In a manner of speech, there was no problem with Terufelos’s ranking. The only thing that he was unhappy about was the process of acquiring his current rank. So, why did he dwell in his previous frustration? Terufelos thought about it again and figured it must be because Zhang Heng had shocked him too much. The difference in strength between the two was so great that even Terufelos began to doubt himself.

“You are too strong, almost like a monster,” Terufelos said, “but you don’t seem to be too old. I can’t imagine how you trained to become so powerful. Fortunately, I don’t have to face you in the arena again. My master has been complaining about the high cost of accommodation in the city. I guess we will leave Rome tonight.”

Terufelos stretched out two thick arms and hugged Zhang Heng.

“That might not be the case.”

“Huh?”

“If your master is smart enough, he should consider selling you after this performance.”

When Terufelos heard what Zhang Heng said, his eyes widened, and he seemed a little surprised. “No. No. We are very close. And we are not like the ordinary master and slave... more like old friends. We have relied on each other and performed at all kinds of places, not to mention that I performed well this time. He has no reason to sell me.”

Zhang Heng was noncommittal about the relationship between the two. He then continued to say, “No matter how close the two of you are, selling you would be the best decision for him, and it would benefit you as well. After this performance, you will become very famous in the city of Rome. That means you will get many spectators that like you. You can maximize your value and make the most money by staying here, but your master probably doesn’t have the financial resources to move his school here. And the schools here in this city fiercely compete with each other. He can’t possibly keep the school running by just relying on you. Hence, selling you is his only choice.”

Terufelos wanted to refute Zhang Heng, but he decided not to say anything about it because, though the truth could be cold sometimes, he knew that Zhang Heng was telling the truth.

“Don’t worry. You should be able to be sold for a good price. With this money, he can retire and enjoy his life early. And if you stay in Rome, you can get more of what you want rather than wandering around outside,” Zhang Heng said.

Although he had accepted what was about to happen to him, Terufelos still wanted to talk to his master about it first. So he hurriedly left without saying anything. After that, only Zhang Heng and Bach remained in the lounge.

The two were also the only two gladiators from Victor Arena that survived the gladiator show. Apart from gladiators who were eliminated during the early game, Habitus was killed by Bach. The other gladiator named Murkazan was asked to be executed by the audience because of his poor performance.

Before Bach could say anything, he heard footsteps coming from outside the door.

The visitor seemed very nervous and anxious. The footsteps sounded messy, and it appeared the person was rushing too. When Zhang Heng and Bach saw the person, they knew that Mark Reuss did not actually need the slaves’ assistance in walking. They were surprised to see that Mark Reuss could run on his own and at a rather decent speed at that.

“How can they treat me like this?!” Mark Reuss cried as soon as he saw Zhang Heng, “This is really tough on me. I bought you with my money, and it took a long time for me to train you into my trump card. It’s

close for me to bring back the glory and honor back to Victor Arena. And suddenly I realize that my wish can never come true! I didn't mistreat you, right? I gave you everything you wanted! When you told me that you didn't want to date anyone, I just bit the bullet and rejected all those invitations. Thanks to that, I offended a lot of people. Why did I get such bad returns in the end?"

Mark Reuss became sadder as he talked, and tears started to flow down from his eyes.

Zhang Heng had to remind him, "His Majesty, the emperor, made this decision. If you say something like this, others might think that you are dissatisfied with a royal decree."

Mark Reuss finally stopped crying when he heard what Zhang Heng said. Still, he could not hide his sad look.

"Actually, it's not that bad. Even if I'm gone, isn't Bach still there? His performance was second only to Terufelos and mine."

### **Chapter 816: Carry Luggage?**

Speaking of Bach, Mark Reuss was angry at him. Although Bach was not as uncontrollable as Zhang Heng, he was not someone that one should mess with. During his previous duel with Rufus, the Black Scythe, Bach was determined to kill him even though he suffered a pretty severe injury. And this time, he did the same thing again. He beheaded Habitus from the same gladiator school.

Both of them were the gladiators that could help Mark Reuss boost the ticket sales in the Victor Arena, especially Habitus. He was clearly more popular than Bach, and the people were more than willing to buy the tickets to watch his performance. And now Mark Reuss had lost Habitus forever.

However, Mark Reuss could not scold Bach because Bach had achieved a good result in this gladiatorial performance. Habitus was now dead, and Zhang Heng was free again. Mark Reuss realized that he could only rely on Bach now. He was left with no other options.

Mark Reuss then stared at Bach for a while, and finally, he sighed helplessly. "Although he was quite good at combat, his strength was not as good as you. You are the champion of this gladiatorial show."

"If you really want to create another Sethnets, I think there is someone who might be able to help you." Zhang Heng said.

"Who might that be?" Mark Reuss was taken aback. There was a reason why he could make his school the second-largest gladiator school in Rome. He quickly reacted, "Oh, you are talking about Terufelos. After you regain your freedom, he will become the most powerful gladiator in Rome. It's a shame that his school wasn't set up in the city of Rome. He can't maximize his value even if he wants to. But the problem is that bringing him in will not be easy. Many gladiator schools are targeting him right now. If I were his master, I would've sold him to whoever that offers me the highest price."

"Terufelos seems to have a good relationship with his master. They do not have the ordinary master and slave relationship. You can try to make use of this fact to your advantage," Zhang Heng added.

"Um, is that right? It's a useful clue indeed." Mark Reuss touched his chin and then sighed. "Even so, he will still cost a lot of money." He said it with reluctance and glanced at Zhang Heng, "Forget it, let's get your matter sorted out first."

Although he was reluctant to do it, he still didn't dare challenge Commodus's authority. He was one of the few people who knew that Commodus had sneaked to the gladiator school to meet Zhang Heng. Since then, Mark Reuss felt that something terrible was about to happen to him. He had a foreboding that this day would come, but he did not expect it to come so soon.

Unfortunately, he was not as powerful as Commodus. In the end, he decided to follow the order and went to the "Freedom House" on Trajan's Square with Zhang Heng. After that, he asked the clerk to change Zhang Heng's status from a slave to a Roman citizen.

And when he signed his name, applause burst out from the House of Freedom. Zhang Heng's current fame had skyrocketed in Rome, with many people from the House of Freedom watching his performance on that day. When they saw that he had become a free man, every single one of them congratulated him.

The scene saddened only Mark Reuss. Regardless of Bach or Terufelos, the two combined were still not as popular as a Zhang Heng. If Zhang Heng were still with him, he would only need to promote him a little more, and his school would become the number-one gladiator school in Rome.

And now, all of his dreams were in vain.

Zhang Heng then patted him on his shoulder, "I remember that there is a rule in Rome. The released slaves still need to spare some time each year to work for the former master."

Mark Reuss was a little surprised when he heard that. Non-stated in the code of law, it was a traditional custom at best. While enjoying free labor from their former slaves, the master would have to become the protector of his former slaves as well. If the former slaves encountered any trouble in their lives, they could always ask the protector for help.

If Commodus were not involved in this matter, Zhang Heng would not mind asking Mark Reuss to become his protector after regaining his freedom. However, he was about to work for Commodus. In other words, the Roman Empire would be his protector.

Zhang Heng then continued to say, "I don't need you to become my protector. Oh, don't get me wrong, I just don't want to get you into trouble."

Mark Reuss was speechless. He then glared at Zhang, thinking that Zhang Heng must be trying to make a fool of him. After that, he heard Zhang Heng continue, "I can spare some time every month to fight in one of your gladiatorial performances. However, it would be best if you told me, my opponent, in advance. And you need to get my consent."

"What?" Mark Reuss thought that he must have misheard Zhang Heng.

So Zhang Heng had to repeat his previous sentence.

Mark Reuss was suddenly overjoyed. He never dreamt that Zhang Heng would be willing to perform in the Victor Arena after regaining his freedom, expecting that he would work wholly for Commodus after he left the gladiator school. Even if he wanted to earn more money, there was no reason for him to perform in the Victor Arena.

When Mark Reuss heard the good news, he asked, "Why? Why are you willing to come back?"

The next second, he regretted asking the question.

Fortunately, Zhang Heng had no intention to go back on his words. He just smiled and said, "Of course, there are conditions if you want me to fight in your arena."

...

Zhang Heng won the championship at the Amphitheatrum Flavium. It did not take long for the news to spread throughout the city. And naturally, Zhang Heng's slave girl knew about it. While she felt proud and happy for her master, she also realized that it was time for the two of them to be separated.

Like Mark Reuss, she did not expect Zhang Heng to regain his freedom so soon. He had only been in the Victor Arena for two months, and he was probably the fastest gladiator in history to become a free man. It meant that he was about to move out from the gladiator school, and his slave girl would again be Mark Reuss's property. There was no way that she could leave with Zhang Heng.

When Zhang Heng came back, it was probably the last time the two met. The slave girl's excitement quickly turned into depression.

However, it was pointless for her to feel unhappy. After all, she was just a slave girl that no one would notice, and she was no different than other slaves.

Dwelled in her thought, she finally heard the familiar footsteps coming from outside. However, she suddenly did not want to see Zhang Heng again. But, it was not too late for her to run out of the house. So, she could only find a place to hide.

After that, she heard Zhang Heng walking into the room. It seemed he did not notice that the slave girl who had been with him all the time was nowhere to be seen. He simply walked around, picking up his belongings. The slave girl sighed in her heart. It seemed like she was right about it. However, she started to feel regret for the decisions that she had just made. It was pointless getting angry. And it was very likely that this was going to be the last time the two met. She might miss her chance of saying goodbye if she did not come out from her hiding now. But the next moment, she heard the footsteps stop outside the cabinet where she was hiding.

Afterward, Zhang Heng knocked on the cabinet door and said, "Hey, we're leaving soon. Aren't you going to come out to help me carry my luggage?"

After a while, the cabinet door opened halfway, and the slave girl poked her head out. Her eyes were still red. She then sniffed and asked, "What luggage?"

"What do you mean? You should have received the news earlier. We are going to move."

"We? But I am no longer your slave," the slave girl replied innocently.

"Well, congratulations, you are free now. Mark Reuss decided to give you back your freedom because of the hard work that you have done for so many years. But I remember you said that your parents are no longer in this world and have nowhere to go. If so, you should move out and live with me first. You can wait until you find a job and move out. But before that, you have to do the housework in lieu of rent," Zhang Heng said casually.

## **Chapter 817: Farewell**

After Zhang Heng packed his things, he brought the slave girl to Varo's residence.

In the negotiation between him and Mark Reuss—in addition to a fifth of the profit of each performance, the freedom of the slave girl and Varro would be added in too. Now that he had solved the slave girl's problem, only Varo's problem remained.

Presently, Varo was not at home. Zhang Heng heard his roommate saying that he was at the training ground, so he grabbed the slave girl who was standing behind him and said to her, "I have something to talk with Varo. Can you please leave us and wait at the door?"

"Okay," the slave girl nodded her head obediently. She knew that Zhang Heng did not want her to listen to his conversation with Varo, and this time, she would not complain about it anymore. That was because she remembered what Zhang Heng had said to her. Sometimes, there were certain things that her master did not want her to eavesdrop on because he was concerned about her safety. With that knowledge in mind, she walked away happily.

After she was gone, Zhang Heng went to the training ground alone. Unlike the slave girl, Mark Reuss seemed hesitant when Zhang Heng asked him to grant Varo his freedom. However, after considering the amount of money Zhang Heng could bring him from the monthly performance, Mark Reuss gritted his teeth and agreed to let Varo become free again.

This was also something that Zhang Heng expected.

With the help of street thugs, Zhang Heng managed to track down the person that turned Varo from an antique dealer to a slave. The person had probably thought that Varo could no longer walk out of the gladiator school alive and wasn't bothered to cover his tracks. An investigation with a bit of effort would suffice in bringing out the whole truth.

However, after learning the truth, Zhang Heng was a little surprised.

Varo was training hard on the training ground. He did not even know that Zhang Heng had won the championship. Right now, he had only one goal in his mind, and that was to train, train, and train. Varo knew that his talent was below average among all the other gladiators. There was nothing special about him. A couple of times, he had to rely on Zhang Heng's help to overcome his threats. At the same time, he realized that he could not rely on Zhang Heng forever. Besides, the two were separated now. If he wanted to leave this place and get his revenge, he had to work harder than any other gladiator in this school. Zhang Heng did not wish to disturb Varo when he saw that he was training hard. So he stood at the side and silently watched Varo carry on with his training.

It was not until a quarter of an hour later that Varo's practice came to an end. He then saw Zhang Heng standing at the side of the training ground. And he put away the wooden sword and walked over to him. "The performance is over?"

"Hmm." Zhang Heng nodded.

"Who won the final championship?"

"That person is standing in front of you now."



"I knew it!" Varo felt happy for Zhang Heng from the bottom of his heart. "No one can beat you, my friend from the East. Now, Mark Reuss has to think of what kind of reward he should give you. You brought Victor Arena fame and glory!"

"Actually... Mark Reuss and I are no longer master and slave."

"What do you mean?" Varo was startled when he heard what Zhang Heng said. "Did he sell you to another school? I don't think he will do such a thing. He's always been thinking about looking for Sethnets's successor."

"No, I am free now. After the performance, the emperor gave me the training sword."

"Are you serious?!" Varo's face was full of surprise, "But you have only completed a few performances. Was there ever a newcomer who gained his freedom as fast as you did?"

"Who knows, but I guess everything has its firsts." For now, Zhang Heng would not tell Varo his previous conjectures. He said to him, "After I regain my freedom, Mark Reuss and I came up with a new agreement. I will come back here every month to perform in a gladiatorial performance once. In exchange, he agrees to let you be free."

"You remembered me?" Varo blushed when he heard that Zhang Heng fought for his freedom. He remembered that when the two had just met, he euphemistically told Zhang Heng that he could not bring him together to conduct his business.

However, Zhang Heng seemed unbothered. "You don't have to think about what you've said to me before. We were not close at that time. Hence, I can understand why you would say something like that. I want to remind you that another person is responsible for putting you here other than your wife and good friend. Do you know this person named Pellegrino?"

Varo frowned, "This name sounds familiar. Oh, I remember now. He is one of the senators in the senate. His servant once came to me with two expensive antique vases and said Pellegrino wanted to sell them off for money."

"What happened after that?"

"Then I did a thorough inspection on the vases and told the servant that someone might have deceived his master because the two vases were not antiques. However, the servant accused me of lying, and he framed me for replacing the vases with fakes when I was appraising them. But he was by my side all the time when I inspected them," Varo said. "Later, a few old customers came forward to prove my credibility. After this problem was solved, I didn't take it too seriously anymore. Why did you mention Pellegrino? Wait, do you mean that he is involved in framing me?"

"To be more precise, he is the mastermind behind this whole thing. As for your best friend and your wife, the relationship between them... has lasted for quite some time. They were worried that you would catch them red-handed. With their capabilities, though, they couldn't come with such a well-devised plan."

"This is something I don't understand too," Varo smiled bitterly. "I mentioned before that I never thought that my best friend would lie to me. With the friendship between us, I know that he is not capable of doing something like this. So, you are saying that Pellegrino wanted me gone, and he bribed

my best friend and wife? But why? Why did Pellegrino want me gone? I'm just an ordinary antique dealer. Was it because I refused to buy his fake vases?"

"It's probably because the property your family has accumulated made him jealous."

"Huh?"

"I had someone investigate Pellegrino for me. Turns out this isn't the first time that old bastard has done something like this. Many people have been targeted by him before. Some chose to pay him, while some would end up like you because they disobeyed him," Zhang Heng said.

"So I was targeted at by a senator?" After Varo knew the truth, a look of fear flashed in his eyes. After all, the Roman Empire's senate was extremely powerful. For ordinary people, they were someone that they could not afford to offend. Initially, Varo thought that his enemies were just his friend and wife. He never thought that his real enemy was a senator. However, after experiencing the dramatic change in his life, Varo's mental state had become a lot stronger than it was. His expression quickly returned to normal, and he said to Zhang Heng, "I have a favor to ask."

"Hmm?"

"I don't want to regain my freedom."

"Oh, why? Haven't you been working hard to regain it?"

Varo clenched his fists, "That's because I didn't know who my true enemy was back then. Since Pellegrino is the mastermind, he must have talked to Mark Reuss about it. That was why Mark Reuss ignored me when I told him that I used to be a businessman. If I leave the gladiator school now, Pellegrino would know about it pretty soon. No, Mark Reuss will likely tell Pellegrino personally. He doesn't want to offend Pellegrino as well. Yes, I want to be a free man again. I want to breathe the air of freedom again. But this is not the time yet. Before I become stronger and find a way to deal with Pellegrino, I will not leave this place."

Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows in surprise, "It seems that you have indeed grown a lot during this period. That's right. This is indeed your best option now."

"You have helped me a lot since we met," Varo looked into Zhang Heng's eyes and said sincerely, "I don't know how to repay your kindness, but this is, after all, my business. So next, I hope that I can find a way and solve it by myself."

### **Chapter 818: Goodbye Dadatis**

Zhang Heng's previous performances earned him quite a bit of money. Other than that, he also received a lot of gifts and copper coins from the excited spectators when he won his final battle at the Amphitheatrum Flavium. Although most of those gifts belonged to Mark Reuss, the money he earned was more than enough to pay the rent.

After Zhang Heng quit the gladiator school, Commodus almost instantly offered him a job. Simultaneously, he was still working for the Balance Blade, so he brought the slave around the town to look at a couple of houses. In the end, Zhang Heng chose the home most comfortable to live in. Its rent, however, was also the highest as compared to other houses.

The room for two people was located at the south of Plato Square. When they opened the window, they could see the Tiber River. Other than the excellent scenery, it also reduced the risk of the property catching fire. Initially, Zhang Heng wanted to rent two rooms, but the slave girl insisted on renting just one. She mentioned that it was unnecessary to waste so much money on her, and she did not mind sleeping on the floor.

Before Zhang Heng could even put together a bed, she had already slept on the floor. That was where and how most slaves slept at night.

“But you are no longer a slave now,” Zhang Heng said.

“Don’t you want me to take care of your daily life? How am I supposed to take care of you if I don’t stay in the room with you? Besides, we have been staying together for some time now. Is there any problem?” the slave girl asked while blinking.

“Uh, let me ask you a question. After you regain your freedom, have you ever thought about what you are going to do to make a living?” Zhang Heng asked.

To Zhang Heng’s surprise, the slave girl nodded again and again after hearing the question. “Yes. I did think about it.”

“Oh? This is unexpected. What do you want to do in the future?”

“I want to help you to clean up your place and take care of your daily life,” the slave girl replied without hesitation.

“...”

“Do you need someone to clean and take care of your daily life?” asked the slave girl.

“Well, I think the answer is yes.” Zhang Heng could not refute her. After all, he lived in the second century, and Rome was by no means a modern country. Living alone and doing everything by himself would prove a little inconvenient. There were no toilets, no washing machine, no running water, and no convenience stores. Even the kitchen downstairs had to be shared among many people.

It was true that Zhang Heng did survive on a deserted island, but he did not want to spend too much time maintaining his basic survival needs in this dungeon. Hence, it was necessary to hire someone to take care of that.

“I did take care of you for a while, and I did a good job, right?” the slave girl asked.

“Well, that’s true,” Zhang Heng nodded.

“Then, do I get this job?” The slave girl completed the perfect deduction.

“...forget it. You can do this for now. After that, I will look for a job for you so that you can support yourself.” Zhang Heng had to come to a compromise.

For now, this problem was solved. Zhang Heng asked the owner to add another bed in the room. He then gave her some money to purchase the essentials. When the two of them had finished cleaning up,

it was already late. The slave girl who was the main laborer of this cleanup operation was exhausted. The moment she got on the bed, she fell asleep immediately.

On the other hand, Zhang Heng was not asleep. He was still waiting for someone.

When the moon rose high in the sky, the streets became quieter. The tavern and other entertainment venues had closed one after another. Except for some drunks loitering in the alleys and gutters, everyone else had fallen asleep. The person Zhang Heng was waiting for had finally arrived.

"Is this your new residence?" Dadatis came in from the window like a ghost.

"Hmm." Zhang Heng nodded, glanced at the street downstairs, then closed the window smoothly.

"The place looks good." Dadatis looked around, and when he saw the slave girl on the bed, he took another look at Zhang Heng, "You brought her out too? You really don't seem as ruthless as you look."

"I never said that I was cruel and ruthless," Zhang Heng replied.

"But your emotion does not fluctuate very much," Dadatis said. "Very well, this is a trait that all assassins dream of."

"You performed well earlier," he continued after a pause. "Not only did you win the championship, but you also successfully caught Commodus' interest in you. If everything goes well, he will first give you one or two simple tasks. If you manage to complete them perfectly, he will definitely reuse you. At that time, you can squeeze into his circle and find out the whereabouts of Altrus."

"Before I make those things happen, I want to ask a question. Was the sudden call for my freedom earlier today arranged by Balance Blade?" Zhang Heng interrupted.

"So, you noticed it as well." Dadatis was a little surprised. "But I am not responsible for this incident. If you want to know more about it, there is someone who might be able to help you."

"Who?"

"The priestess. She wants to see you."

Zhang Heng was surprised. According to Dadatis, the organizational structure of the Balance Blade was not that complicated. Except for a group of auxiliary personnel who provided external services, the core members were a group of top-tier assassins and a priest. There was no nominal leader. Assassins like Dadatis and the other assassins were the sharpest weapons of the Balance Blade. Usually, they would come up with something similar to a council to maintain the organization's operation. The priestess, however, could use the oracle to mobilize the entire organization.

To some extent, she could even be regarded as the actual leader of the Balance Blade. According to Zhang Heng's deduction, the Balance Blade should belong to a powerful political force. If this was the case, the priestess of the Balance Blade was most likely the voice of that particular political force.

No matter the truth, the priestess was undoubtedly a very important person. Zhang Heng did not expect that the other party would summon him before proving his loyalty by passing Balance Blade's test.

Was it because the relationship between him and Commodus progressed faster beyond expectations?

Zhang Heng could not figure out the priestess's intention for the time being. And he also did not know whether the meeting was a blessing or a curse. So he did not immediately agree to it. Instead, he asked, "Do the other core members of the organization know about this meeting?"

"I don't think so," Dadatis shook his head. "I was also told suddenly that the priestess wants to see you. Under normal circumstances, even the core members of the organization would hardly see the priestess. When there is no oracle, she usually won't show up."

"So, if she shows up now, does it mean that a new oracle has appeared?" Zhang Heng frowned.

"No, you don't need to be so nervous. It's different this time. She wants to see you." Dadatis said, "Also, don't you want to enter the secret library in the base? Normally, this requires the consent of more than two-thirds of the assassins, but if the priestess is willing to help you, she can take you directly into the library."

### **Chapter 819: Priestess**

To avoid getting caught by the manager of the insulae, Zhang Heng and Dadatis left through the window they came in.

Dadatis had prepared a small boat on the Tiber River downstairs.

As Zhang Heng climbed into the boat, he noticed no oars on board, so he asked the old Persian, "How are we supposed to get out of here?"

"Relax, we just have to go down the river," replied the old trainer as he undid the moorings.

The boat then began to drift downstream under the influence of the current.

Zhang Heng and Dadatis each occupied one end of the boat, one at the bow and the other at the stern.

Even though the Tiber River was submerged in darkness, and the hustle and bustle during the day were absent, the scenery was no less remarkable. Reflections of the stars scattered across the galaxy twinkled in the water, like a transparent ribbon studded with agate, and the reflection of the moon trailed the boats, riding the ripples, fracturing one moment before becoming whole again the next.

"You were right not to come during the day," Dadatis, who was at the stern, said suddenly. "It's not safe out here anymore, and it's better we do not meet unless absolutely necessary. And remember to pretend you don't know me in front of the others."

"Hmm?"

"Remember Balance Blade's enemy?"

"Oh, you mean the traitor who allied himself with Octavian two hundred years ago? I remember you said that he formed an organization of assassins similar to the Balance Blade, specifically to deal with the Balance Blade."

"Yes, they call themselves the Hounds," said Dadatis. "We have fought hand to hand against each other over two hundred years, but about sixty years ago, our people caused the Hounds to suffer great loss—we successfully assassinated most of their core members."

“That means you people did pretty good. What happened after that?”

“Then the lucky few who managed to get away disappeared for a very long time until half a year ago when we came across their trail.”

“You think they’re coming back?” Zhang Heng asked.

“They are not coming back; they are already back.” A troubled look settled on Dadatis’ face. “We just received news that one of our core members who was investigating a suspected Hound was assassinated in Britannia. And we know nothing of the murderer.”

“Is this Hounds’ doing?”

“We don’t know for sure yet. But besides the Hounds, we don’t have any other suspects. The assassin who was killed was codenamed Blackfish. He may not be the best assassin in the organization, but he is definitely the most cautious one. He was born in Britannia, and he knew the place and people well. In addition to the organization’s reputation, he also had many personal friends there, so his death was a shock to the other members of the organization.”

“You’re worried about this.” Zhang Heng looked at the Persian in the eyes.

“Yes, the Hounds’ return meant that the survivors of the war sixty years ago are planning to level the score. They’ve been quietly regrouping, and after preparing for so long—this comeback won’t be as simple as killing one or two of us. This means that new war is coming, a war between Balance Blade and the Hound.”

Dadatis expressed his concern. “Although Balance Blade won sixty years ago, we have been living a little too comfortably since then, and we don’t know much about the new breed of Hounds. Our enemies, on the other hand, must have been studying us, and once they make a move, they will hit us where it hurts most.”

“But haven’t you already decided to retire?” Zhang Heng asked. “In that case, get out while you still can, so you will have nothing to do with whatever happens after that.”

“Do I seem like the kind that makes a run for it at a time like this?” The old Persian looked annoyed. “Besides, you refused to learn the art of balancing. You’re only interested in the fighting—that is not how it should be. Fighting skills are just a means to an end. Our mission is to maintain the balance of everything in the world for Kreis’ sake. You need to keep this in mind at all times because it is what distinguishes us from the other assassins.”

“Mhmm...” Zhang Heng muttered absentmindedly.

Dadatis let out a deep sigh. This apprentice of his was good at everything, one might even call him the perfect assassin archetype, but the only problem was that he was unable to accept the Balance Blade’s beliefs. In the past, Dadatis would not have minded even it took him a long time, as long as Zhang Heng was willing to join the Balance Blade. Under their imperceptible influence, eventually, Zhang Heng should be able to blend in.

But when he received the news about Black Fish’s assassination, Dadatis realized that he may not have the luxury of time either.

As they were speaking, the little boat had already made its way under a bridge. Dadatis set his thoughts aside, reached out a hand, and knocked rhythmically somewhere on the structure of the bridge. Almost immediately, a rope ladder descended from the top of the bridge.

The Persian gestured for Zhang Heng to take the lead, and Zhang Heng climbed up.

Waiting for them at the top was a tightly covered, black, horse-drawn carriage.

“Don’t think too much. This is an unusual time. The priestess is very important to the Balance Blade; we need to do all we can to keep her safe.”

“I understand.” Zhang Heng accepted the black cloth meant to cover his eyes and climbed into the wagon. While it was a horse-drawn carriage, it was very different from those used in the later generations. This one only had two wheels, and it was not as comfortable as its modern counterparts. It lacked any windows or doors as well. Sitting inside, Zhang Heng felt as if he was sitting inside a coffin.

Even more so when Dadatis sealed the tiny hole that was the entrance.

“This is as far as I go. Someone will escort you later on. Remember to show some respect when you meet the priest. She hates people who are disrespectful to Kreis.”

“That would’ve been my guess,” Zhang Heng grunted, wholly aware of the claustrophobic space and coldness around him.

Fortunately, the journey was a short one. After about half an hour later, they arrived at their destination. But no one called for Zhang Heng to exit the carriage. Instead, four slaves came to carry the carriage.

Zhang Heng counted silently in his head. After about a hundred steps, he was put down again.

After that, it was all quiet. The slaves appeared to have left, and Zhang Heng was seemingly forgotten.

It wasn’t until a quarter of an hour later that an emotionless voice, frigid as like a block of marble, spoke out. “You are quite calm. Aren’t you afraid that I might have my people throw you into the river?”

### **Chapter 820: Is This An Oracle?**

“Why do you want to throw me into the river?”

“Your teacher told you that I am Kreis’s priestess, right? And I don’t like people who are disrespectful to Kreis,” said the person with an ice-cold tone.

“If that’s the case, you might need to kill everyone in Rome because not many people who believe in Kreis in this city.”

“Don’t quibble. They are not our men, but you are. Or maybe you will eventually belong to us in the future... Your teacher has chosen you as his successor. Not only do you need to inherit his skills, but you’ll need to take over his goal. You are supposed to maintain the balance of everything in this world.” The priestess stroked the edge of the carriage with her fingers.

“Otherwise, why do you think I took so much effort to approach Commodus? To contribute to the prosperity and stability of Rome?” Zhang Heng, in the carriage, asked rhetorically.

“Don’t try to deceive me. I know that you joined the Balance Blade to read books about assassins in the library. No matter how powerful you are, you will eventually become someone that everyone despises if you do not have faith and belief. Maybe I should kill you right here to prevent you from bringing trouble to our world in the future.”

“Maybe you should do that. By then, no one would be able to give you the whereabouts of Altrus.” Zhang Heng said lightly.

“Are you threatening me?”

“No, you are the one who threatened me first.”

Zhang Heng did not retreat in the face of the intense pressure of the priestess. Instead, he went against her courageously, and he had no intention to give in. It seemed he wasn’t bothered the slightest by the consequences of offending the priestess. If Dadatis were here, he would have probably rolled his eyes in fury because Zhang Heng did not listen to his advice when they talked earlier on the bridge.

But after Zhang Heng finished speaking, there was a long silence outside the carriage.

The priestess outside seemed to be considering whether to ask someone to throw Zhang Heng into the river. But after a while, the cover on top of Zhang Heng’s head was removed.

He heard the priestess say in an ice-cold voice again, “You can come out now.”

Zhang Heng crawled out of the cramped carriage and then pointed to the black cloth on his face, “What about this thing?”

“Stop your demanding. If you don’t want to die, you’d better keep it on.”

“It appears you guys have been facing some problems recently. Otherwise, it would be pointless to live if you have to live so carefully all the time.”

The black cloth did not completely block off Zhang Heng’s vision. The light from outside could penetrate it, and Zhang Heng could also see a vague silhouette of the person that stood in front of him. It looked like the person was the priestess. However, the priestess was wearing a mask as well. In other words, even if he suddenly took off the black cloth covering his face, he still could not see how the priestess looked like.

The true purpose of the black cloth was to test his loyalty.

The priestess was noncommittal. She said, “We don’t need to live purposefully. As long as we remember the meaning of each person’s existence, that’s more than enough.”

“This is pure faith, and it’s admirable.” Zhang Heng paused, “But if this is true, why do you want to see me privately without telling other people?”

The priestess smiled, her laughter as cold as her voice.

“You think you know everything, don’t you?”

“I have never said something like this before,” Zhang Heng said calmly.



“It seems the rumor is right about you. You are an extremely arrogant man. You think that you have won the championship at the Amphitheatrum Flavium and unexpectedly regained your freedom, and now you are going to disrespect the Balance Blade.”

“I don’t think it was an accident that I regained my freedom,” Zhang Heng said frankly.

“At least you are not that stupid. If we can give you back your freedom, we can reclaim the freedom from you anytime we want. This is a fact that will not change even if you have Commodus on your side,” the priestess said coldly.

“It sounds like your political allies are quite strong. In that case, I can stop worrying. What do you want me to do?”

The priestess snorted, “We need you to complete something for us.”

“Is this an oracle?”

“No.” The priestess said after a long silence.

“Is that an order from the Assassin Council, with the consent of more than half of the assassins?”

“Neither.”

“Heh... why should I listen to your order then?” Zhang Heng said.

While he was on the way here, Zhang Heng wondered why the priestess wanted to meet him suddenly. With her current position, it was not necessary for her to do such a risky thing. And, she also had to hide this meetup from all the other assassins from Balance Blade. The two had just met, but she seemed very hostile towards Zhang Heng. It was a little abnormal.

Zhang Heng carefully recalled that he had done nothing that would offend her before. Hence, there was only one possibility for her to treat him in such a rude manner.

She needed Zhang Heng to help her with something, but she did not want him to spot her weakness. That was why she came up with such a plan. As soon as Zhang Heng showed up, she started to threaten him and tried to dominate the conversation. This was indeed a very clever political skill.

However, this method usually worked on those assassins who were relatively innocent and had very little political experience. When Zhang Heng was at Nassau, he managed to handle the complicated political environment on Nassau Island with ease. That was why Zhang Heng was not scared so easily by her.

The conversation between the two people when they first met was a powderkeg. They were arguing the whole time, and neither of them was willing to take a step back. And in the end, it was a draw.

Unfortunately, the priestess’s plan did not work as intended because she was the one that needed Zhang Heng to help her with something. Once she lost the dominating role, she lost most of her bargaining power in the next negotiation.

However, Zhang Heng decided not to push her to the corner. After all, he wanted to listen to what the priestess had to offer him. So he said afterward, “First, tell me what you want me to do.”

“I hope you don’t kill Altrus right after you find his whereabouts,” the priestess said.

Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows when he heard what she said, “Wait, did I hear that right? You, the priestess of Kreis, are asking me not to kill the target given by the oracle?”

“No, I’m not asking you to spare Altrus. I’m telling you not to kill him so quickly when you find him,” the priestess emphasized, “The situation has changed during this period. I need to find out something from him. So I hope that you will inform me when you locate him. I will send someone to talk with him first. But don’t you worry, I will leave him to you after I talk to him. You will be able to complete your test, and you will not lose anything.”

“It seems the gods you believe in are not looking at the bigger picture here. After that?”

“Don’t you want to enter the library? Due to your beliefs, other assassins in the organization may not agree to let you enter, but I can grant you access right now, bypassing the vote of the Assassin Council. I help you, and you help me. What do you think about helping each other out to get what we need?” The priestess finally threw out her bargaining chip.